



Funding Mechanisms to Advance Localization and Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response

Practical Guidance to
Support Local
Women-Led
Crisis Responders





List of Acronyms

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AFM	Alliance for Feminist Movements
CBPF	Country-based pooled fund
CSO	Civil society organization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FCDO	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FFC	Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises
FHN	The Feminist Humanitarian Network
FRF	First Response Fund
GBV	Gender-based violence
GYLO	Girl and youth-led organization
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/allies and others
LNA	Local and national actor
MRC	Mujeres Reconstruyendo sus Comunidades
NFI	Non-food item
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UAF	Urgent Action Fund
UAF-A&P	Urgent Action Fund - Asia & Pacific
UAF-Africa	Urgent Action Fund - Africa
UHF	Ukrainian Humanitarian Fund
UWF	Ukrainian Women's Fund
UN	United Nations
W/FF	Women's and Feminist Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WLO	Women-led organization
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WRO	Women's rights organization

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About the Alliance for Feminist Movements (AFM)

The Alliance for Feminist Movements (AFM) is a collaborative effort between governments, private philanthropy, women's and feminist funds, civil society organizations, and other allies to ensure that feminist movements receive the financial and political support they need to succeed. Together with more than 400 members, the AFM works to reshape how feminist movements are understood, supported, and financed.

The Crisis Hub

The Crisis hub is a learning and solutions hub, hosted by AFM and co-hosted by the Urgent Action Funds Consortium and an anonymous women's rights organization. The Crisis Hub's primary role is to collectively decide on concrete actions to influence the humanitarian aid sector to pursue its localization goals by supporting feminist and Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) at the frontlines of crisis response.



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The Power of Local Women-Led

Crisis Response

When the 2014-2016 Ebola epidemic swept through Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea killing more than 11,000 people, members of women's organizations served as contact tracers, conducted house-to-house education campaigns, and cared for the sick when formal health infrastructure had collapsed. In Liberian communities where women's groups were active, an organized Ebola response was nearly twice as likely to emerge than in communities without them. **The community trust and pre-existing social networks that made this possible were the product of years of sustained investment in women's peacebuilding and civic leadership.**¹ When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Ukrainian Women's Fund activated a response within five days, channeling grants for food, water, medicines and psychosocial support across all Ukrainian regions, reaching communities that international actors could not access.² When earthquakes struck Afghanistan in 2022 and again in October 2023, MADRE's long-standing relationships with local women organizers enabled rapid humanitarian relief while international organizations were still completing security assessments. In the 2023 Herat earthquake, where more than 58% of casualties were women, the formal response was largely channeled through male community leaders who were often unaware of the most vulnerable women in their communities. Women crisis responders were the only actors who could reach them.^{3,4}

These are not exceptional cases. In Sudan, women's networks organized within days of the April 2023 outbreak of war, operating community kitchens to reach more than 70,000 households daily.^{5,6} In Gaza, feminist activists provide humanitarian aid and community care in the near-total absence of functioning international systems.⁷ In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where a new Ebola outbreak was declared in May 2026 and donor cuts have left local health systems close to collapse, women's community groups are on the frontlines.⁸ Whether operating as formal women's rights organizations (WROs), girls and youth-led organizations (GYLOs), informal networks, or unregistered women's groups, **women, girls and gender-expansive individuals activate and serve their communities with speed and reach that formal humanitarian systems consistently struggle to match.**

Across these contexts, women-led organizations (WLOs) and WROs deliver the full range of humanitarian activities:* distributing food, water and non-food items (NFIs); providing shelter, cash assistance, gender-based violence (GBV) response, and psychosocial support services; delivering sexual and reproductive health care; and operating protection programs. They reach

* We use the phrase "WLOs/WROs" throughout this toolkit as a shorthand to represent formal and informal organizations led by and in service of the rights of women, girls and gender-expansive people. When we refer to women, girls and gender-expansive individuals, we refer to the fact that feminist and women's rights movements, organizations, and funds are diverse, and are led by diverse people everywhere, including, but not limited to, lesbian and bisexual women and people, trans, intersex and nonbinary people, racialized people, Indigenous people, women and people with disabilities, women and people living with and affected by HIV, young feminists, girls, sex workers and other historically marginalized people.

the people that formal systems consistently miss, including LGBTQI+ individuals, people with disabilities, displaced and undocumented communities, sex workers, and women and girls, often operating in closed or contested spaces where international actors cannot reach. WLOs/WROs conduct needs assessments rooted in genuine community consultation, operate with cultural and local language fluency, negotiate access in active conflict zones through longstanding relationships, and support protection through evacuations, safehouses and emergency relocation for community advocates and members facing direct threat.⁹⁻¹¹ They do this with significantly greater cost-effectiveness than traditional humanitarian actors, and remain present to support their communities through rebuilding and recovery long after international attention has moved on. Where humanitarian response activates around acute events and operates within defined emergency periods, **women-led feminist crisis response recognizes that a crisis is structural, intersectional and political.**⁺ It encompasses the slow erosion of civic space, the targeting of specific populations, and the compounding of pre-existing inequalities that formal humanitarian systems do not capture.^{12,13}

Efficient, effective and localized crisis response is essential as humanitarian needs escalate, bilateral and philanthropic funding contracts, and funding for women and girls drops precipitously.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ However, these women-led responders and organizations receive less than 1% of international humanitarian funding, due to a wide range of systematic barriers and misperceptions about risk and capacity.¹⁷ **There are several existing mechanisms to fund WLOs/WROs and invest in localized crisis response.**^{18,19} A robust ecosystem of women's and feminist funds (W/FFs) has been built over decades to resource WLOs/WROs with the speed, flexibility, and care their work requires, overcome structural challenges, and provide resources for a comprehensive suite of crisis response and protection activities.²⁰ **They have decades of experience quickly and moving money to less traditionally-funded, yet extremely important, local actors on the ground including WLOs/WROs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), unregistered organizations and collectives, individual community advocates, and LGBTQI+ organizations.**

This toolkit is a practical guide for humanitarian donors who want to meet their localization commitments, while advancing gender equality and supporting the access of marginalized populations to aid in crisis. The toolkit starts with an introduction to the funding mechanisms and the ecosystem of key actors, followed by donor entry points based on strategic goals, and ends with examples to demonstrate the strengths and breadth of women's and feminist crisis response. As WLOs/WROs face unprecedented financial strain due to massive cuts in humanitarian aid and gender equality-focused funding leading to heightened risk of suspension or closure, eliminating access to critical services for more than one million women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals, the case for resourcing localized, community-centered women-led crisis response⁺⁺ has never been more urgent.²¹

⁺ This toolkit uses the term crisis response to reflect this broader scope: the actors and approaches it describes operate before, during and after acute emergencies, across a wider range of needs and a fuller arc of community life.

⁺⁺ We use "women-led crisis response" as a shorthand for women-led and feminist crisis response.

Key benefits to donors when partnering with women-led or feminist funding mechanisms include:

- Stronger accountability to affected populations
- Access to hard-to-reach populations that crises disproportionately impact, such as religious or cultural minorities, elderly people, children, and people with disabilities
- Early warnings from local advisors and networks, facilitating rapid response to emergencies
- Nuanced risk mapping in crises and inclusive coverage of communities' needs
- Improved protection and inclusion outcomes
- Stronger community trust and acceptance
- Greater cost-efficiency
- Investment in local capacity that outlasts the crisis
- Risk mitigation through trusted relationships and contextual knowledge
- Catalytic investment that builds movement infrastructure, organizational strengths, community resilience, and locally led peace processes

Funding Mechanisms That Reach Women-Led Crisis Responders

This section introduces the funding mechanisms that have been designed to move resources more effectively and directly to WLOs/WROs in crisis contexts.

