Is Global Funding Reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women?

Experiences from the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA)

RIGHTS + RESOURCES

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Women in Global South Alliance

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Acknowledgements

This report by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) presents results and analysis of the second phase of the research "Tracking Funding Reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women in the Global South."

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This report is dedicated to and is in recognition of the crucial roles and contributions that Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women make in transforming gender-based inequalities and preserving the world's forest and land biodiversity. It intends to bring women's voices together with strength and solidarity to ensure that global climate and conservation financing include women's organizations as key rightsholders with access to direct funding.

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cover photos

top: Women leaders from the Ogiek, Maasai, Batwa, Aweer, Benet, Sengwer, and Yaaku Indigenous communities meet in Mt. Elgon, Kenya for the 2022 East Africa Assembly.
Photo by TonyWild Photography for Rights and Resources Initiative.

middle: WiGSA members pose for a photo in Peru during the Nepal-Peru Bilateral Learning Exchange.
Photo by Lorene Moran-Valenzuela for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

bottom: Local woman cuts green overgrowth off a bush at the Shree Bindeshwari Community Forest, Nepal.
Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

Executive Summary

The Forest Tenure Pledge made at UNFCCC CoP26 in 2021 was a historic turn in governments' and philanthropic donors' commitment to delivering funding directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities for their efforts and roles in preventing deforestation and leading in climate and conservation efforts. What is still unclear in the global funding scenario in 2025 is how and to what extent Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women have benefited directly from the Pledge. The current lack of gender-disaggregated data in international donor trends makes tracking global funding reaching women's organizations difficult.

Women's organizations have made the call that if the climate finance goals intend to repair the historical gap in direct funding to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, donors must respond to the gender funding gap and concretely address the rights of women and girls whose direct access to funding has been severely limited. Women are key actors in climate change and conservation action, traditional knowledge keepers and transmitters, food security and sovereignty caregivers, and have developed incredible resilience in environmental crises; however, they continue to be underrepresented and underfunded. Ensuring direct funding for women's organizations and groups can transform the gender-based inequalities that have historically denied women their rights and locked them out of critical decision-making at the territorial, national, and international levels.[1]

In anticipation of a new Pledge at the UNFCCC CoP30 in Brazil, governments and donors must urgently recognize women as crucial rightsholders in climate and conservation action. **This will ensure that this Pledge concretely includes a gender-responsive perspective to prevent women's rights from being left behind in financial commitments.**

To build evidence and help to fill the data gap on the state of global funding reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women, the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI),[2] in collaboration with the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA), has embarked on an analysis of the level and characteristics of funding WiGSA network members have been able to access. A preliminary analysis launched at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) CoP16 in 2024 showed that investments in gender equality are on the decline, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant women remain severely underfunded. The preliminary report also indicated that stereotypes and biases against women's organizations persist in the global funding architecture, in which women face higher scrutiny and lower expectations in achieving outcomes when compared to men-led organizations.

This report presents the results of the second phase of this collaborative research: "Tracking Global Funding Reaching Women: Pilot Implementation," which aims to identify and analyze the structural obstacles Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women face in accessing funding. The study builds on the results of the preliminary report launched in 2024, which identified existing data on grants and funding mechanisms reaching grassroots and rightsholder women's organizations and scoped opportunities to expand on available data through a bottom-up data collection process involving representative networks within WiGSA.

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1 Indigenous and Afro-descendant women have long struggled for the recognition of their individual and collective rights, including their rights to fully and effectively participate in decision-making. See IFIP 2021; Raising Indigenous Women's Voices for Equal Rights and Self-Determination; Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies for Leadership Among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women; and UN Women.

2 RRI is a global coalition of more than 200 rightsholder organizations dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities, as well as the women within these groups. The RRI Gender Justice Program promotes and enables the development of bottom-up, evidence-based analyses and the creation of tools to support women's national and international advocacy and meaningful participation in strategic policy decision-making at both national and global levels.

The present report uses the Funding with Purpose approach developed under the Path to Scale (P2S) initiative, which assesses if "climate, conservation and rights funding is channeled in ways that are relevant and appropriate to IPs and LCs, and ensures funding engagements are led by their organizations." Under this framework, we analyzed whether WiGSA recipient organizations consider if their current funding: i) responds to their needs and aspirations; ii) is flexible; iii) is transparent; iv) is gender-inclusive; and v) promotes mutual accountability.

RRI developed the research in collaboration with WiGSA because the network provides a comparative advantage in visualizing and assessing if and how global funding is reaching different types of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations, groups, networks, and associations working at the intersection of climate and conservation action and women's tenure and resource rights. Moreover, WiGSA was catalyzed by RRI in 2022 as a response to the historic $1.7 billion Pledge and launched at the UNFCCC CoP27 in Egypt, and as a women's movement advocating for access to direct funding.

Key findings

- The top two priority agendas and strategies within the WiGSA network of organizations are women's land and resource tenure rights and climate and environmental justice; however, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women face significant barriers in securing direct funding that intersects with women's human and tenure rights and environmental and climate justice.
- Women's organizations must rely heavily on volunteer labor to develop their activities, adding to the existing inequalities of "unpaid work" that women perform. Moreover, significant differences exist in the level of volunteer work between Afro-descendant women or mixed organizations and Indigenous women or mixed organizations, with the former depending on much more volunteer labor.
- Due to limited funding, WiGSA network organizations show serious difficulties creating positions or retaining personnel dedicated to resource mobilization. The lack of dedicated personnel for fundraising poses additional pressure on project leaders, who need to take on this task in addition to their broader set of functions.
- The median annual budget of WiGSA network organizations in 2023 was approximately US$273,000, and it increased only slightly in 2024 to US$338,000.
- There are differences between the budget dedicated to women's work within mixed organizations (integrating women and men) and women's organizations. The proportion of the budget dedicated to women's groups' strategies within mixed organizations was only 19 percent in 2023 and 28 percent in 2024, reflecting existing disparities regarding the prioritization of women's rights agendas within mixed organizations.
- Afro-descendant women or mixed organizations have annual budgets that, on average, are less than half of those of other Indigenous women or mixed organizations and local community women or mixed organizations. In 2023, the median budget for Indigenous and local community women's or mixed organizations was US$273,466, compared to US$154,000 for Afro-descendant women's and mixed organizations.
- Data on the "aspirational budget" of WiGSA member organizations (the proposed budget that the organization needs to function properly and sustainably based on its agenda, scope of work, and projections) versus their actual budget reveals an average gap of at least 50 percent.
- The major source of funding for WiGSA member organizations comes from international NGOs. It is noticeable that feminist funding and UN agencies play a relatively minor role, and human rights funds and national governments have an even more limited role as funding sources for organizations within the WiGSA network.
- An alarming deficit of flexible and core funding within the WiGSA network was reported. Fifty-three

percent of member organizations reported having no core funding or that it represents less than 10 percent of their total budget, with some organizations reporting that they have never received core or flexible funding.

- Organizations and groups in the WiGSA network work mostly with short-term grants. In fact, 85 percent of member organizations receive grants of two years or less, and 25 percent had funding agreements under six months.
- Forty percent of WiGSA member organizations reported that securing funding for institutional strengthening is the most difficult fundraising task. This is followed by funding for knowledge production and research (30 percent) and advocacy work (25 percent). When combining these fundraising challenges, a concerning pattern emerges in which key areas of women's organizations' development receive the least funding.
- Thirty-eight percent of WiGSA organizations reported that they had no savings or reserves, 67 percent of organizations can only operate for 0 to 6 months without external funding, and only 9 percent of organizations could operate for over one year, suggesting that most organizations operate under conditions of severe financial precariousness.

Summary of recommendations

Redesign funding mechanisms: Toward flexible, institutional, and long-term funding

The predominance of rigid, short-term project grants is the primary inhibitor of sustainability and responsiveness for organizations like those that are part of the WiGSA network. To counter this, WiGSA members recommend:

- Establishing dedicated funding lines for women's organizations, defining percentages for gender strategies in their funding topics and grantmaking structures, and ensuring that mixed organizations receiving the funds are committed to dedicating at least part of the funding received to support their women's groups' activities.
- Prioritizing medium and long-term funding: Make three-to-five-year funding the norm rather than the exception. This provides the necessary stability for strategic planning, talent retention, and building trusting relationships with communities.

Transform the relationship: From control to trust and strategic partnership

- The current power dynamic, where the donor controls and the partner complies, must be replaced by a true partnership based on trust, mutual learning, and the co-creation of solutions.
- Implement "Reverse Calls for Proposals" models: Instead of donors predefining priorities, this model invites organizations like WiGSA network members to present their own strategic agendas and needs, shifting power dynamics and ensuring that funding responds genuinely to local priorities.
- Simplify application and reporting processes: Reduce the bureaucratic burden by shortening forms, accepting proposals and reports in simpler formats and local languages, and exploring alternative methods such as oral reports or conversational field visits.

The inclusion of intersectional and transformative gender approaches

The current approach to gender integration into funding architecture has proven insufficient and is often superficial. A shift toward intentional and transformative investments that address the underlying root causes and structural barriers to gender inequality is needed.

- Be intentional and specific in supporting gender work: Donors should avoid generalized proposals and

instead design programs with concrete mechanisms to ensure that women are real beneficiaries, with a deep analysis of how inequalities affect Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in specific contexts.

- A connection between funding for human rights, women's rights, and climate and conservation is needed: Gender-based, racial/ethnic-based discrimination, and socioeconomic exclusion interconnect and affect the positioning of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in climate and conservation funding architecture. Achieving global climate change and conservation goals must go hand in hand with eliminating discriminatory patterns against women.

The urgency of funding racial justice for Afro-descendant women

- Afro-descendant women's organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean have highlighted the alarming lack of specific funding for initiatives that address racial justice, discrimination, and the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, especially women. This absence severely limits the impact and sustainability of their work, perpetuating historical and structural inequalities. An urgent change is essential to make racial justice visible and position it as a central priority in donors' regional agendas.

Reinvent impact measurements: From quantitative reporting to systemic change evaluation

- Donors should adjust standardized reporting templates and work with their partners to co-design systems that capture the substantive changes that organizations themselves value.
- Co-design monitoring and evaluation systems by incorporating qualitative indicators that measure transformations in trust, political participation, dominant narratives, and power relations at the family and community levels.
- Fund learning, not just reporting: Grants should include specific resources for organizations to conduct their own reflection, learning, and strategic adaptation processes. "Reports" to donors must transform from compliance exercises into spaces for strategic dialogue about challenges and learnings.

Invest in strengthening the local ecosystem

- The strengthening of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations cannot depend solely on their internal capacity to adapt to a rigid system. Donors must invest in the support ecosystem that allows these organizations to thrive.
- Create specific funds for capacity-building: These funds should be managed by the organizations and networks themselves and fund their identified priorities, such as purchasing accounting software, training in strategic communications, hiring legal support for formalizing legal status, and paying fair salaries for administrative and fundraising staff.

