

### Supporting Women's Rights Organisations

Women's rights organisations are a vital catalyst for gender equality and the realisation of women's rights. For instance, research in 70 countries by Htun and Weldon *The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective 1975–2005*, found that the mobilisation of women's organisations and movements is more important for combating violence against women than the wealth of nations, left-wing political parties, or the number of women politicians. The UK government has recognised the value of women's rights organisations in achieving gender equality, for example by making support for women's rights organisations one of the seven key principles underlying Department for International Development's *Theory of Change on Tackling Violence against Women and Girls*. However it is not clear how effectively the UK government is implementing this principle into practice. The purpose code '*Women's equality organisations and institutions*' is used in reporting to the OECD Creditor Reporting System and also as a sector code within DFID's online project database. It tracks support to women's civil society organisations and women's ministries. In 2011, UK aid activities reported under this purpose code amounted to just USD 16.41 million compared with USD 118.6 million in the Netherlands, USD 82.15 million in Norway, USD 58.49 million in Spain, USD 50.52 million in Sweden and USD 24.13 in Denmark. Moreover, although the information is difficult to access, Womankind's research suggests that very few southern-based women's organisations are direct recipients of the Department for International Development's centralised funds. For example, only one southern women's rights organisation, Gender Links, is funded under the Programme Partnership Agreement fund and there were no direct grants to southern women's rights organisations under the Civil Society Challenge Fund. Womankind recommends that the UK government should increase support to women's rights organisations as key allies in development and peacebuilding.

#### Recommendations for the UK government:

- Embed a commitment to actively supporting women's rights organisations in international development policies.
- Commit to a dedicated fund for southern women's rights organisations, drawing on the positive aspects of the MDG3 funding model in the Netherlands. Include in this commitment an increase in devolved funding for gender equality and women's rights through intermediary women's funds that have partnerships with southern women's rights organisations.
- Commit at least 15% of peacebuilding funds (e.g. the Conflict Pool, co-managed by DFID, FCO and MOD) to tackling VAWG, advancing gender equality and promoting women's participation in peace processes, in line with the United Nations target.
- Increase the accessibility of existing funding streams to women's rights organisations by simplifying grants application, monitoring and reporting processes in line with recommendations proposed by the Development Assistance Committee's Network on Gender Equality.
- Scrutinise and track how much money is spent on women's rights and who receives this funding – including how much reaches southern women's rights organisations, directly and indirectly, and ensure greater transparency and an increase in focus on funding women's rights organisations.

## **Background information**

### ***a) Why support women's rights organisations***

History has shown that women's rights organisations and movements are a vital catalyst for gender equality and the realisation of women's rights. Women's rights organisations wield broad influence – from grassroots organising to advocacy and campaigning – and are uniquely placed to mobilise and empower women to come together to know and claim their rights. They often have a solid base in the daily realities of women's and girls' lives, and the legitimacy to represent women's concerns and priorities. They are a crucial source of knowledge and innovation on women's rights and have pioneered effective models for advancing women's rights – such as women's police stations and family courts, which have been widely adopted. Their very existence also serves to affirm women's leadership and participation.

***b) Challenges for women's rights organisations:*** Recent years have seen increasing attention to women and girls from development actors. Private foundations such as the Gates Foundation and Nike Foundation, donor agencies including Norway, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK, and large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), have all expanded their focus on women and girls. This spotlight has acted as an impetus to expand funding commitments on gender equality and women's rights. However, women's rights organisations are often unable to access these new funding opportunities. For example, just 1.3% of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) funds dedicated to gender equality in the 2010 budget went to women's rights organisations and women's ministries. A global survey of 1119 women's organisations from over 140 countries in 2011 found that only one-tenth of the organisations received funding from bilateral donors, national governments and INGOs. Only 6.9% received funding from UN Women, the United Nations entity for gender equality, and only 3% from corporate funds. So while there is more funding available for work on women and girls, it is not reaching women's rights organisations.

***c) Innovative funding models:*** There are various models of best practice for funding women's rights organisations that the UK government could incorporate into its international development policy; for example, women's funds have a vital role in funding organisations which are too small to receive funding from mainstream donor agencies. There are a number of well-established women's funds which are experienced in administering grants to local women's rights organisations including: Mama Cash, the Africa Women's Development Fund, the Global Fund for Women, the Central American Women's Fund, the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, and the Young Feminist Fund FRIDA. There are major benefits to channelling money through women's funds. Women's funds can provide small, flexible grants; support programme expenses as well as projects so that organisations can cover their core costs; are increasingly providing multiyear funding so that organisations can make long-term plans; allow simplified grants application, monitoring and reporting processes; are able to reach small, remote and minority organisations; and enable large grant-makers such as bi-lateral donors to sub-contract the partnership and administrative workload. Special donor funds and budget lines dedicated to women's rights are also being successfully used by bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies. For example, the MDG3 Fund set up by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands provided strategic support to women's rights organisations.

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