Consortia are structured partnerships in which multiple organizations pool resources, absorb administrative requirements collectively, and coordinate grantmaking or implementation to harness the strengths and impact of each entity involved. They take several forms: smaller women-led, feminist or local organizations forming a consortium to access larger institutional grants; W/FFs partnering with international NGOs or UN agencies to combine fiduciary infrastructure with grassroots reach; or W/FFs partnering together to coordinate coverage, reduce duplication, and present a unified entry point for donors seeking to move significant resources into the ecosystem.

Intermediaries are entities that receive funding from large donors and channel resources, often paired with accompaniment, to local and national actors (LNAs), including WLOs/WROs. They

serve a critical function in the funding ecosystem, absorbing the compliance and administrative burden that would otherwise fall on small local organizations, while maintaining accountability to upstream donors.^{22, 23} W/FFs, INGOs, and UN multilateral funds can all act as intermediaries that pass funding onward to other organizations, though with significantly different approaches to partnership, flexibility, and power-sharing with grantee organizations.

Multilateral funds are grantmaking mechanisms that sit within or are formally connected to the UN humanitarian system, enabling donors with UN-level compliance and accountability requirements to channel resources toward civil society and locally led actors. Two primary examples are relevant to women-led crisis response: (1) the **Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)** receives contributions from member states and other donors and grants primarily to CSOs and women-led groups in conflict and crisis settings, many of them first-time recipients of UN-system funding; and (2) the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women**, administered by UN Women, funds national and local CSOs working on GBV prevention and response across humanitarian, development and fragile contexts. While Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) are a critical part of the humanitarian funding architecture, they continue to present barriers to entry for WLOs/WROs: less than 5% of CBPF funding reaches WLOs globally, per most recent available data.²⁴

A pooled fund is a financial instrument that combines contributions from multiple donors and channels them toward a specific cause, place, or need. Pooling resources allows donors to share risk, reduce individual administrative burden, and achieve greater collective impact than they could through separate grants. Pooled funds may distribute funds directly to organizations and individuals, or channel through a network of partner organizations to reach local actors.²⁵

Rapid response funds are intermediaries with pre-established funding pools that can be deployed within 48 to 72 hours of a crisis event. They rely on streamlined application processes, on-the-ground advisors, and pre-vetted partner networks to move money fast, bridging the gap between when a crisis strikes and when traditional humanitarian funding streams activate. Rapid response funds may be the full mandate or one funding mechanism within the intermediary.

Specialist funds, a specific type of intermediary, are public fundraising and grantmaking mechanisms designed for and by specific communities, movements or thematic priorities that mainstream humanitarian funding systematically excludes. They include **women's and feminist funds (W/FFs)**, **refugee-led funds**, **national NGO-led funds**, **LGBTQI+ funds** and **thematic funds** focused on topics such as climate justice or digital rights. Their defining features are proximity to the populations they serve, trust-based and participatory grantmaking, and the ability to reach actors, including unregistered and informal groups, that more traditional funding mechanisms miss.

Women's and feminist funds (W/FFs) are specialist funds that mobilize and redistribute resources to women's rights organizations, women-led organizations, and feminist and LGBTQI+ movements. They operate at national, regional and multi-regional levels, and can function as pooled funds, rapid response mechanisms, and longer-term movement-based intermediaries,

often combining all three mechanisms within a single organization. They are distinguished by participatory funding models, ceding decision-making power over who and what gets funded to the affected communities; trust-based grantmaking approaches that build mutually accountable relationships through flexible multi-year support and reduced administrative burdens on grantees; and long-term relational support including capacity building, peer learning, and staff care.^{26, 27} By channeling official development assistance (ODA) and philanthropic funds, W/FFs enable WLOs/WROs “to center their own strategies, maintain their feminist values, and work on local responses effectively.”¹⁰ In crisis settings, W/FFs reach actors including unregistered groups, informal collectives, individual community advocates, and organizations in closed civic spaces that formal humanitarian funding mechanisms rarely access. They absorb administrative burden on behalf of their grantees, maintaining accountability to upstream donors while protecting the autonomy and political identity of the organizations they fund, whom they treat as partners, not sub-grantees.^{13, 28, 29}

A note on overlap: These mechanism types are not mutually exclusive. An intermediary with multiple donors may also identify as a pooled fund. A rapid response fund may be one funding stream within a larger intermediary fund or an entire entity. A consortium may consist of intermediaries, WLOs/WROs, international NGOs, multiple funds, and other entities, and may deploy single-donor resources or draw on pooled contributions from several donors.

Key Actors in Women-Led Crisis Response

Effective women-led and feminist crisis response depends on a network of actors working across different levels of the humanitarian system. This section defines who these actors are, what they do, and how they relate to each other.

First responders are the individuals and groups who provide immediate assistance in the first hours and days of a crisis: community members and organizers; local health workers, teachers and civil society members; and organized emergency services such as paramedics, firefighters and search-and-rescue teams. They are often first on the scene, treating the sick and injured, providing safety, locating people and evacuating the wounded.

Women-led organizations are defined by their leadership: the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines a WLO by its humanitarian mission and leadership, defined as (1) governed or directed by women; or (2) led by women, demonstrated by at least 50% of its senior leadership.³⁰ WLOs work across sectors and are recognized as critical humanitarian actors with invaluable reach into communities underserved by formal humanitarian systems. **WLOs, comprised of members of the affected communities, are frequently the first to respond to a crisis and the last to leave, operating with deep community trust and legitimacy.**¹³

Women's rights organizations advance the interests and rights of women, girls, and gender-expansive populations, promote gender equality, and/or challenge and transform gender inequalities, social norms and unequal power relations.³¹ In crisis contexts, WROs provide direct services and protection to affected communities, advocate for the rights of marginalized groups, and work across sectors including health, shelter, food security, protection, GBV, mental health and psychosocial support, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

Girls and youth-led organizations are civil society groups governed and driven by young people, including adolescent girls, young women and gender-expansive youth, whose focus is advancing girls' and youth rights.³⁰ In crisis settings they provide relief services and distributions, peer support, information dissemination, community mobilization and protection services tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of young people, who face distinct risks including early and forced marriage, sexual violence, loss of education, and recruitment into armed groups.

Unregistered organizations are community groups, collectives and informal networks that operate without formal legal registration in-country, often because registration is inaccessible, unsafe, irrelevant to how they work, or blocked due to ethnic, gender identity or rights-based activism. In crisis settings they are frequently the first and most trusted responders, emerging organically in response to immediate community needs. They are structurally excluded from almost all formal humanitarian funding streams.^{*+} W/FFs are among the few mechanisms designed to reach them, through flexible eligibility criteria, allied organization arrangements and creative resource transfer mechanisms.

Funders and donors are a diverse range of intermediary, philanthropic, governmental, and multilateral actors whose contributions resource the women-led and feminist crisis response ecosystem. They vary significantly in scale, priorities, processes and strategic goals. Some provide large-volume funding with significant compliance requirements; others offer flexible, rapid and unrestricted capital. Some strictly fund; others actively shape policy, humanitarian norms and funding architecture. W/FFs occupy a distinct position within this landscape as funders and critical actors, combining financial resources with accompaniment, peer learning and power-sharing with the organizations they fund. Additionally, women and youth in diaspora move money through remittances and mutual funds, activating before official donors move resources to support local women- and girl-led groups.

International non-governmental organizations operate across multiple countries with significant institutional capacity, established donor relationships and logistical reach. In the feminist crisis response ecosystem, INGOs can play a dual role: as implementers delivering services at scale, and as intermediaries that can sub-grant to local actors. The quality of their partnerships with WROs and WLOs varies considerably and is shaped by their organizational commitments to localization and power-sharing.¹¹

^{*+} Unregistered organizations are understood as critical actors in crisis response though structurally blocked from accessing most funding. Under OCHA's Exceptional Circumstances, they can be eligible as sub-grantees, when no other partners are suitable to accomplish the crisis response goals.³²

Conveners and coordinators are networks and platforms that strengthen the feminist crisis response ecosystem by connecting actors, facilitating peer learning, amplifying collective advocacy and opening access to decision-making spaces that individual organizations cannot enter alone, such as the Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN). They do not typically disburse grants but are essential infrastructure for coordination, visibility and movement building. **Funder networks** bring together donors, foundations and funding institutions around shared commitments, enabling peer learning, coordinated advocacy and collective influence on humanitarian and philanthropic norms.