The report is divided into four sections

1. The first presents the methodology and describes the information collection strategies;
2. The second provides a descriptive overview of the general results from the online survey and focus group, including information on the characteristics of the organizations in terms of composition, reach, structure, budgets, types of funding and donors, obstacles and strategies for accessing funds, and good practices;
3. The third section presents three case studies, detailing the results obtained and their connection to the findings of the second section; and
4. The last section offers practical recommendations aimed at donors and women's organizations.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted between February and May 2025, and it is based on a human rights and gender-sensitive approach[3] to analyze i) the level of global funding reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations, and ii) whether the funds allocated to them meet the criteria of responding to their priorities and needs and being led by their organizations. Using the approach developed by the P2S initiative in 2022, this analysis not only focuses on how much money is received but also examines how it's received, under what conditions, and with what consequences for the autonomy, sustainability, and effectiveness of the organizations. The five dimensions of the approach provided the categories for analyzing WIGSA organizations' experiences, from their internal structures to their relationships with donors. The five key dimensions of this approach are:

1. **Led by IPs, ADPs, and LCs**: Funding should prioritize initiatives led by these communities, ensuring their self-determination and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Donors must involve them in the design and governance of funding mechanisms.
2. **Mutual accountability**: Transparency and accountability systems must be bidirectional, not only requiring communities to be accountable to donors but also demanding that donors be transparent in their programming and strategies.
3. **Flexible and long-term**: Funds must adapt to communities' self-determined priorities, allowing rapid responses to opportunities or threats and sustaining processes of transformative change through multi-year commitments.
4. **Gender-inclusive**: An intersectional approach is required to guarantee the equitable participation of Indigenous and local community women in territorial governance, with specific funding for their groups and the integration of a gender perspective in all initiatives.
5. **Timely and accessible**: Resources must be distributed swiftly and with minimal administrative barriers, enabling communities to act quickly in the face of threats or windows of opportunity.

RRI developed the research in collaboration with WiGSA,[4] a cross-continental solidarity network of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with a scope of work and influence in more than 60 countries. WiGSA members unite in a common vision to inspire changes to the existing structural inequalities and historical injustices regarding the recognition of women's tenure and human rights, and advocate for direct access to finances and global funding.

At the time of research implementation, WiGSA consisted of 22 organizations, of which 21 participated in collecting and analyzing data and qualitative information (Table 2.1). Each WiGSA member represents anywhere from hundreds to millions of groups, associations, or individual Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and/or local community women working at the regional, national, or local levels. WiGSA's regional members, although counted as single members, are networks working in a range of 6 to 30 countries. Similarly, national members represent dozens of organizations or chapters of local women.

This report integrates the voices, knowledge, and perspectives of the women's organizations and groups that comprise WiGSA and incorporates their real experiences and needs in accessing and securing funding.

3 These approaches allow for a holistic and meaningful assessment of how an intervention or process is guided and can help to identify patterns of exclusion, discrimination, and gaps in the realization of rights. See: OHCHR, 2018; ONU Mujeres, 2017; UNEG, 2014.

4 WiGSA is composed of 27 organizations as of August 2025.

We used three tools for collecting quantitative and qualitative data and information: An online survey sent to all organizations within the WiGSA network, a focus group with six WiGSA organizations, and an in-depth study of three case studies using qualitative techniques.

Survey

The online survey contained 30 questions, organized into three sections: organizational characteristics; financial status; and strategies, challenges, and aspirations. The questionnaire was available in English, French, Nepali, Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The survey was designed to establish a baseline using the results of the 2023–2024 period, with the expectation that this same instrument could be applied periodically (biennially) within the WiGSA network or RRI coalition to monitor progress or setbacks in the level and quality of global funding reaching women's organizations.

The online survey was conducted using KoboToolbox, a free platform frequently used in humanitarian surveys that allows for questionnaire reuse. Twenty-one WiGSA member organizations responded to the online survey.[5]

Table 2.1. List of WiGSA Members That Participated in the Online Survey

Organization Name	Operational Scope[6]	Based In
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)—Indigenous Women's Program	Regional	Thailand
Coalition des Femmes Leaders pour l'Environnement (CFLEDD)	National	Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Bolivia (CNAMIB)	National	Bolivia
Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (CONAQ)	National	Brazil
Coordinadora de Mujeres Líderes Territoriales de Mesoamerica (CMLT)	Regional	Panama
Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA)	National	Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN)	National	Nepal
Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)	Sub-national/Local	Liberia
Fundación Azúcar	National	Ecuador

5 WiGSA members were able to opt-out of answering any of the questions. In some cases, the sample size of the survey question is 19 or 20 organizations, not 21, depending on their responses.

6 Organizational scope was categorized into regional (working in several countries), national (working in one country), and sub-national/local (working in specific counties or provinces within a country).

La Asociación de Mujeres Afrodescendientes del Norte del Cauca (ASOM)	Sub-national/Local	Colombia
La Asociación de Mujeres Artesana Embera (AMARIE)	Sub-national/Local	Panama
Le Réseau des femmes Africaines pour la gestion Communautaire des Forêts (REFACOF)	Regional	Cameroon
National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF)	National	Nepal
Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazonicas (ONAMIAP)	National	Peru
Pastoral Womens Council (PWC)	Sub-national/Local	Tanzania
PEREMPUAN AMAN	Sub-national/Local	Indonesia
Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora (Red MADD)	Regional	Panama
Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev)	National	Liberia
União das Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira (UMIAB)	Sub-national/Local	Brazil
Women on Mining and Extractives (WoME)	National	Sierra Leone
Women Rights and Resource Network (WRRN)	Sub-national/Local	Nepal

Case studies

The qualitative strategy included a closer analysis of the organizational characteristics and the perceptions, experiences, and trajectories of three WiGSA member organizations in accessing funding. To better understand the dynamics of unique regional experiences, organizations located in different geographic areas, representing different types of organizations and/or different ethnic or community groups were selected.

Table 2.2. List of WiGSA Members That Participated in the Case Study Interviews

Organization Name	Based In
Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora (Red MADD)	Panama
Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)	Liberia
PEREMPUAN AMAN	Indonesia

The objective of the interviews and field visit was to explore the following topics:

- Characterization of decision-making processes, working mechanisms, evaluation systems, and accountability

- Details about the structure, processes, and decisions related to fundraising
- Financial information from the last four years regarding budget, sources, and types of funding
- A detailed review of positive and negative experiences in obtaining funding
- Identification of institutional capacities and needs for accessing funding
- Identification of strategies and barriers to funding
- Identification of opportunities for funding access
- Determining whether the organizational type and/or ethnic group(s) represented make a difference in accessing funding

For the analysis of the interviews, a matrix was designed with four main dimensions:

- Organization and structure
- Budget
- Obstacles and strategies
- Opportunities

Within each of these main dimensions, subdimensions of analysis were applied, such as types of funding, main donors, agendas funded, and aspirational budgets, incorporating analysis, including excerpts from the interviews that exemplified the results or topic under discussion. A joint analysis grid[7] was used to systematize the interviews.

Focus group

A focus group followed the online survey: In-depth interviews with the organizations to discuss the main survey results and to exchange experiences, barriers, and the significance of the data that emerged from the survey.

Table 2.3. WiGSA Organizations That Participated in the Focus Group

Organization Name	Based In
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)—Indigenous Women's Program	Thailand
La Asociación de Mujeres Afrodescendientes del Norte del Cauca (ASOM)	Colombia
Le Réseau des femmes Africaines pour la gestion Communautaire des Forêts (REFACOF)	Cameroon
União das Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira (UMIAB)	Brazil
Women on Mining and Extractives (WoME)	Sierra Leone
Women Rights and Resource Network (WRRN)	Nepal

The focus group was conducted virtually and included organizations from diverse sectors and regions. The format involved a second simple survey to review results that the participants predicted, a presentation of the data, and a discussion of the expected versus actual results using guided questions.

7 This concept, also known as triangulation, is a core concept in qualitative research, where researchers use multiple methods, data sources, or theoretical perspectives to study the same phenomenon. It helps to increase the validity and credibility of research findings. There is extensive literature on different types of triangulation (data triangulation, methodological triangulation, etc.). See, for example, Patton, Michael Quinn, 2015.

WiGSA members participating in the bilateral encounter Peru-Nepal, May 26–30, 2025. Photo by ONAMIAP.

3. About WiGSA Organizations

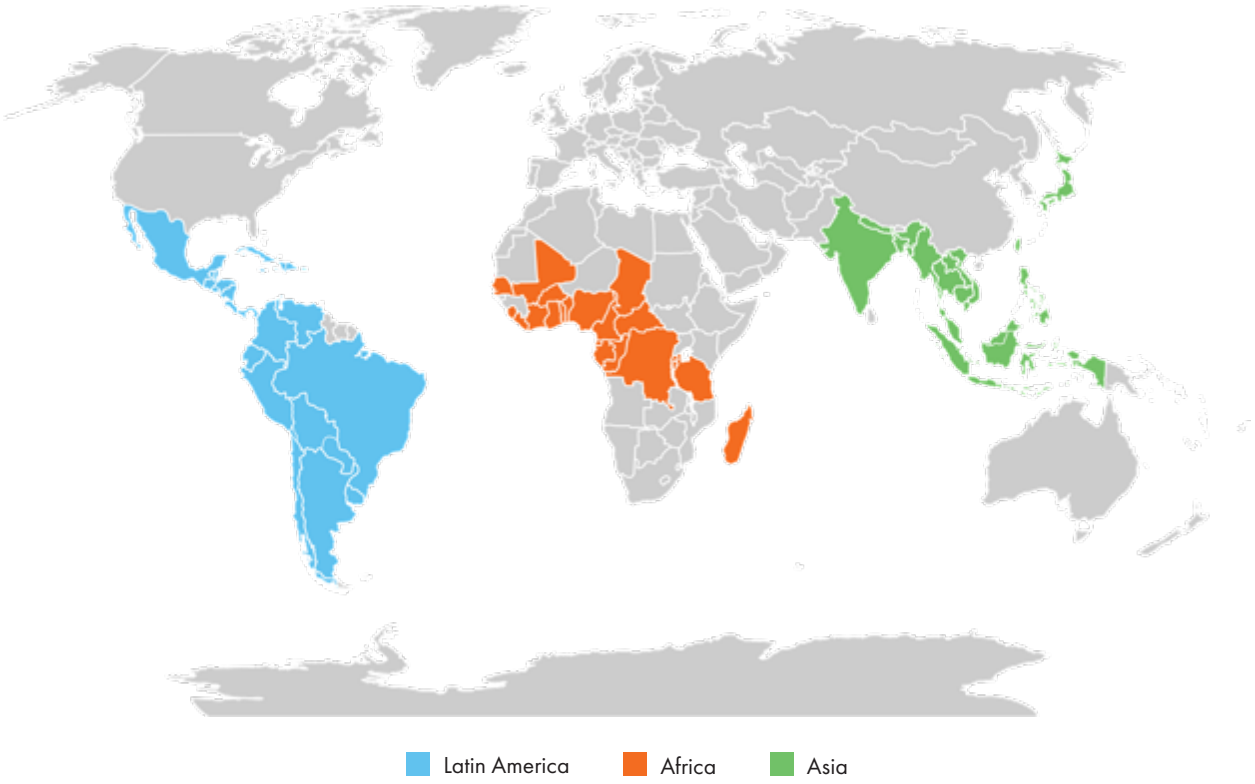
WiGSA[8] is a diverse and robust network of organizations that represent thousands of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is composed of formal and informal organizations, collectives, women's groups within mixed organizations, and associations that embody the voices and struggles of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities. Its members work at the territorial level on issues related to women's land rights and community land defense; restoration of ecosystems and forest protection; mining impacts on women and their communities; agricultural production and food security and sovereignty; and strategies to prevent violence against women, among others, granting WiGSA unique legitimacy and a crucial capacity to influence decision-making spaces at the national and global levels. At the time of research implementation (February–May 2025), WiGSA was composed of 22 members, of which 21 responded to the survey (Table 2.1). WiGSA membership is diverse, integrating different types of organizational structures, scopes of work, representation, and legal status:

- **Organizational structure:** Six members are self-defined women's groups within mixed organizations (mixed organizations in this report refer to those integrated by men and women), and 15 are women's organizations.
- **Scope of work:** Ten WiGSA members are national-level women's organizations, groups, or associations; seven operate at the subnational or local levels within specific counties or provinces; and four are regional networks working in several countries.

8 WiGSA is a fast-growing cross-continental network of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations, groups, and networks. As of August 2025, WiGSA integrates 27 members and spans its work in more than 60 countries, giving WiGSA a broad and representative capacity to influence diverse geographic, cultural, and political contexts. Eight new organizations were added to the WiGSA network in the first half of 2025, and at the time of research implementation from February to May 2025, WiGSA was 22 organizations.

- **Representation:** Nine represent Indigenous women; four represent Afro-descendant women; six represent local community women; and two represent both Indigenous and local community women.
- **Legal status:** Four organizations are not currently registered as legal entities, and, of these, two are in the process of legal registration.

Map 3.1. Countries of Influence of the WiGSA Network During the Research Period

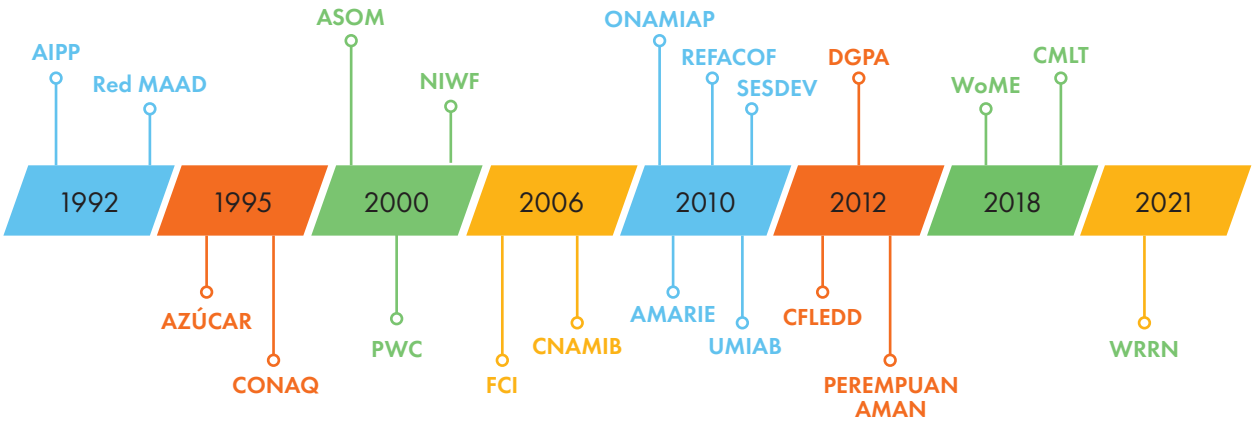


It is important to highlight the WiGSA network's vast reach, covering a large number of countries at the regional level and numerous communities and localities within individual countries.

This is crucial when analyzing each organization's scope of work against its budget levels because, when broken down by the number of countries, localities, and communities it works with, its budgets become inadequate.

WiGSA member organizations have diverse histories; many have a long-standing track record in the field, some with nearly four decades of experience. As shown in Graph 3.1, WiGSA members AIPP, Red MAAD, Fundación Azúcar, and CONAQ were founded in the early and mid-1990s, followed by a continuous process of women's organizational formation at different levels and regions, with specific rights-based agendas. The WiGSA network brings together both long-established and recently established organizations, thereby enriching and broadening the collective perspectives within the network.

Graph 3.1. Timeline of the Founding Years of 21 WiGSA Member Organizations



Priority agendas and strategies within WiGSA member organizations

This section addresses the results of the online survey regarding WiGSA members' priority agendas and strategies. According to the survey results (Table 3.1), WiGSA members' main priority agendas are women's land and resource tenure rights and climate and environmental justice. Other organizations develop specific work on Afro-descendant women's rights or Indigenous women's rights.

Table 3.1. WiGSA Members' Priority Agendas

Topic	%
Climate and environmental justice	76
Women's land and resource tenure rights	57
Indigenous women's rights	38
Community and women's forest resources management	33
Ending gender-based violence	29
Rights-based conservation	24
Afro-descendant women's rights	19

However, organizations working specifically on the rights of Afro-descendant women experience major difficulties in securing funding for their core and intersectional agendas. This could be largely because donor priorities are often too generic or fail to recognize the specificities of racial or social inequalities that place Afro-descendant women at a greater disadvantage. For example, a central issue highlighted was the "*blindness of the donor ecosystem to structural racism.*"[9] This means that very few funds are directed at addressing racial discrimination and racial justice and their intersection with tenure rights and climate and conservation action. As a result, organizations are forced to constantly "translate and adapt" their agendas to fit donor frameworks, which can dilute their transformative mission.

This reflects broader systemic challenges documented in philanthropic and human rights research, where racial justice funding remains scarce and often generic, failing to recognize the specific needs of Afro-descendant and Indigenous women's groups. Consequently, "*Indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations face significant barriers in securing adequate, direct, and flexible funding to advance their intersectional and transformative agendas.*"

"Indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations face significant barriers in securing adequate, direct, and flexible funding to advance their intersectional and transformative agendas."

9 All quotes throughout this report, including this one, are excerpts from interviews conducted as part of the case studies and/or focus group discussions.

Moreover, many of the core issues the WiGSA network works on, such as land rights, natural resource management, and the climate justice agenda, are traditionally interpreted as male-dominated topics of action. Interviews and focus group discussions shed a light on the fact that donors often show strong resistance to funding women's organizations addressing these areas or fail to recognize women's crucial role altogether. Equally, WiGSA organizations reported that many donors perceive them as lacking the capacity and competence to manage funds related to these issues.

Organizational capabilities and structures

Individual organizational capabilities and structures within the WiGSA network show considerable variability, as shown in Graphic 3.2. On average, most organizations have a permanent staff of approximately 12 people, complemented by significant volunteer participation, averaging 41 volunteers per organization.

Notably, mixed organizations tend to have a higher number of permanent contracted staff than women's organizations, averaging 16 versus 10 people, respectively. Conversely, women's organizations appear to rely much more heavily on volunteer work.

Additionally, there is a significant difference in volunteer contributions between Afro-descendant women's organizations and groups and Indigenous women's organizations and groups, with the former depending on a much higher volume of volunteer labor.

Ketut Ayu is head of the Women Farmers' Group and member of the Adat Dalem Tamblingan Indigenous community in northcentral Bali, Indonesia. The Group plants, grows, harvests, packages, and sells over 700kg of coffee every month in shops throughout Bali.

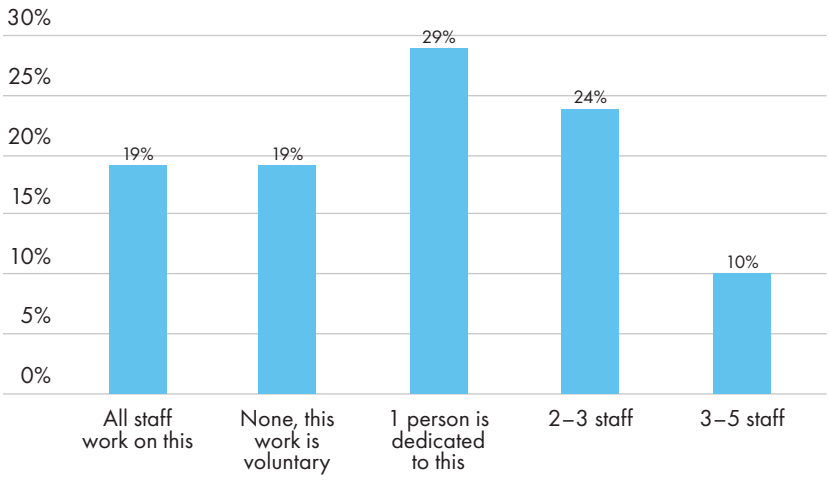
Photo by Santhi Wijaya for BRWA and Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

Graph 3.2. Organizational Structure of the WiGSA Network

The large amount of volunteer work in all organizations is a main cause for concern. As women from these organizations have pointed out, this reflects patriarchal practices where women continue to perform unpaid work that is considered domestic and of low importance. This issue stands out throughout the research process and in the interactions with WiGSA organizations as affecting the organizations' capacities to advocate for more and better resources.

WiGSA network organizations show serious difficulties creating positions or retaining personnel dedicated to resource mobilization. Graphic 3.3 shows that 67 percent of these organizations have only one person responsible for fundraising, or no one exclusively dedicated to this task. In such cases, the responsibility for securing funding usually falls on project leaders or technical team members, who take on this work as part of a broader set of functions without exclusive, systematic dedication or training to do so, exceeding their capacities to function as both program implementers and institutional fundraisers.