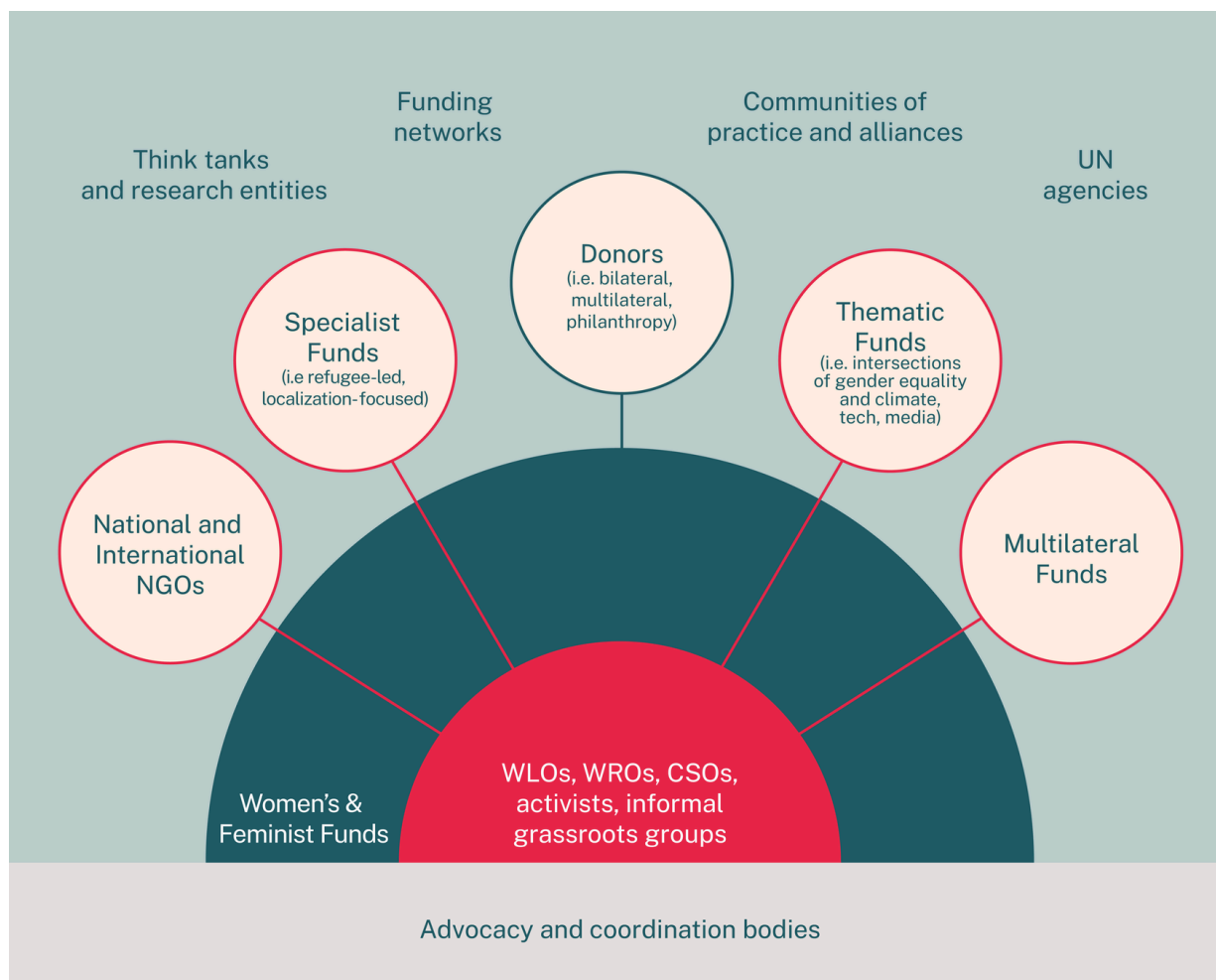
Key conveners, coordinators, and funder networks include the Alliance for Feminist Movements (AFM), the Prospera International Network of Women's and Feminist Funds (Prospera), and the Better Preparedness Initiative hosted by the Human Rights Funders Network and the Peace and Security Funders Group, among others.

The Ecosystem: How Women-Led Crisis Response Actors Work Together

Women, girls and gender-expansive people's movements are the heart of the feminist crisis response ecosystem. The grassroots collectives, community networks, informal associations, CSOs, GYLOs, WROs, and WLOs form organically in response to the realities women face in their communities. They range from formally registered national CSOs to unregistered community groups, activist networks, cooperatives and individual defenders. What they share is embeddedness in their communities, relationships of trust that make sensitive work possible, and long-term presence that outlasts any single crisis or funding cycle. Formal humanitarian funding mechanisms often require legal registration, institutional track records, organizational banking, audited financials and reporting in dominant languages, requirements that systematically exclude these actors.

W/FFs exist specifically to close the gap to localize crisis response and invest in gender equality. They provide flexible and fast funding directly to WLOs/WROs and individual advocates alongside accompaniment, peer network building, organizational strengthening and collective care. W/FFs operate at every level: rapid response funds move money to crisis responders and community leaders within days; national and regional funds hold the community relationships and contextual knowledge that make locally-accountable response possible; multi-regional and global funds provide the institutional infrastructure to channel larger contributions into the ecosystem; and thematic funds address the intersecting dimensions of crisis, from digital security to climate-driven displacement to sexual and reproductive health. Shared due diligence frameworks, peer referral networks, joint crisis coordination mechanisms and collective advocacy platforms allow the ecosystem to function as a whole across these levels.²⁹ The ecosystem of feminist crisis responders and W/FFs is strengthened by a broad infrastructure of donors, INGOs, advocacy organizations, human rights networks, communities of practice, and coordination bodies. **Figure 1** illustrates the broad array of actors working across women-led crisis response.

Figure 1: The Ecosystem of Organizations Advancing Localization and Gender Equality in Crisis Response



Spotlight on Women's and Feminist Funds Resourcing Crisis Response

Scale and Reach

- More than 28 national, regional, and multi-regional women's and feminist funds (W/FFs) operate with a gender equality mandate and crisis response funding streams.
- Crisis response funding delivered to LNAs across all major global crises, spanning armed conflict, political violence, natural disasters, climate emergencies, and protracted complex crises, including Afghanistan, the DRC, Haiti, Lebanon, Palestine, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine in 2025.
- Annual grantmaking ranges from USD 500,000 for smaller national funds to USD 25 million for large global funds.

- Across W/FFs and multilateral funds focused on women-led crisis response, **more than USD 70 million is moved to local feminist crisis** responders annually (2024 data); they have significant absorptive capacity to move at least twice their current annual grantmaking budgets.
- More than **2 million people in crisis reached annually**, including provision of food, NFIs, shelter, medical services, psychosocial support, protection activities, and more.

Defining Features

- **Funding directed to local actors that formal mechanisms rarely access**, including unregistered groups, informal collectives and individuals; explicit mandates to reach marginalized and underserved populations, including women, girls and LGBTQI+ communities.
- **Absorption of the administrative burden freeing grantees to focus on crisis response and service delivery**: receipt of applications and reports in multiple accessible languages and formats, efficient due diligence practices, use of creative methods to move money to the ground, support for grantees in reporting and right-sizing compliance requirements to match the size, capacity and context of each organization and grant.
- **Rigorous accountability to upstream donors including governments and to communities and movements**: most W/FFs are co-created with the movements they serve, with governance and participatory decision-making structures grounded in feminist and localization principles. Activists, women human rights defenders and community members serve on boards, advisory panels and grant committees, ensuring funding decisions are made by those closest to the communities served.
- **Pre-existing grassroots advisor networks and community relationships activate even before a crisis is declared**, facilitating grants to mutual aid networks, informal frontline actors and community-led responses that the formal humanitarian system does not recognize as eligible recipients, in both immediate response and longer-term recovery phases.
- **Grantee accompaniment, staff care, peer network building and mentorship provided alongside grants, building organizational resilience**.
- **Provision of core operational funding, multi-year and trust-based grants that help organizations break out of scarcity and project-tethered budgets**, even when upstream funding is conditional; funding flexibility that allows grantees to pivot plans, prioritize staff and community safety when conditions deteriorate, and fund locally led civilian protection solutions such as evacuations.
- **Simultaneous response to immediate crisis needs and root causes**, supporting organizations to sustain presence through rebuilding and recovery.

+ 2 million

People in crisis reached annually, including provision of food, NFIs, shelter, medical services, psychosocial support, protection activities, and more.

> \$70 MILLION

Moved to local feminist crisis responders annually

Though the humanitarian system has historically excluded many local actors, including WLOs and WROs, the women-led and feminist crisis response ecosystem is increasingly integrating with the formal humanitarian architecture. W/FFs sit on humanitarian coordination bodies such as the Pooled Funds Community of Practice^{**}; WLOs participate in cluster systems and country-level humanitarian planning processes; and W/FFs and WLOs work alongside traditional humanitarian actors through shared funding models, collaborative consortia, and bridge mechanisms including the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, START Network and NEAR Network, which connect bilateral humanitarian donors with the grassroots organizations doing the work. The feminist crisis response ecosystem is now better understood as a complementary and increasingly connected layer of the humanitarian system, with documented speed, reach and cost efficiency.³³

^{**} The Pooled Funds Community of Practice is a collaborative space for pooled fund managers and supporters working in humanitarian and fragile contexts. The Pooled Fund Community is guided by a seven-member Steering Committee: International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the Start Network, UN OCHA, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Disaster Response Emergency Fund (IFRC-DREF), Change Fund (NEAR), UNOPS Asia Pacific Centre for Fund Management, and Equality Fund / First Response Fund (2025-2026 composition).

Resourcing Women-Led Crisis

Response: Donor Entry Points

Every donor has a role in this ecosystem. The entry points below are organized around the questions donors most commonly bring to crisis funding: where and how to direct resources geographically or thematically, how to move money at speed and scale, how to meet localization and inclusion commitments, and how to sustain local and women-led crisis response infrastructure. The entry points offered are illustrative and may not be comprehensive; women-led crisis response is dynamic and changes over time alongside emerging needs and priorities.

More information is available about specific W/FFs in the linked [Register of Intermediary Funds and Coordination Bodies Working at the Intersection of Gender Equality and Crisis Response](#).

I want to fund in a specific geography, where a crisis is happening right now.



When a natural disaster, health emergency, or flare up of violence occurs, working with W/FFs allows you to tap into networks of WROs/WLOs on the ground already doing work in their communities. Geographic specificity is one of the clearest entry points into the ecosystem; W/FFs exist at national, regional and multi-regional levels.

Key Entry Points:

- National funds offer the deepest community roots and pre-existing partner networks; they are activated before a donor arrives, and are best suited to single-country crises where local accountability and contextual knowledge matter most.
- Regional funds are well-suited to migration and displacement crises that cross borders; they have more flexibility in who receives funding and how money moves across frontlines and can operate across contested or shifting boundaries.
- Regional, multi-regional, and global funds can cover geographies where national W/FFs do not yet exist. All geographic levels of W/FFs work in close partnership to ensure complementary responses; multi-regional and global funds will advise about their network coverage and refer donors to the fund(s) with the strongest existing relationships and ability to move money fast in that context.

I want my funding to reach frontline responders within days of a crisis, before the formal system mobilizes.



Specific W/FFs specialize in emergency response and have on-the-ground advisors and pre-vetted grassroots networks ready to activate, allowing for rapid dispersal to local communities without lengthy due diligence at the time of crisis. This includes groups and organizations without legal registration, funding histories, or institutional bank accounts.

Key Entry Points:

- The Urgent Action Fund (UAF) Consortium has global coverage across four coordinated regional W/FFs and provides rapid response funds that reach local actors in as little as 72 hours, open to prospective grantees applying in any language using accessible and safe mechanisms.
- Global Resilience Fund grants reach GYLOs as fast as 48 hours to support frontline humanitarian response through trusted young women advisors who rapidly identify grant recipients and flexible approaches to money transfers.
- Multiple national funds have embedded a crisis response mechanism in their programs which activate within days and have shown strength in delivering rapid response funding when crisis strikes in their country.

I want to close the localization gap by meaningfully reaching local actors.



The Grand Bargain's 25% localization target is far from reached, and in fact, receding in the face of global funding contractions.^{34,35} LNAs face structural barriers to access funding: in-country registration and banking requirements, burdensome English-only applications, inflexible funding, lengthy due diligence processes, and misconceptions about absorption and implementation capacity.[§]

Key Entry Points:

- Fund WLOs and WROs directly with flexible multi-year funding or consider a consortium of local organizations for a larger contribution.
- National feminist funds are locally led and governed, and grant to local actors the humanitarian system misses, including unregistered groups, informal collectives and organizations with limited international funding experience.[#]
- Regional and multi-regional feminist funds are well suited for donors with higher compliance requirements; they absorb fiduciary and reporting burden while passing flexible funding to local partners.
- Many complementary ecosystem actors focus on community-led response. For example, NEAR, a Global South network of local civil society organizations centers local leadership in humanitarian action, and the START Network of NGOs and non-profits focuses on locally led humanitarian response.

[§] LNAs do not come with higher fiduciary risk; across 32 donors, INGOs and UN agencies in Ukraine, none reported a substantial confirmed case of corruption by local partners.³⁶ WLOs/WROs report spending upwards of 30% of working time on compliance tasks for donors.³⁷

[#] Research shows that local intermediaries can deliver programming up to 32% more cost efficiently than international intermediaries.³⁸

I want to ensure my localization strategy reaches marginalized and invisibilized populations that are hard to reach by mainstream humanitarian aid.



W/FFs recognize that crises do not affect all members of a society equally, and that people closest to specific communities know their needs best. Reaching marginalized and invisibilized populations^{ss} is a priority for W/FFs and they are among the most significant funders of LGBTQI+ organizations in crisis settings.³⁹

Key Entry Points:

- UHAI EASHRI funds LGBTQI+ communities and sex workers across East Africa.
- Black Feminist Fund centers Black feminist organizations and movements globally, including in crisis settings.
- Women's Fund Asia has explicit programming for women with disabilities and Indigenous women across Asia.
- The Global Resilience Fund directly resources girls and young people responding on the frontlines of crisis and humanitarian disasters.
- The Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative and the Collective for Refugee Leadership in the Middle East and North Africa are two intermediaries effectively funding refugee-led organizations.⁴⁰

I work for a humanitarian unit within a government donor and want to support women-led crisis response; I need to partner with an organization that can manage large administrative and reporting requirements.



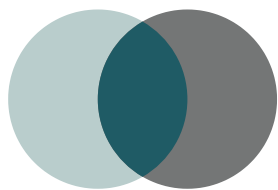
Many W/FFs have successfully administered large grants from institutional and bilateral donors, bringing community relationships, local knowledge, flexible grantmaking, and grantee accompaniment that make resources more effective once they reach the ground.