Graph 3.3. Staff Dedicated to Fundraising[10]



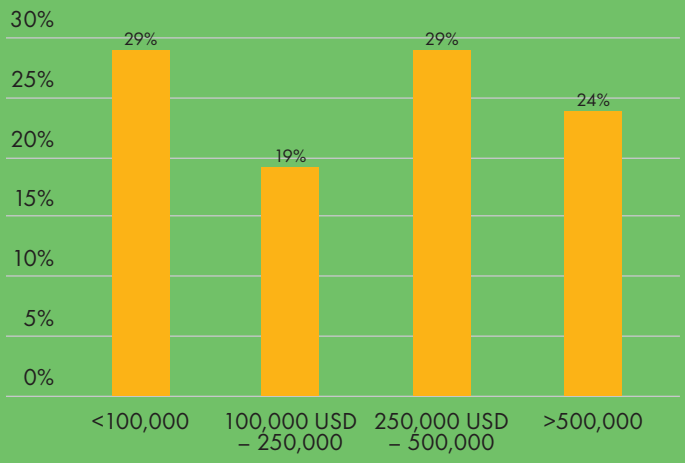
10 Due to rounding to the nearest whole number, graphs throughout this report may not always equate to 100 percent.

Members of WiGSA pose for a photo with local community members and Community Forest User Group leaders during its second strategic meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal. Photo by Sandesh Chaudhary for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

4. The Financial Situation of Network Organizations

This section analyzes budgets, types, and characteristics of funding and donors. The analysis focuses on the funding received in 2023 and 2024. Graph 4.1 presents the average annual budgets of the organizations in the WiGSA network, showing a wide range, varying from US$40,000 to over US$1,000,000. It is noteworthy that 30 percent have less than US$100,000 annually.

Graph 4.1. Percentage of WiGSA Network Organizations by Annual Budget (Average for 2023–2024 in USD)



Looking at the average, the annual value for 2023 was US$497,500, but given the wide variety and range of budgets, this number does not clearly reflect the situation, as one large budget can skew the full data set. A more accurate indicator is the median, representing the central value that divides the data set into two halves. According to this measure, the annual budget of WiGSA network organizations in 2023 was approximately US$273,000, increasing to US$338,000 in 2024, as seen in Table 4.1. However, this modest growth may not keep up with real-time challenges such as inflation, expanding programmatic needs, or increasing operational costs for many WiGSA organizations.

Table 4.1. Total, Average, and Median Annual Budget for 2023 and 2024 in USD

	2023	2024
Total	$10,447,505	$12,530,724
Average	$497,500	$596,701
Median	$273,466	$338,066

Drone footage of the Amazon Rainforest, Ecuador. Photo by Shutterstock.

Table 4.2 below shows the budget differences between women's organizations and women's groups within mixed organizations in both years.[11] As can be seen, the budget amount—whether considering the average or the median—is higher in women's organizations than what the women's groups manage within mixed organizations. In fact, in the case of mixed organizations, the proportion of the budget allocated to women's groups and their projects was only 19 percent in 2023 and 28 percent in 2024. This suggests that, in net terms, mixed organizations tend to have fewer resources dedicated specifically to women compared to organizations whose primary mission is to work exclusively with women. This finding could be indicative of the persisting structural inequalities experienced within mixed organizations, where women's rights tend not to be part of the priority political agenda and, therefore, are poorly funded. However, this finding needs to be tracked in future analyses and in a context where more opportunities for direct funding to Indigenous and local community organizations are opened, to understand whether access to more direct funding for mixed organizations has a positive impact on the allocation of dedicated or increased funding for their work with women.

11 Out of the 21 organizations that participated in the survey, six are self-defined women's groups within mixed organizations (mixed organizations in this report are those integrated by men and women). Mixed organizations responded with the budget amounts allocated only to the women's groups within those organizations.

Table 4.2. Average and Median Annual Budget for 2023 and 2024 for Women's Groups Within Mixed Organizations and Women's Organizations in USD

	Mixed Organizations		Women's Organizations	
	2023	2024	2023	2024
Average	$108,880	$174,611	$652,948	$765,537
Median	$61,142	$57,738	$385,582	$422,000

Table 4.3 compares the budgets of Afro-descendant organizations in relation to the rest of the organizations in the network, that is, Indigenous or local community organizations. We observe that **Afro-descendent organizations have, on average, budgets that are less than half of those of other types of organizations.** In 2023, the median budget for Indigenous and local community women's organizations was US$273,466, compared to US$154,000 for Afro-descendant women's organizations and women's groups within mixed organizations. This finding stressed the trend identified in the 2024 preliminary scoping analysis, which shows that funding gaps are not homogeneous even within women's organizations. Moreover, according to the new results, both Afro-descendant mixed organizations and Afro-descendant women's organizations tend to face additional challenges in accessing funding, which indicates a clear need to better understand and effectively address the diverse factors affecting Afro-descendant organizations' direct access to global funding.

Table 4.3. Comparison of Average and Median Annual Budgets Allocated to Afro-descendant or Indigenous and Local Community Women's Organizations and Groups in USD

	2023		2024	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Afro-descendant women	$214,750	$154,500	$258,000	$233,500
Indigenous and local community women	$564,030	$273,466	$676,396	$338,066

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show that funding levels between women's groups within mixed organizations and Indigenous and Afro-descendant women's organizations remain insufficient, considering their scope of work, and the latter are most affected. **The findings also reveal a pattern of funding constraints for women's groups (either Indigenous, Afro-descendant, or local community women) within mixed organizations.**

Table 4.4 provides average and median data on WiGSA members' annual budget versus their "aspirational" budget, in which they were asked to provide a budget figure for their organization to function properly and sustainably based on their agenda, scope of work, and projections. **The analysis reveals an average gap of at least 50 percent between the current actual annual budget of the organizations within the WiGSA network and their aspirational budget.** This result reveals a difficult funding scenario for women's organizations and groups, where failure to meet the aspirational budget to properly function means, in practice, cutting or reducing budgets for programs, an inability to retain key staff, and limited action on key priority agendas.

Table 4.4. Average and Median Annual Budget 2024 vs. Aspirational Budget

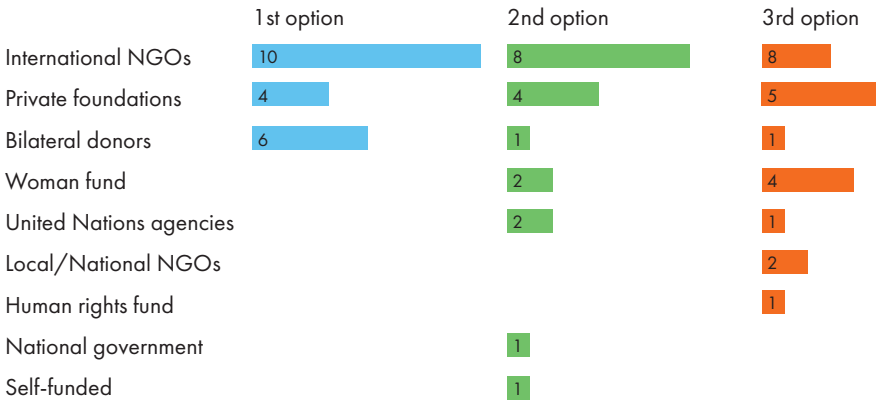
	Actual 2024	Aspirational
Average	$596,701	$1,764,441
Median	$338,066	$717,500

Main sources of funding

Graph 4.2 shows the ranking given by WiGSA network members on their main sources of funding. The online survey provided the opportunity to select up to three major types of donors WiGSA organizations are dependent on for funding, selecting them according to their importance: option one for their main source of funding; option two for their secondary source of funding; and option three for their third source of funding. For WiGSA network organizations, the main source of funding comes from international NGOs, selected by 10 organizations as their first option and main source of funding. Private or philanthropic foundations and bilateral donors are the secondary sources of funding, followed by other types.

It is worth noting that feminist funding and UN agencies play a relatively minor role, and human rights funds and national governments have an even more limited presence in terms of funding to WiGSA member organizations. **Considering that the WiGSA network's priority agendas (Table 3.1) address the intersectionality between women's land and resource rights and environmental justice, the results indicate a disconnection between human rights funders and climate and conservation donors.**

Graph 4.2. What Were the Main Sources of Funding Received in 2023 and 2024?[12]



12 The online survey provided the opportunity to select up to three major types of donors WiGSA organizations are dependent on for funding, selecting them according to their importance: option one for their main source of funding; option two for their secondary source of funding; and option three for their third source of funding.

Core funding

A central element of an appropriate approach to funding is assessing the extent to which the financial resources organizations receive align with their strategic objectives and institutional mission. This includes examining whether the funds offer sufficient flexibility for organizations to carry out their initiatives, strengthen internal capacities, and expand their reach.

From this perspective, access to structural or core funding, that is, funding not tied to specific projects, is essential for long-term organizational sustainability. The survey included a question designed to measure the proportion of core funding within each organization's annual budget.

Analyzing data from 19 organizations[13] within the WiGSA network, we found that 53 percent reported having no core funding or that it represents less than 10 percent of their total budget, as shown in Table 4.5. These figures are alarming and highlight the enormous deficit of flexible funding for the network's organizations. The lack of core funding for women's organizations and groups could affect their ability to effectively respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, continue innovating in their advocacy for women and community land rights, and sustain long-term programs aimed at greater impacts and systemic changes.

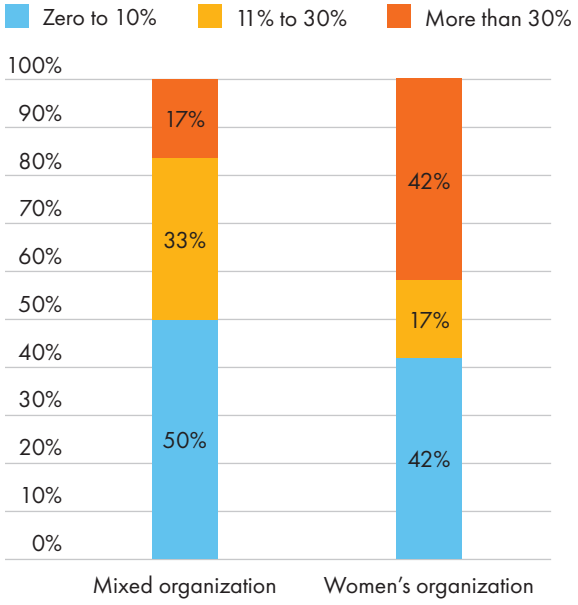
Table 4.5. Proportion of Core Funding Among WiGSA Organizations

Core Funding, in % of Annual Budget	Number of Organizations	%
0 to 10%	10	53
11 to 30%	7	37
>30%	2	11
Total	19	100

When comparing women's groups within mixed organizations in Graph 4.3, the results are less favorable for mixed organizations. Half (50 percent) of mixed organizations reported receiving 10 percent or less in core funding, compared to 42 percent of women's organizations.