Key Entry Points:

- Global and multi-regional women's funds can provide fiduciary assurance at scale while passing resources downstream to their established grantee networks.
- The First Response Fund was designed specifically to receive bilateral humanitarian funding with high compliance requirements and disburse it through a network of feminist funds to WLOs and WROs on the ground.
- The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund grants primarily to CSOs and WROs and provides UN-level accountability standards.
- Consortium arrangements allow a lead organization with strong fiduciary infrastructure to absorb administrative and reporting requirements while providing resources to multiple W/FFs and implementation partners.

^{ss} This includes refugees and displaced people, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ people, adolescent girls, pregnant and postpartum women, and people with disabilities.

I want to fund women-led crisis responders in specific focus areas, such as technology, climate, or media and communications.



Climate change is one of the leading drivers of humanitarian need; disinformation, digital threats and communications warfare exacerbate tensions and silence the communities and movements most affected. Funds and LNAs working at these intersections are often part of the crisis response ecosystem.

Key Entry Points:

- National and regional feminist funds often support multi-sectoral work and receive earmarked contributions for a specific topic.
- For climate and environmental justice: the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action is a funder collaborative channeling resources to frontline actors; Global Greengrants Fund leads the UN Women's Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition; Women's Fund Asia has an explicit disaster risk reduction and environmental justice program area; and the UAF Consortium supports environmental advocates across regions.
- For technology, digital safety, and online protection: Numun Fund is the only dedicated global fund for feminist technology, covering digital rights, connectivity, online GBV and feminist artificial intelligence.
- For countering disinformation: Nebula Funds support gender justice and LGBTQI+ movements to build the communications capacity to counter well-resourced anti-rights disinformation campaigns

Whatever your entry point, the W/FF ecosystem offers a multifaceted infrastructure for investment in crisis response across the full spectrum of need. WLOs/WROs work across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus simultaneously, and the funds that resource them are designed to honor that continuity across preparedness, response, recovery and resilience¹¹ A portfolio could span rapid response funds for acute crisis support, national and regional feminist funds for sustained response and stabilization, global funds for longer-term support and capacity-building, and coordinators for connecting actors to drive movement building and advocacy.

An investment in the ecosystem as a whole makes holistic response possible. W/FFs treat grantees as long-term partners rather than project recipients, and multi-year core funding combined with accompaniment, mentorship and peer learning means that every amount invested in crisis response is also an investment in the organizational strength that sustains WLOs, WROs and grassroots movements through funding droughts, hostile political environments and repeated shocks.¹⁸ Wherever you start, we encourage donors to fund across actors, geographies and crisis timelines as part of a collective, intersectional response to the crises of our time.

Examples of Women-Led Crisis Response

To showcase the reach and power of women-led crisis response, we share a selection of six case studies spanning natural disasters, climate emergencies, civil war, military invasion, and health crises. Together they document what women-led crisis response accomplishes: women's groups containing an epidemic; women entering trades previously closed to them and rebuilding damage; women-led organizations working across military lines to evacuate hundreds of families; women's groups advocating to be heard by the UN humanitarian architecture and increasing the funding directed towards WLOs; and locally-rooted organizations reaching the LGBTQI+ communities, disabled women, and displaced populations that formal humanitarian systems miss. While not an exhaustive account of the ecosystem, these examples offer a window into a robust local and global ecosystem delivering rapid, inclusive, and comprehensive care and service delivery in parallel with the larger humanitarian infrastructure.^{***}

Harnessing Grassroots Women-Led Networks Built Before the Crisis: Women's Funds Respond to Earthquakes in Nepal and Mexico



A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal in April 2015, killing nearly 9,000 people and destroying over 500,000 homes across 20 districts. Tewa, Nepal's only national women's fund, activated immediately, channeling resources through 46 existing grantee partners already embedded in affected communities. Tewa had spent two decades building relationships with grassroots women's groups across the country. Within the first 70 days, Tewa partners, alongside partner organization Nagarik Aawaz, reached 120 communities across 15 districts, supporting approximately 25,000 households.⁴¹

They disbursed over USD 570,000 in aid to individuals and partner organizations: relief packages included cash, food staples, hygiene supplies, and sanitary products specifically for pregnant and nursing women. The response focused on populations the formal system consistently overlooked, including pregnant and postnatal women, elderly people, and children. Cash support upheld Tewa's principles of dignity and agency of individuals and communities to meet their own needs best. In over 90% of outreaches, theirs was the first relief that communities had received. In Bardiya, volunteers coordinated with the District Administration Office to register 339 women for citizenship cards they had been denied, making those women eligible for government earthquake recovery grants for the first time.

^{***} Organizations are not named unless permission has specifically been granted to protect the anonymity and safety of the crisis responders.

In addition to funding from W/FFs and philanthropic funders,^{***} Tewa's domestic donor base of over 5,000 Nepali individuals including earthquake-affected community members themselves contributed to the relief efforts, a deliberate practice by Tewa to blur the distinctions between helpers and those being helped.⁴²

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Just a few years later, half way across the world in Mexico, two earthquakes struck in September 2017 affecting seven states and killing more than 400 people. Fondo Semillas, Mexico's national and only feminist fund, first mapped what was missing in the earthquake response, and learned that the government and external funders were prioritizing short-term housing reconstruction, leaving economic reactivation, mental health recovery and the rebuilding of social fabric almost entirely unfunded. Women-led groups, working to meet these more comprehensive needs and ensure responsible allocation of resources to reach the communities in need, were being passed over for funding.

In 2018 Fondo Semillas launched a funding call, Mujeres Reconstruyendo sus Comunidades (MRC), deliberately opening the process to unregistered groups and newly formed collectives with no prior funding experience.^{##} Twenty-four organizations received funds with grant sizes averaging USD 23,000: 42% of organizations were newly formed after the earthquake and 80% were new grantees to Fondo Semillas. Together, they reached 9,214 people across five states through economic reactivation, community development and mental health recovery work, prioritizing women without identity documents, communities with no disaster insurance, and areas where male outmigration had left women as sole providers. The 18-to-30-month grants were fully flexible: when one organization's planned shelter was destroyed by aftershocks mid-project, it redirected funds overnight with no reapplication required. Women trained in bioconstruction and masonry, trades that had belonged exclusively to men, and rebuilt communal ovens that were the economic and cultural centers of daily life in many indigenous communities.⁴³

^{***}Funding for TEWA's response came from multiple sources including Global Fund for Women, Ford Foundation, the Global Fund for Community Foundations.

^{##} Funding for MRC came from GlobalGiving, MacArthur Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, the Global Fund for Community Foundations, Equality Fund, Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres and Global Fund for Women.

Fondo Semillas designed MRC around both funding and accompaniment to build the capacity of newly formed groups and equip grantees with critical skills to self-sustain as groups. This included 78 workshops in risk management, strategic planning, self-care, institutional strengthening, and women's rights; field visits; and peer convenings where grantees built networks and alliances across regions.⁴³ MRC became a permanent funding mechanism as Comunidades Resilientes. When Hurricane Otis struck Guerrero in October 2023, Fondo Semillas activated the model immediately to fund 19 organizations. When Hurricanes John and Erick struck the same region in 2024 and 2025, it issued emergency grants to the same grantees within days, without requiring reapplication. In parallel, Fondo Semillas developed La Red de Nodos Feministas in 2023, a national network of 12 organizations across Mexico which critically examines emergency response through a feminist lens.⁴⁴

In both Nepal and Mexico, crisis response was the foundation for networks and women's groups that have continued serving their communities long after international attention moved on.

Activated in Days, Embedded for Years: Ukrainian Women's Organizations in the Humanitarian Response to Ongoing War



When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF) had 22 years of experience building a trust-based network of women's and feminist organizations across every region of the country, including the conflict-affected east.

Through grantmaking, leadership training, and Women, Peace and Security coalition-building, UWF had established civil society networks working on implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 mandating the inclusion of women at all levels of peacebuilding, including in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.⁴⁵ Within five days of the invasion, UWF launched a rapid response grant program with smartphone-accessible application forms and 72-hour funding decisions. Their civil society and WLO networks activated to become humanitarian coordination infrastructure. Grantees delivered food, water, medicines, shelter, psychosocial services, and civilian evacuation across the country.

They sourced insulin and hormonal medications through informal networks into occupied Luhansk territory where formal supply chains had been cut off. Recognizing that WRO first-response teams needed support to stay operational, UWF offered rapid reload grants for staff care including psychological support and opportunities for fun together. With support by Prospera to accumulate resources, UWF had disbursed 39 grants totaling approximately USD 280,000 across most oblasts within 26 days². UWF absorbed growing international humanitarian resources as funding for Ukraine scaled up: total grantmaking grew nearly four-fold from 2020 to 2024.^{46,47}

Additional WLOs/WROs and GYLOs funded by a range of W/FFs, multilateral funds, and philanthropies provided key support to marginalized and invisibilized populations. Ukrainian LGBTQI+ organizations built evacuation routes specifically for trans women, sourced hormones that had vanished from pharmacies and supported LGBTQI+ people facing denial at border checkpoints and discriminatory policies in host countries. Another CSO previously focused on Roma women's inclusion, pivoted to supporting Roma families without identity papers through displacement, providing legal protection, driving lessons, and financial literacy alongside GBV services. A disability rights organization led emergency response specifically for Ukrainians with disabilities, including those trapped in homes and institutions with no access to evacuation support or emergency information.⁴⁸ With flexible rapid response grants from the Global Resilience Fund, 25 girl and young feminist-led organizations (GYLOs) on the frontlines provided emergency evacuation and relocation support, menstrual health supplies and medications for people with mental disorders, legal and psychological support, job-search support and mentoring, and temporary accommodations, reaching women and girls in Odesa, Kherson, Mariupol, Kramatorsk and other hard-hit areas.⁴⁹ Global Fund for Women grantee partners provided psychological and legal assistance, shelter, and hygiene supplies to single mothers, pregnant women, women with disabilities, older women, sex workers and LGBTQI+ people; protected sexual and reproductive health and rights; supported economic autonomy through a women-led quail-farming initiative; and rebuilt bombed homes. WLOs/WROs additionally drew on years of GBV service provision to support survivors as demand increased dramatically with escalating conflict-related sexual violence and domestic violence.⁵⁰

Ukrainian women's organizations advocated their way into the formal humanitarian architecture in parallel. Collectively, through the WRO Funding Task Force within the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, they mapped women's organizations across the country, built a documented evidence base for direct and flexible WRO funding, and coordinated advocacy toward humanitarian donors and coordination bodies.

UN Women consultations with WPHF partner WLOs and CSOs in Donetsk, Kharkiv and Sumy oblasts fed directly into OCHA's winterization planning, with findings shared with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group. Two WPHF-funded WROs joined the UN Humanitarian Country Team in 2024, the body where humanitarian priorities and funding allocations are set and advocated directly for the integration of women's needs into annual planning.⁵¹ The Ukraine Humanitarian Fund responded: it trained more than 50 WLOs on its eligibility systems, restructured its scoring to assess gender dimensions separately, and increased direct grants to Ukrainian WLOs from USD 9 million to USD 18.6 million for GBV response by 2024.³³

Women-Led Organizations and Funds in Sudan Before the World Paid Attention



Long before Sudan became a global humanitarian priority in 2023, Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) was resourcing and accompanying Sudanese women's movements as they navigated militarization, civic repression, and gender-based violence. Between 2019 and 2022, they invested USD 380,000

across 52 grants, supporting women-led organizing, documentation, advocacy, holistic security, legal protection, relocation and movement building. The close networks sustained throughout these years meant that both UAF-Africa and WLOs were well-prepared for rapid response when war formally erupted in April 2023. When INGOs evacuated international staff, WLOs remained and leaned on the relationships and trust built across those years. However, if local women leaders faced danger and needed to leave, they could apply for emergency grants from UAF-Africa for evacuation and relocation support, and were then offered healing circles and cross-border psychosocial care.^{52, 53}

The war quickly became one of the world's largest humanitarian crises and one of its most underfunded. Before official donors moved resources, diaspora networks led by women and youth mobilized first, supporting local women- and girl-led crisis responders. The formal humanitarian system raised less than a quarter of the USD 4.2 billion proposed in the 2025 Sudan humanitarian plan needed to provide a meaningful response for more than 20 million people in need, per UN estimations.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, formal humanitarian system actors cannot operate in approximately one-third of the country because the government, whose permission they require, does not control that territory. Because of their local connections, WLOs, CSOs, and mutual aid networks operate across all states, providing support to terrorized populations regardless of military control. These organizations have delivered food, healthcare, shelter, psychosocial care, and GBV responses together, recognizing and responding to holistic needs affecting their communities. Global Fund for Women provided USD 935,000 from 2024 to 2026 in grants to Sudanese feminist partners leading community kitchen operations, legal aid and medical support for GBV survivors, and safe evacuations for women trapped in active conflict zones.

Black Feminist Action for Sudan mobilized USD 1.8 million through the network, Black Feminists in Philanthropy, to support more than 22 Sudanese feminist organizations, including one that established a dedicated GBV response center and another who has built and run Emergency Response Rooms^{\$\$\$} through a powerful model of mutual aid.⁵⁵ Twenty-five women and girl-led organizations across eight states reached 93,400 people in six months via USD 700,000 in grants from the Global Resilience Fund. Feminist Emergency Room combined community kitchen operations with safe spaces where women received psychosocial support and accessed referrals for sexual violence services. Voice of Women and Children distributed hygiene and birth kits in displacement shelters in Northern State, weaving reproductive health education and mental health support into every distribution.⁵⁶

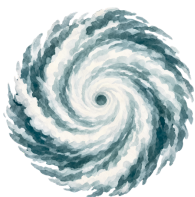
The First Response Fund (FRF), funded through UK FCDO and Global Affairs Canada's humanitarian envelopes, resourced five W/FFs — African Women's Development Fund, Global Resilience Fund, MADRE, Doria Feminist Fund and UAF-Africa — to fund 67 WLOs across almost all states in Sudan, with 55% of grants reaching hard-to-reach areas. With GBP 1.75 million from FCDO through FRF's Sudan country-specific window, WLOs reached 169,960

^{\$\$\$} The Emergency Response Rooms coalition received a Nobel Peace Prize nomination and won the 2025 Right Livelihood Award. Ole von Uexkull, Right Livelihood's Executive Director shared, "As Sudan endures the world's largest humanitarian crisis, Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) show how communities can rise to the gravest challenges, delivering aid that is dignified, effective and rooted in solidarity. In honouring ERRs, we celebrate the power of people to confront systemic crises by building just and cooperative alternatives to violence and division."

people through food assistance, 23,300 through health interventions, 4,220 through GBV prevention and response, and 4,000 women and girls through sexual and reproductive health services over four months. Additional WLOs have responded directly to internally displaced persons (IDPs) influxes in displacement camps, providing hot meals, shelter materials, maternal and postnatal healthcare, and safe spaces for women and girls newly arrived from South Kordofan, Blue Nile and North Darfur. In West Kordofan, one WLO delivered maternity kits to support safe deliveries for 30 IDP women amid active conflict. One MADRE-funded organization implemented a multisector response that included WASH, construction of 120 shelters, protection, health and food security in strong coordination with camp coordination and the shelter cluster. UAF-Africa specifically funded six unregistered WLOs providing food assistance in localities experiencing Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Phase 4 and 5 famine conditions and siege, including Tawila, Bara, Kadugli and Al-Fula in North and West Darfur and Kordofan, where these organizations continued operating despite drone attacks, communication blackouts and active military operations. In addition to funding, the W/FFs have played a critical role in the accompaniment of WLOs, strengthening organizational capacity and supporting reporting and right-sizing of due diligence and compliance to match the size and capacity of organizations and their respective grants.⁵⁷

One Sudanese-led WLO received a USD 121,000 FRF grant, channeled through the African Women's Development Fund: they provided food, water, and shelter for more than 54,000 people through 18 community kitchens across six states in four months, including four states with active military operations controlled by different armed actors simultaneously. In contrast, that same WLO had to submit more than 50 separate applications previously, each for USD 5,000 to USD 10,000,^{****} to access similar funding through a traditional humanitarian donor, one per kitchen location, each tied to a fixed activity, population and geography, with no ability to redirect when conditions changed. W/FF grants gave the organization the autonomy to adjust their activities in real time. When conditions changed, the organization redirected funds to cover civilian evacuations for 400 families, the single most practical lifesaving tool available in active conflict zones, according to frontline responders, and one funded by almost no humanitarian mechanism.