13 Two organizations opted out of answering this question in the survey.

Graph 4.3. Percentage of Core Funding for Mixed and Women's Organizations



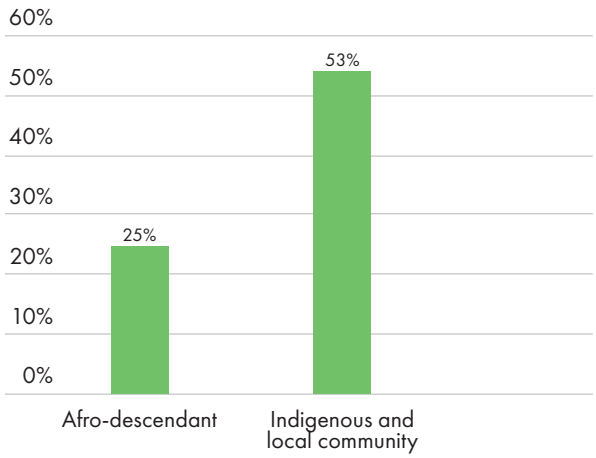
One positive aspect that can be highlighted is that, when analyzing the proportion of core funding among different types of organizations—Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community—it appears that Afro-descendant organizations have a relatively higher percentage of core funding within their total budgets.

As shown in Graph 4.4, **25 percent of Afro-descendant organizations reported that their core funding is zero or less than 10 percent, while 53 percent of Indigenous and local community organizations indicated that their core funding is zero or less than 10 percent of their total budget.**

Although the small sample size limits our ability to draw definitive conclusions, this percentage-based analysis offers a useful approximation and allows for the formulation of hypotheses for future research. In this sense, it could be suggested that, although Afro-descendant organizations generally operate with more limited resources and smaller budgets, they might achieve relatively greater access to flexible funding. This, in turn, could strengthen their capacity for institutional strengthening or sustain their basic operations despite overall financial constraints.

> "Project-based funding generates considerable uncertainty and hinders the long-term sustainability of the network, as true sustainability is not simply a matter of having funds in the bank account. It is, fundamentally, a matter of predictability."

Graph 4.4. Percentage of Organizations with 0 to 10% of Core Funding by Organizational Representation



The information gathered through interviews and the focus group highlights these findings; for example, there are organizations within the network that have never had access to flexible or institutional funding (core funding). This rigidity, in their own words, *"stifles sustainability and organizational development,"* preventing investment in key staff or fundraising teams. Other organizations reported relying on 80 percent project-based funding, with only 20 percent institutional funding. This modality generates *"considerable uncertainty and hinders the long-term sustainability of the network, as true sustainability is not simply a matter of having funds in the bank account. It is, fundamentally, a matter of predictability."*

In contrast, experiences accessing and receiving institutional funding demonstrate enormous value and transformative potential. Organizations that have some percentage of core funding emphasize that this type of support is crucial because it allows them to cover operating costs, strengthen internal structures, and invest in long-term initiatives.

This clear causal relationship between the availability of core funding and organizations' capacity to strategically plan and strengthen their internal structure underscores a broader implication for donors: **The transition toward institutional core funding is essential for genuine empowerment and long-term transformative impact, beyond mere project implementation.**

Duration of funding

When analyzing the average duration of grants received by organizations within the network, 85 percent received grants lasting two years or less, and 25 percent last barely one year. Only 15 percent of the identified funding agreements extend beyond two years (see Graph 4.5).

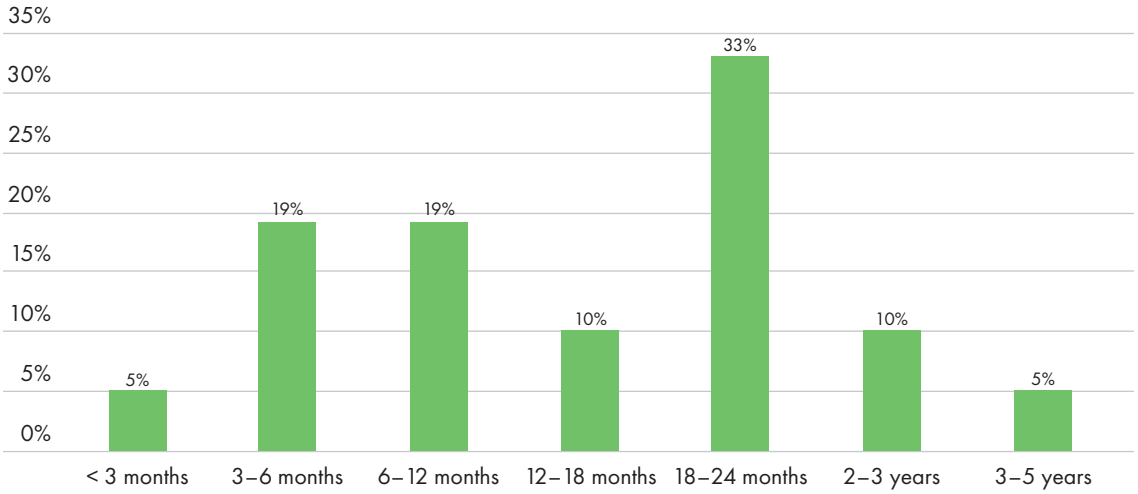
This pattern reveals a structural limitation: **Restricted access to medium- and long-term funding is one of the main barriers to institutional strengthening.** The short duration of funding cycles forces organizations to devote a significant portion of their time and resources to the continuous search for new sources of support. This, in turn, weakens their capacity to engage in long-term strategic planning, maintain stable teams, and sustain advocacy and territorial engagement over time.

Furthermore, the fragmented and short-term nature of funding discourages organizational innovation and limits the ability to scale successful projects or build cumulative learning. From a sustainability perspective, the lack of multi-year and flexible funding disproportionately affects smaller organizations or those with fewer established institutional connections, thereby deepening inequalities within Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women working at the ground level and at the frontline of collective efforts to defend their rights and their community tenure rights.

Handicrafts created by the Indigenous Ipetí-Emberá community of Panama. Photo by Tova Katzman for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

For this reason, **moving toward more stable, flexible, and institutionally oriented funding schemes is not only desirable but essential to ensure sustainable and transformative impacts in the territories and communities where these women's organizations and groups operate.** This is even more important in the context of climate change and conservation action, where strategies on sustainable management of land and forest resources, forest restoration, and biodiversity conservation require longer-term efforts and funding. Moreover, when working on transforming gender-based structural barriers and socioeconomic discriminatory practices against Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women, donors' funding levels and their grantmaking processes require a different vision and understanding of the very same endured limitations under which women's organizations are working; therefore, increasing both the term of the grants and the level of funding is desirable for women's organizations working in climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation efforts.

Graph 4.5. Average Duration of Funding for WiGSA Network Organizations



According to the discussions in the focus group and interviews, the short duration of funding cycles forces organizations to devote a considerable portion of their time and resources to the continuous search for new sources of support. Some organizations reported experiencing considerable uncertainty due to the typical duration of their grants—between 18 and 24 months. As stated in the focus group, "*this dynamic creates a kind of fundraising treadmill, where organizations divert valuable human resources and time from their core mission to ensure operational continuity.*" The broader implication is that, by prioritizing short funding cycles, donors inadvertently create a system in which organizations remain in a perpetual survival mode, rather than building resilient and sustainable long-term movements.

Most difficult resource mobilization activities

In line with the previous analysis, one of the main challenges WiGSA organizations face is securing funding for institutional strengthening. According to the data presented in Graph 4.6, 40 percent of the organizations identified this as the most difficult activity for which to mobilize resources. Knowledge production and research (30 percent) and advocacy efforts (25 percent) follow closely.

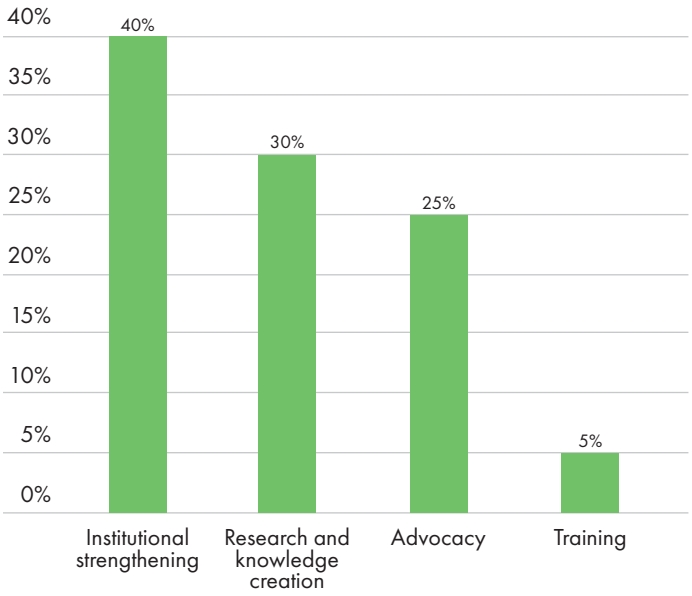
These findings reveal a concerning pattern: **The activities most essential for long-term sustainability and structural transformation—institutional strengthening, independent knowledge generation, and political advocacy—receive the least funding.** Overall, current funding mechanisms continue to favor short-term, project-based interventions with easily measurable results to the detriment of deeper, long-term, and systemic processes.

This dynamic reflects an extractive logic often applied to Global South organizations. These organizations are constantly evaluated based on their capacity to execute projects, but are rarely supported to become strong political actors, knowledge producers, or agents of transformation. The lack of funding for research and institutional development not only limits long-term impact but also undermines the strategic autonomy of these organizations, frequently leaving them dependent on externally defined agendas.

Therefore, rethinking funding architecture from a perspective of organizational justice and gender justice involves not only increasing the volume of available resources but also fundamentally reevaluating how funds

are allocated, according to which criteria, and in service of what objectives.