Cyclone and Typhoon Response in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Led by Those Most Affected



In November 2025, the Philippines was struck by two powerful typhoons within one week. Typhoon Tino caused massive flooding, flash floods and landslides resulting in over 350 fatalities and missing persons; Super Typhoon Uwan affected 16 out of 18 regions in the country and displaced nearly 1.8 million people. Later that month, Cyclone Ditwah struck Sri Lanka, triggering severe flooding and landslides across all 25 districts and affecting 2.3 million people.^{58,59}

**** This WLO, led by members of the Sudanese diaspora and staffed by Sudanese staff in-country, is registered in a neighboring country, precluding its access to larger grant sizes as an “unregistered” organization.

While early warnings enabled the pre-emptive evacuation of more than 1.5 million people in the Philippines, the formal humanitarian response concentrated on large-scale evacuation and infrastructure. The populations it routinely missed included fisherwomen whose livelihoods were destroyed, LGBTQI+ communities facing discrimination, women with disabilities, sex workers, Indigenous Peoples, and families in informal settlements. In Sri Lanka, single mothers, widows, older people, people with disabilities and low-income families in vulnerable boarding houses were similarly outside the reach of standard household-based assessment and distribution systems.⁶⁰

Urgent Action Fund-Asia & Pacific (UAF A&P) activated within one week of each cyclone, disbursing 22 grants in the Philippines and 19 in Sri Lanka, totaling USD 230,000 to local groups without prior international funding experience or formal registration.^{****} The First Response Fund facilitated funds from FCDO to UAF A&P and Women's Fund Asia that further strengthened the locally grounded crisis response, and highlighted complementary action between regional based funds that widened the reach of resources for affected populations. The local crisis responders delivered material humanitarian relief and gender-specific support through the same grants simultaneously. For example, across the Philippines, over 19,000 people received relief packages and over 10,000 were reached with hygiene activities. In Himamaylan City, one grantee combined food assistance, safe drinking water, hygiene kits, temporary shelter and agricultural inputs for over 2,300 people in a single integrated response. A fisherwomen's collective in Metro Manila provided food, WASH items, income-generating support and house repair assistance to approximately 2,000 people, directly addressing the economic devastation the storms caused to women's fishing livelihoods. An LGBTQI+ advocacy network in the Visayas and Mindanao reached LGBTQI+ youth, trans individuals, older persons and fisherfolk in isolated areas, while an organization supporting women with disabilities deployed trained women leaders in disaster response to ensure accessible aid reached women with disabilities specifically.

Nearly 90% of UAF A&P partners who responded in the acute phase returned for longer-term recovery and preparedness support. Partners completed advanced training for community psychosocial first aiders, supported mangrove plantation projects designed to reduce cyclone damage over time, built and piloted cash assistance programs, and in contexts where formal humanitarian coordination was absent, developed their own referral pathways for GBV and child protection.⁶⁰

Caregivers, Responders, Leaders: Women and the Ebola Epidemics



When Ebola swept through Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone between 2013 and 2015, it became the deadliest outbreak of the virus in recorded history, killing more than 11,000 people. In Liberia, 75% of those infected or killed were women. Ebola spread along the lines of women's social roles: primary caregivers for the sick at home, nurses and cleaners in health facilities with inadequate protective equipment, market traders crossing, and community members who prepared bodies for burial.⁶¹ Communities had to contain the outbreak by organizing and caring for each other while navigating the systemic failures of the formal response.⁶²

^{****} Funding came from two bilateral donors, one providing core funding to UAF A&P for humanitarian response that could be deployed flexibly and immediately across geographies, and one providing disaster-specific earmarked funding for the Philippines typhoon response.

In September 2014, a feminist psychiatrist, funded by UAF-Africa, led a rapid assessment team in Liberia to document the gendered realities. Women were simultaneously the most exposed and the most active responders, facilitating dialogue between global health experts, traditional healers and local caregivers, yet were the least protected and recognized.⁶³ UAF-Africa used the evidence to push for gender-sensitive responses and funded emergency grants. In Sierra Leone, they funded community-level education on Ebola prevention broadcasts in seven local languages including Mende, Limba, Temne and Krio, directly addressing the community denial and government mistrust driving transmission in rural. In Liberia, after a market woman died of Ebola and public trust collapsed, a WLO used a grant to clean three major markets, establish handwashing stations, and run awareness sessions among market women. UAF-Africa also funded community socio-therapy groups and psychosocial support for survivors, caregivers and community members, offering care the formal response was not providing.⁶⁴

Research later confirmed what these women leaders accomplished. In Liberian communities where women's groups were present, an organized Ebola response was nearly twice as likely to emerge. The same organizations proved effective again during COVID-19, demonstrating that investment in women's groups built durable health emergency infrastructure.^{1,65}

In May 2026, the DRC declared its 17th Ebola outbreak in Ituri Province and neighboring North and South Kivu, a region already devastated by conflict, displacement and collapsing health systems. The gendered dynamics are repeating: women and girls account for over 60% of suspected cases.^{66,67} The formal response is severely degraded due to the withdrawal of almost 80% of US government humanitarian funding to DRC in 2025, removing infrastructure that helped contain previous outbreaks.⁶⁸ Community trust is essential for outbreak where formal systems are overstretched, access is constrained by conflict, and communities experience crisis fatigue and outright distrust of Ebola prevention efforts.

Between May and July 2026, Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises (FFC) engaged 72 local civil society organizations in participatory consultations to identify needs and community capacities, deployed more than 350 community volunteers across Ituri and North Kivu to serve as a frontline early warning network, and financed 39 community-based emergency initiatives. Funded partners have installed over 300 handwashing facilities, distributed 200 hygiene kits to displaced households, established three psychosocial clinics, and produced and broadcast multilingual prevention messages in French, Swahili and Lingala. Alongside grants, FFC provided institutional accompaniment including health-sector accreditation support, training on humanitarian standards, and integration of partners into provincial and humanitarian coordination mechanisms, strengthening local organization capacities as effective humanitarian actors beyond the immediate outbreak.⁶⁹

Through resourcing from the First Response Fund, UAF-Africa has funded community-based Ebola prevention and awareness, psychosocial support for women and girls, and distribution of hygiene supplies and dignity kits. In Mambasa territory, where Ebola's resurgence coincided with armed violence and the collapse of health services, one UAF-Africa grantee documented

the experiences of approximately 900 displaced Indigenous women and girls, identified critical gaps in maternal and reproductive healthcare, and established safer pathways to antenatal care and childbirth while minimizing Ebola exposure risks. Grantees have also strengthened WASH infrastructure, improved community accountability mechanisms, and supported community-led water management.

The Global Resilience Fund is supporting more than 35 GYLOs in DRC working with trans women, displaced women, sex workers, women journalists and community communicators, ensuring that messaging is reaching populations often invisibilized. Grantees distribute infection prevention materials and hygiene kits; strengthen community alert and referral systems; train young women and local focal points to identify and refer suspected cases; share behavior change communication via WhatsApp and local radio; providing food rations and psychosocial support; and sustain mutual aid networks for displaced girls and caregivers. Together these groups are reaching approximately 99,000 people through peer networks, family members and community outreach. Several grantees are unregistered and ineligible for formal humanitarian funding, yet participate in national protection cluster meetings and coordinate through OCHA's mechanisms.⁷⁰ Ending this outbreak will require both the clinical capacity of the formal system and the community trust that locally rooted WLOs, GLYOs and grassroots groups can provide.

Sustaining Support to Afghan Women Despite the World's Biggest Regression of Women's Rights



Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban has issued more than 80 edicts systematically eliminating women from public life in Afghanistan, banning girls from secondary and higher education, prohibiting women from most employment, and restricting movement.⁷¹

The formal humanitarian system faces a structural constraint: operating in Afghanistan requires Taliban permission, and that permission is withheld or conditioned in ways that prevent women-focused programming across most of the country. Since the Taliban's ban on women working for NGOs in December 2022, 93% of humanitarian groups have reported trouble accessing women.⁷² The organizations that have maintained presence were embedded before restrictions took effect, operating covertly, locally, and through relationships built over years of investment.

MADRE has continued to provide flexible, sustained funding and accompaniment to Afghan grassroots partners that can reach women and girls despite severe operational and security constraints. When earthquakes struck southeastern Afghanistan in August and September 2025, killing more than 2,000 people, one MADRE partner provided more than 1,400 people with cash, food, shelter, clothing and psychosocial support within days. Women and girls received dignity kits and powdered milk, which one injured pregnant woman described as the first time women had been centered in the local response.

Temporary learning spaces were organized for girls whose clandestine schools had been damaged. MADRE is now investing in a digital education library developed by Afghan women university students to preserve educational access when future disasters or security conditions make in-person instruction impossible.

Another partner operates a network of community health centers providing informal education and psychosocial services to 2,500 Afghan girls across all 34 provinces and weekly counseling to over 400 girls and their family members. A third partner, the only women-led initiative in southern Afghanistan, organizes clandestine women's councils to identify emerging risks and runs literacy, computer skills, and vocational training for teenage girls and adult women.⁷³ Through its Innovative Peace Fund, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) supports Afghan women-led peacebuilding organizations delivering culturally rooted, trauma-informed mental health and psychosocial support across 20 provinces through group healing sessions, anonymous helplines, livelihood-integrated self-help groups and trauma-informed mediation, reaching over 1,372 women in group sessions and more than 100,000 people through one partner's helpline since 2013.⁷⁴

Sustained flexible investment has also built the infrastructure for Afghan women to advocate for themselves in international spaces and hold perpetrators accountable. Under WPHF's Rapid Response Window, 70 Afghan women and key decision makers convened in Tajikistan in December 2023 to develop a Call to Action, ensuring Afghan women's priorities shaped ongoing international peace negotiations, prior to the Doha 3 talks.⁷⁵ Through sustained civil society and UN Women advocacy, WLO allocation through the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund reached USD 5.07 million for 8 organizations in 2025, triple the 2024 figure.⁷⁶ MADRE's Access to Justice Programme supported Afghan survivors and advocates to document Taliban abuses and engage the International Criminal Court, which has issued arrest warrants against two Taliban officials for crimes against humanity including gender persecution.⁷⁷

The organizations sustaining this work are at acute risk. Many projects funded by bilateral donors suspended their Afghanistan programming after the Taliban takeover, as government policies on engaging with the de facto authorities made continued operations impossible. Nearly three-quarters of Afghan WLOs experienced funding cuts in 2025, with more than half expecting to suspend or close within the next year.²¹ The healthcare, psychosocial support, legal assistance, education and financial lifelines that Afghan women and girls still receive exist because W/FFs and feminist organizations have maintained longstanding, continuous investment in WLOs/WROs when traditional humanitarian actors and funders could not.

A Call to Action

WLOs/WROs are on the ground in every context where a crisis is unfolding or quietly building. Women, girls and gender-expansive people are feeding families, distributing essential items, evacuating civilians, documenting violations, running safe spaces, training community health workers, and rebuilding what conflict and climate disasters have destroyed. They have been doing this work for decades, often with little external recognition and chronically insufficient resources.

The W/FF ecosystem that resources them has the infrastructure, the partner networks, the due diligence systems and the grantmaking experience to absorb significantly more than it currently receives and efficiently fund these grassroots actors. The case studies in this toolkit document what happens when women-led crisis response is resourced: women's organizations reach 25,000 households with emergency relief supplies within 70 days of an earthquake in Nepal; a local feminist fund in Mexico turns a disaster response into a permanent national resilience network; a women-led organization in Sudan feeds more than 27,000 households through 18 community kitchens across areas controlled by different armed actors; LGBTQI+ organizations and fisherwomen's collectives reach overlooked youth and fisherfolk that the formal humanitarian systems left behind in 15 provinces within a week of two back-to-back typhoons.

The chronic funding shortfall facing women's rights and feminist organizations has accelerated sharply in recent years and shows no sign of abating. A 2026 UN Women survey of 855 predominantly local and national WLOs/WROs across 52 countries found that 88% can no longer meet current levels of need, and two in five consider suspension or closure likely within the next year.²¹ Protection risks are rising in direct proportion to the withdrawal of services: organizations report increases in gender-based violence, worsening mental health distress, and increases in early and forced marriage in the communities they serve. **When these organizations close, everyone loses the service delivery, institutional knowledge, deep-seated community relationships, and the continuity of trusted presence that makes comprehensive crisis response possible.**⁷⁸

88%

855 predominantly local and national WLOs/WROs across 52 countries can no longer meet current levels of need

2 in 5

WLOs/WROs consider suspension or closure to be likely within the next year

Donors reading this toolkit have a concrete role to play: choose an entry point, reach out to a W/FF or a convener, and start a conversation about what a partnership could look like.

Sustained investment in this ecosystem means that the next time a crisis strikes, marginalized populations often invisibilized in humanitarian response will have access to aid. It means that women, girls, and gender-expansive people are centered in crisis response rather than treated as a footnote to it. It means that the grassroots actors with the deepest community roots and the clearest understanding of what their communities need are resourced, listened to and funded to lead. It means that crisis response does not stop at food and shelter but extends to psychosocial care, sexual and reproductive health, protection from GBV, and the healing of social fabric that communities need to rebuild. It means that the frontline responders sustaining all of this are themselves cared for, not burned out and abandoned. When the next earthquake, outbreak, conflict or climate disaster strikes, the trust, the relationships and the organizational infrastructure to respond will already be in place because we have invested in them before the crisis begins.

Reach Out to Get Started



Any fund in this toolkit will respond to direct outreach and advise honestly on whether they are the right fit for your context, compliance requirements and strategic goals. The following conveners and coordination bodies can also support with key introductions with their respective constituencies:

- **The Alliance for Feminist Movements (AFM)** has a wide range of members working at the intersection of gender justice and crisis response, from WLO/WROs to W/FFs as well as philanthropic donors interested in strengthening their localization efforts.
- **The Better Preparedness Initiative**, hosted by the Human Rights Funders Network and Peace and Security Funders Group, coordinates W/FFs and existing bilateral and philanthropic donors for peer-to-peer connections.
- **The Prospera International Network** of Women's and Feminist Funds, with 48 member funds operating across 172 countries, can provide geography-specific referrals and identify funds with thematic priorities matching your strategic goals. Multi-regional and global W/FFs are also well positioned to make warm referrals based on their existing relationships with national and regional funds, and WLO/WRO and CSO partners across their geographies.
- **The Feminist Humanitarian Network** coordinates grassroots and national feminist and women's rights organizations; national and regional feminist and women's networks; and international NGOs, federations and organizations headquartered in the Global North.

Visit the [Register of Intermediary Funds and Coordination Bodies Working at the Intersection of Gender Equality and Crisis Response.](#)



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