Graph 4.6. Activities for which it is Most Difficult to Mobilize Resources

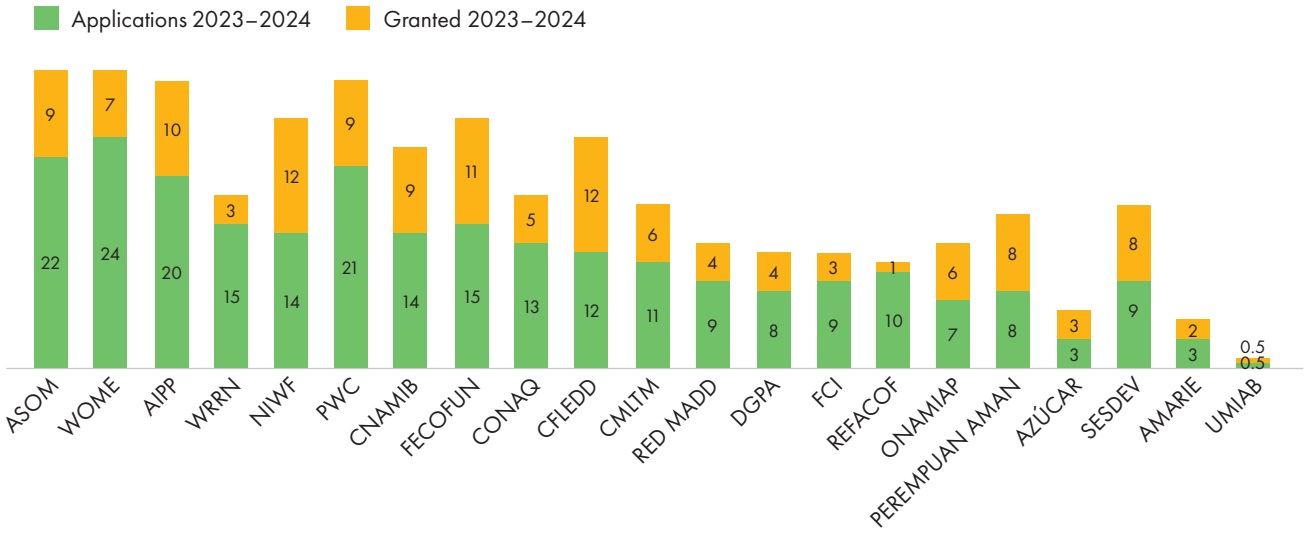


Effectiveness in obtaining funding

To analyze organizations' effectiveness in obtaining funding, we analyzed the number of funding applications submitted and their success rate, as presented in Graph 4.7. Although there is considerable disparity between organizations, with a range of 1 to 13 applications per year, on average, WiGSA organizations apply to at least six calls for proposals per year, with a success rate of 50 percent.

Considering the limited institutional capacity of many organizations in terms of staff, specifically having personnel dedicated exclusively to fundraising, we can gauge the effort each organization must make to sustain its work continuously, knowing that in the best-case scenario, its success rate will be half of its attempts.

Graph 4.7. Applications Applied vs. Approved



Savings and reserves

A central aspect of analyzing the financial sustainability of organizations is how long each organization could continue operating with its current savings if external funding were to cease. Beyond providing a snapshot of immediate financial health, this indicator also sheds light on institutional capacity and accumulated financial resilience, as well as the systemic risks organizations face due to funding volatility. This finding offers key insight into how well the current financial architecture supports—or undermines—the long-term sustainability of grassroots movements.

The data reveal a worrying trend: 38 percent of organizations reported that they had no savings or reserves, 67 percent of organizations can only operate for 0 to 6 months without external funding, and only 10 percent of organizations could operate for over one year, suggesting that most organizations operate under conditions of severe financial precariousness.

Table 4.6. Number of Months Organizations Could Operate Using Only Savings and Reserves

Operational Savings	Number of Organizations	%
We have no savings or reserves	8	38
0–3 months	2	10
3–6 months	4	19
6–12 months	5	24
>12 months	2	10

This finding reveals that rather than fostering institutional stability and long-term planning, the current funding landscape seems to impose a logic of constant urgency and chronic financial fragility. It is important to emphasize that this lack of financial reserves should not be interpreted as a sign of poor management. Rather, it reflects the broader dynamics of a funding system that remains inadequate for the timelines, scales, and organizational models of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations. It also reflects the volatile realities of the current international funding landscape. **The limited capacity of having institutional reserves adds to the already existing burden on women leading organizations or programs who need to take on extra unpaid work and practically absorb institutional costs individually to ensure the organization or program continues functioning.**

This situation illustrates the tensions between short-term, project-based funding cycles and the need for sustained capacity-building and institutional growth. If women's organizations are expected to execute transformative work in defense of women's individual and collective tenure rights, environmental justice, territorial governance, climate change mitigation, conservation, and ecosystems restoration, they must be supported through funding mechanisms that allow them to do so with stability, autonomy, and foresight.

Ultimately, this finding reinforces the urgency of reimagining funding systems that align with the missions, structures, and rhythms of the organizations it seeks to support. Reducing structural risk and enabling financial resilience must become central objectives in designing future funding models committed to justice and equity.

Panelists share preliminary results of this study a side event at London Climate Action Week on June 24, 2025, titled, „Women's Leadership in Climate and Conservation Action Needs Greater Financial Support: Voices from the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA)."
Photo by Lorene Moran-Valenzuela for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

5. Obstacles and Strategies

External challenges

When analyzing the main external challenges organizations face when trying to raise funds, Graph 5.1 shows that the most frequently cited problem (52 percent) is that funding processes are complex, inaccessible, and unrealistic in terms of the time given to prepare a proposal. Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women are part of collectives at the territorial level, and producing a proposal requires consultation and consensus-building, which requires extra time, normally not considered by the donor timelines. This suggests a strong disconnect between how funding mechanisms are structured and what women's organizations on the ground can realistically access and manage—a direct contradiction to desired funding models that are flexible, context-sensitive, and gender-inclusive.

In addition, 38 percent of respondents also reported:

- A lack of funding to support the work of Indigenous and/or Afro-descendant women's organizations or women's groups within mixed organizations.
- A scarcity of available funds for the regions, geographies, ecosystems, or countries where they operate.

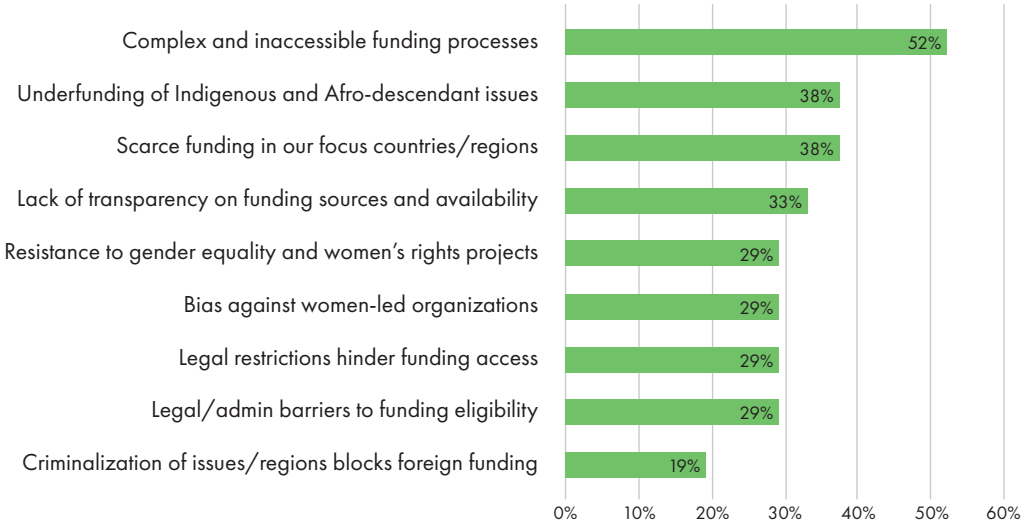
Other challenges mentioned include:

- Inadequate information about funding sources, a barrier that reflects poor transparency and weak communication within the funding ecosystem.
- Resistance to funding projects focused on gender equality or women's rights.
- Difficulty gaining recognition as a woman-led organization.
- Legal barriers within countries that complicate access to and receiving funds.

- Inability to meet donors' legal or administrative requirements.
- Working in regions or on issues criminalized by their governments and facing restrictions or threats to foreign funding are particularly serious challenges in authoritarian contexts or where civic space is shrinking.

In conclusion, this data shows that fundraising challenges are not only financial but systemic. There is a clear mismatch between donors' expectations and the operational contexts of grassroots and rights-based women's organizations. To truly support these groups, donors must adapt their mechanisms—simplifying processes, increasing transparency, and removing unnecessary legal burdens.

Graph 5.1. Main External Challenges in Accessing Funding



Some organizations noted that obstacles begin even before the application process, citing complex online platforms, insufficient application deadlines, and information channels that do not reach local organizations in a timely manner. Furthermore, eligibility criteria are often exclusionary, such as the requirement of five years of audits for a community women's organization, which ends up favoring large international NGOs.

For Afro-descendant women's organizations, the deepest gap is linked to the *"blindness of the donor ecosystem to structural racism,"* as mentioned earlier, which translates into a lack of specific funds aimed at addressing racial discrimination and racial justice. In the words of the women interviewed, *"this is not a priority for anyone."* This gap forces organizations to constantly translate and adapt their core political agendas to fit into frameworks that were not designed to accommodate them, which can dilute their mission.

Similarly, some organizations expressed a *"lack of understanding from certain donors about the type of organization and the work carried out,"* which differs from traditional NGOs, and the requirement for numerical indicators that do not reflect the qualitative nature of their work.

Additionally, the barriers of intersectionality are also crucial: Indigenous or Afro-descendant women face gender biases within their communities and with donors, who may underestimate their work by viewing it as domestic or not recognizing their roles in climate and conservation action.

Likewise, participants in the focus group reinforced donors' lack of trust and competition with male-led organizations that receive significantly larger amounts of funding: *"I always ask if it's due to lack of trust,*

because almost everyone recognizes the key role these women are playing. But those same people who recognize that key role are the ones not mobilizing funds to support them... and I always ask, where is the problem? Why can we observe such a large gap?... A male-led organization can have 10 times or even more funding than a women-led organization.... We want dedicated funding for women.... We don't have seed funds to strengthen our organization.... Women in this world are only here to work voluntarily and to die working without receiving anything."

"For Afro-descendant women, funding is generally much scarcer...and if we are women living in rural areas, even more so, because they don't consider us to have the capacities or competencies to manage funds. So, this is an issue that is also deeply intertwined with discrimination and racism."

"That is especially true when talking about women's rights and land for us, especially in our countries where men are always or should always be in charge of land matters and not women. This always puts us in the lowest position, and you don't have much support to advance women's rights.... In terms of budget, I believe we really need sufficient budgets because what we have now is not enough to do the work we are supposed to do and thus be able to achieve the results we need."

The consulted organizations highlight the difficulty of advocating for women's rights in traditionally male-dominated issues, such as land tenure, due to a lack of budget and limited support. Additionally, it was pointed out that *"for Afro-descendant women, funding is generally much scarcer...and if we are women living in rural areas, even more so, because they don't consider us to have the capacities or competencies to manage funds. So, this is an issue that is also deeply intertwined with discrimination and racism."*

The contradiction between the funding approach ideal and the reality of donor mechanisms is evident. Systemic complexity, lack of contextual understanding, and inherent biases (gender and racial) within donor mechanisms directly lead to the exclusion and dilution of grassroots agendas. The broader implication is that the current funding architecture inadvertently perpetuates existing power asymmetries and systemic inequalities.

Internal challenges

When analyzing the internal barriers organizations within the WiGSA network face in their efforts to mobilize financial resources, 62 percent of respondents cited insufficient information about funding opportunities as one of the most frequently reported difficulties. This limitation not only suggests a scarcity of accessible information but also points to structural gaps within the organizations, such as the inability to secure funding for staff dedicated to resource mobilization or the lack of connection to relevant funding networks.

Language barriers, identified by 57 percent of organizations, represent another considerable obstacle. Since most funding opportunities, guidelines, and application processes are issued in English or other dominant languages, organizations operating primarily in local or Indigenous languages are at a clear disadvantage. This linguistic exclusion reinforces broader patterns of marginalization and limits these groups' ability to engage with international donors on equal terms.

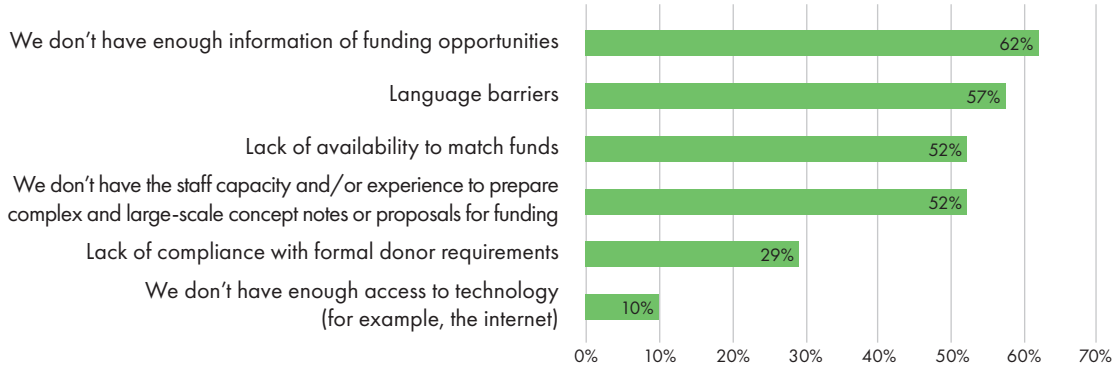
Equally urgent is the issue of co-financing. Half of the organizations reported a lack of availability to provide counterpart funds—a common requirement in international grants that demand applicants contribute a portion of the project costs. For organizations with limited or no core funding, this requirement becomes a significant barrier to participation, effectively disqualifying them from many calls before they even begin.

Additionally, 52 percent of organizations indicated that they lack staff capacity or experience to prepare complex proposals or concept notes—especially those required for large-scale or multi-year funding. These point to both a skills gap and an institutional challenge: **Many of these organizations are deeply engaged in community work but lack the resources or proper training to meet the increasing technical and formal demands of donor systems.**

Other barriers, such as non-compliance with donors' formal requirements (29 percent)—which may include financial audits, results frameworks, or monitoring protocols—and lack of access to digital technologies like the Internet (10 percent), also emerged from the data. Although these percentages are comparatively lower, they underscore the profound asymmetries between funders' expectations and the operational realities of grassroots organizations.

Together, the data paints a picture in which internal limitations significantly restrict organizations' capacity to access and manage funding. These are not just administrative limitations on the part of women's organizations, but reflections of broader inequalities in the global funding architecture that make the funding systems' functionality unable to respond to the realities in which Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations operate. **The findings call for urgent investment in long-term institutional strengthening, technical training, and multilingual access. More broadly, they highlight the importance of designing funding systems that are aligned with the capacities, needs, and contexts of the communities and movements they seek to support.**

Graph 5.2. Main Internal Challenges to Accessing Funding



In line with Graph 5.2, 60 percent of organizations indicated that the ability to identify funding opportunities is the most critical skill needed, significantly surpassing technical areas such as budget compliance (28 percent) or monitoring and evaluation (12 percent).[14]

In many organizations, the availability of staff with experience in funding is concentrated in just one person, while the rest of the staff and volunteers lack the experience and confidence to prepare funding proposals. It was noted that *"people cannot dedicate themselves exclusively to fundraising due to lack of remuneration, which leads to weak organizations."* Furthermore, many organizations lack work tools and the specific expertise that some calls for proposals require in developing strong proposals.

The data reveals that internal capacity gaps are often a symptom of external funding challenges rather than inherent deficiencies. The lack of institutional or flexible funding (as noted in the previous section) prevents organizations from investing in hiring dedicated staff or in long-term training. This creates a causal relationship and a vicious cycle in which organizations cannot invest in the necessary capacities to secure better funding because the funding system does not provide them with the resources to do so. The broader implication is that internal weaknesses result from external systemic failures, which demand a rethinking of how capacity-building is approached and funded.

A woman watches elephants in the distance in Kenya.
Photo by Anthony Ochieng.

14 This data corresponds to the question: Which FUNDRAISING SKILL does your organization most need?

Good fundraising practices and experiences

The following data (Graph 5.3), detailing the best fundraising practices identified by WiGSA member organizations in 2023 and 2024, reveals key insights into how these groups navigate a funding system that often remains structurally misaligned with their realities. These practices reflect not only adaptive strategies but also the persistent gap between donor frameworks and the lived experiences of grassroots organizations, particularly those led by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women.

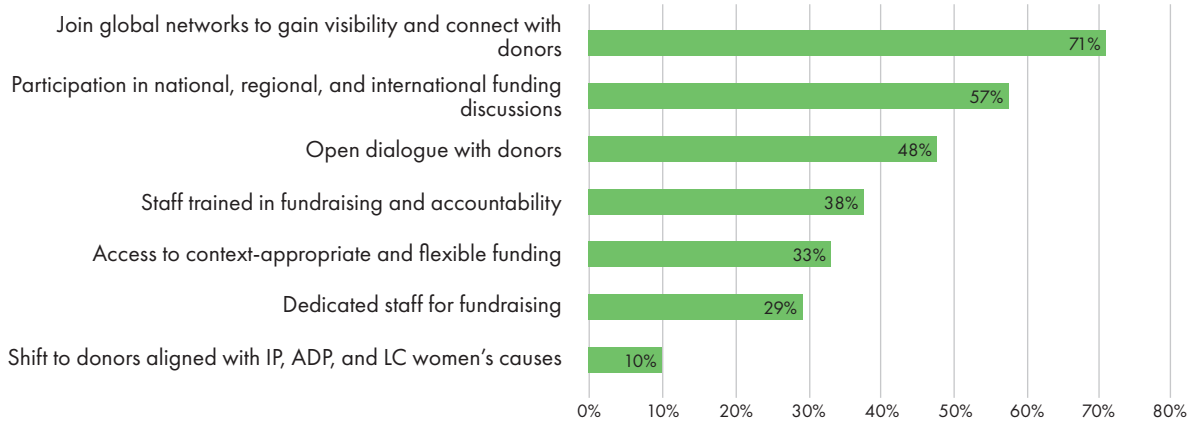
The most prevalent practice, reported by 71 percent of organizations, is participation in international coalitions and networks. This underscores the strategic value of transnational visibility to overcome exclusion from traditional funding channels. Membership in these spaces allows access to information and recognition, often compensating for the organization's lack of formal fundraising infrastructure. The second most common practice—participation in national and international policy dialogues on funding priorities—signals an effort to influence the architecture of aid and funding allocation, positioning women's organizations not just as recipients, but as political actors with a voice in shaping agendas.

Other practices, such as direct engagement with donors and internal capacity strengthening in proposal writing and accountability systems, reflect the need for organizations to adapt to rigid external criteria. In contrast, those same criteria rarely adjust to the organizational context, scale, or worldview, as previously noted. Notably, only 29 percent of organizations reported having dedicated fundraising staff, and a mere 10 percent actively seek to diversify their funding sources. These figures suggest structural limitations in the professionalization of resource mobilization and limited space to exercise agency in selecting financial partners that align with an organization's political and cultural priorities.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate not only the challenges WiGSA organizations face but also their remarkable resilience and strategic creativity. Despite operating within a funding system that often does not fit their realities, these organizations are building influence, strengthening alliances, and asserting their leadership in the global funding landscape, while contributing to the advancement of global commitments in climate change and conservation.

Through practices such as alliance building, policy engagement, and internal capacity development, they are not only adapting to external frameworks but are transforming them from within. This transformation signals a promising shift in which funding modalities can be increasingly informed by the grounded knowledge, priorities, and organizational forms that women's movements bring. Rather than being shaped by donor requirements, they are defining the terms of their engagement based on their own conditions, opening the door to fairer, more gender-inclusive, and context-appropriate funding systems.

Graph 5.3. WiGSA Network Organization's Fundraising Strategies and Best Practices



The urgent need to strengthen networks, improve the visibility of women's work in areas like natural resources and biodiversity conservation, and the importance of training for proposal writing and participation in joint calls for proposals emerged strongly in the interviews and focus group.

Along these lines, it's very interesting to consider the organizations' own reflections on the need for a mindset shift at both individual and institutional levels to achieve true gender equity. *"Women often do volunteer work and accept small funds (e.g., $5,000–$30,000 or even $1,000–$10,000) due to a lack of alternatives. This isn't enough to achieve desired goals, and unlike male-led organizations, women's organizations often accept these small amounts out of necessity."* This practice of accepting insufficient funds and working voluntarily contributes to perpetuating a vicious cycle of underfunding, and it is pointed out that if women demanded more, they could obtain more adequate funding. **The need for engaging in volunteer work and accepting a small amount of payment for women's work is also a reflection of the persisting global gender-based economic inequalities that have placed women as subjects of unpaid work.** What is worrisome is that with the increasing impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, women's efforts in tackling these impacts end up not being recognized. Instead, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women continue subsidizing critical work at the territorial level.

Case studies provide concrete examples of these good practices, which consistently involve a shift from transactional and control-based funding structures (that is, donors defining what to do with funding from finances reporting to closely monitoring how expenditures are implemented) to relational, trust-based, and co-designed approaches, as described below:

- FCI: The long-term relationship with one of its donors, although initially rigid, evolved into a trusting relationship that allowed the inclusion of unplanned additional crucial activities in a five-year project, such as creating a document that simplifies land rights laws for women. This experience demonstrates that long-term funding, when combined with flexibility, allows projects to evolve to be more effective. A collaboration with this donor exemplifies co-design, where the donor worked with FCI from the initial phase to ensure gender considerations were central. Furthermore, a field visit led the donor to revise its internal policy to pay more attention to personnel costs—an act of trust and adaptation that transcends contractual logic.
- PEREMPUAN AMAN: The relationships with some of its donors are emblematic examples of institutional (core) funding that is flexible and multi-year. Access to funding came through an informal conversation and a personal relationship, with a one-page proposal, full upfront disbursement, and no formal narrative or financial reports. The donors rely on continuous dialogue and the organization's internal systems. In this case, these donors act as strategic allies that offer support beyond money, such as help in navigating administrative and legal processes.

- Red MAAD: The relationship with one of its donors is based on dialogue and accompaniment rather than supervision. Regular meetings allow for sharing mutual priorities and expectations. Honesty in communication was crucial for managing the unexpected cancellation of its legal status in the country where its headquarters was based, responding with flexibility and offering recommendations. A decisive factor was that the donor's staff in charge of overseeing the grants was an Afro –descendant woman, whose familiarity with Afro-descendant movements facilitated dialogue and the integration of gender and race perspectives. Budgetary adjustments and balance transfers were allowed through a simple consultation process, demonstrating flexibility in management.

These good practices represent a fundamental shift from a logic of control and compliance to one of trust, flexibility, and genuine partnership. This reveals a contradiction with prevalent rigid models and suggests that the most effective funding relationships are those that mirror the relational and trust-based nature of the grassroots organization itself. **The implication is that systemic change requires donors to fundamentally reconsider their operational paradigms, moving from an auditing role to a strategic ally.** Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the perception of the three organizations regarding flexible versus rigid funding models.

Table 5.1. Comparison of Financing Models: Flexible vs. Rigid

Financing Features	Flexible and Trust-Based Models	More Rigid Models
Type of funding	Core funding, flexible, multi-year (3–5 years or more)	Project financing, restricted, annual or short-term (18–24 months)
Accessibility	Based on relationships, invitations, and simplified proposals (e.g., one page)	Open calls, long and complex proposals, high bureaucratic burden
Accountability	Conversational, trust-based, learning-focused, and acceptance of the organization's internal systems	Rigid templates, focus on quantitative indicators and strict financial compliance (e.g., receipts)
Nature of the relationship	Strategic alliance, partnership, mutual learning; donor is a facilitator and partner	Transactional, contractual; donor is an auditor or supervisor
Impact on autonomy	Strengthens autonomy, allows the definition of its own agenda and response to emerging needs	Limits autonomy, imposes an external agenda, and diverts resources to administrative compliance
Impact on vision	Systemic and qualitative change (e.g., trust, decision-making power, change of narratives, transformation of power relations)	Quantitative and tangible outputs (e.g., number of trainees, hectares mapped, policies influenced)

Table 5.2. Differences in Funding Related to Donor Requirements and Organizational Capacities

Central Points of Funding	Typical Donor Requirements	Reality/ Capacity/Need	Consequences
Proposal design and flexibility	Projects with predefined and rigid results and activities; strictly programmatic funding	Need for flexibility to respond to emerging community dynamics (e.g., cooperatives, sexual- and gender-based violence cases); need for holistic support	Opportunities for impact are lost and the responsiveness and relevance of the intervention are limited; the organization cannot address needs comprehensively
Sustainability and institutional capacity	Reluctance to fund core costs (e.g., institutional strengthening, capacity development, salaries not tied to activities)	Reduced management structure and critical need to invest in fundraising professionalization and staff capacity to reduce vulnerability	Overburdened leadership, high institutional risk, and perpetuation of a cycle of financial vulnerability; inability to plan long-term
Eligibility and access	Requirements like multiple years of financial audits or complex calls for proposals on centralized platforms with short deadlines	Limited administrative capacity to comply with costly audits and difficulty accessing information on time and navigating complex systems	Systematic exclusion from important calls for proposals; structural advantage for larger international NGOs
Monitoring and evaluation	Extensive and complex narrative and financial reports in English with inflexible formats	Small team with multiple responsibilities and the need for simplified reporting formats adapted to local contexts (e.g., local languages, oral reports)	Diversion of human resources and valuable time from mission-related work to administrative compliance; increased workload and organizational stress
Gender approach	Formal and superficial mention of gender as a component to be integrated or considered	Mission centered on the transformation of gender power relations and the need for intentional funding that addresses structural biases and causes	Funding does not support a transformative agenda and reinforces biases that favor male-led organizations; gap between discourse and real investment

The information presented in this section reveals that WiGSA network organizations face significant external and internal obstacles in securing funding, yet they have developed strategic approaches to navigate these challenges.

Despite these systemic challenges, WiGSA organizations employ various strategies, with participation in international coalitions and networks being the most prevalent. They also engage in national and international policy dialogues to influence funding priorities and undertake internal capacity strengthening in proposal writing and accountability systems. These strategies, coupled with a push for flexible, trust-based funding models, highlight their resilience and commitment to transforming the funding landscape to better suit the realities and needs of grassroots women's organizations.

top: WiGSA members pose for a photo at its second strategic meeting in Kathmandu Nepal. Photo by Sandesh Chaudhary for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

bottom: A Maasai woman in Kenya smiles while carrying a water jug on her back. Photo by Bartosz Hadyniak for iStock.

Members of WiGSA participate in the network's second strategic meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal.
Photo by Sandesh Chaudhary for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

6. Case Studies

The case studies aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the structural barriers organizations face in accessing international funding. This analysis incorporated a contextualization of the strategies and characteristics that either facilitate or hinder access to funds. Three organizations were selected, one per region, representing different types of organization: PEREMPUAM AMAN, from Indonesia; Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora (*Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women*, Red MAAD); and the Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) from Liberia.

The interviews yielded valuable information for understanding the characteristics, dynamics, needs, and current realities of these organizations. Their specific situations also reflect those of many other organizations

This section provides a detailed account of the emerging themes and results obtained from each of the case studies.

PEREMPUAN AMAN

PEREMPUAN AMAN is an Indigenous women's movement in Indonesia that aims to advance a profound political and social territorial transformation. Its mission focuses on changing narratives, building political awareness, and, fundamentally, altering the gender power relations that underpin exclusion and violence, both within their communities and in their interactions with the state and other actors.

Given this purpose, conventional funding mechanisms often erect barriers to providing support that the movement itself values. The standard architecture of international cooperation is designed for service NGOs

or traditional political advocacy groups, which operate with a project-based logic: linear, predictable, and with quantifiable milestones. These mechanisms prioritize risk control, standardization, and accountability through numerical indicators, such as the number of policies influenced or hectares of territory mapped. This approach is not entirely compatible with the emergent, process-oriented, and qualitative nature of social and systemic change sought by a women's movement like PEREMPUAN AMAN. When describing an experience with a donor who demanded such metrics, the interviewee elaborated that the approach was completely detached from their work, as the changes they promote are social and cultural and not always perceptible or demonstrable through numbers.[15]

The problem, therefore, does not lie in a supposed lack of organizational capacity or will on the part of donors. What the PEREMPUAN AMAN case reveals is a fundamental clash of operating paradigms. On the one hand, a project management logic seeks predictable and measurable results. On the other hand, a movement-building logic operates organically and relationally, and its most significant outcomes—such as trust, political awareness, or the democratization of family relationships—are often intangible and emergent. The mismatch is not a simple problem of communication or lack of flexibility; it's a structural incompatibility between the funding tool (the project grant) and the nature of the purpose it aims to support.

The essence of PEREMPUAN AMAN: Identity, structure, and purpose

PEREMPUAN AMAN'S identity is shaped by its struggle for recognition and autonomy as an Indigenous women's organization. For 12 years, from 1999 to 2012, Indigenous women within the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) fought to integrate a gender perspective and secure their own space for decision-making within the male-led movement. The creation of PEREMPUAN AMAN in 2012 as an autonomous organization, with its own membership, assembly, priorities, and agenda, is fundamental proof of its political identity and the need for women's voices and decision-making power.

Its organizational structure reflects its nature as a movement. It's not a centralized NGO but a network comprising a small national secretariat of 13 people that supports a grassroots movement of over 4,600 Indigenous women, organized as individual members across 113 local chapters throughout Indonesia. Its mission is to strengthen Indigenous women's political identity, their confidence, and their capacity to defend themselves and advocate for their rights.

The organization's working methodology is a clear example of its process-oriented and qualitative approach. One of its key tools is engendering participatory mapping. This method isn't solely for collecting data on land use. Its primary goal is to be a tool for women's deep reflection on their roles, knowledge, and contributions to the community. It's a process to build political awareness and change the narrative about the place of Indigenous women, transforming what was considered a "destiny" or domestic task into a political act with a political stance. This approach demonstrates that for PEREMPUAN AMAN, the process *is* the result.

The organization's main lines of work include:

- Documenting the reality of Indigenous women, using gender-sensitive methodologies to show their role in managing territories and natural resources.
- Building political identity and strengthening the confidence of Indigenous women to participate in decision-making at both the community and governmental levels.
- Education and empowerment activities, enhancing their autonomy through capacity-building and active participation in community life.

Budget and types of funding

15 Excerpts, quotes, and testimonies in this section are from interviews conducted on April 30 and May 22, 2025.

PEREMPUAN AMAN has shown consistent growth in its financial capacity over the years, according to data gathered through surveys and corroborated in interviews. However, it's important to note that the organization is still far from the ideal amount the movement requires to carry out its work adequately.

Regarding funding sources and types, PEREMPUAN AMAN relies on a diverse range of actors, including private foundations, women's funds, and international NGOs. Two philanthropic donors are its main donors.

As for the type of funding, the organization obtains its resources through a combination of institutional and project funds, with institutional funding (core funding) representing 30 percent of the total budget. As will be analyzed throughout the document and has been emphasized by those interviewed, *"this type of funding is crucial, as it allows the organization to cover operational costs, strengthen internal structures, and invest in long-term initiatives, such as internships for youth from local chapters."*

Project funding represents 70 percent of the total budget. This indicates that a significant portion of the organization's resources is tied to specific outcomes and activities.

The typical duration of grants PEREMPUAN AMAN receives is between 18 and 24 months, which its members value as a reasonable period for planning and implementing their projects.

Despite these financial situations, PEREMPUAN AMAN operates with a limited financial cushion, able to cover its operations with savings for a period of three to six months. This highlights the importance of flexible and predictable funding.

Finally, between 2023 and 2024, the organization submitted four funding applications each year and received approval for all four applications in both periods, demonstrating a high success rate in securing resources with a targeted approach to what to apply for.

"Institutional funding is crucial because it allows the organization to allocate resources where they are most needed, whether it's to cover the secretariat's operational costs, strengthen institutional capacities, or respond to the emerging needs of its members in local chapters, instead of being tied to predefined activities in a project proposal."

Good practices and current challenges

The interviewees recounted various experiences with international donors, providing practical examples of how relationships, work dynamics, accountability mechanisms, and evaluations operate.

Relationships with foundations are cited as examples of good practices that have been fundamental to strengthening the movement. The main characteristic of this support is that it involves institutional (core) funding that is flexible and multi-year (for example, five years). As mentioned in the interview, *"this type of funding is crucial because it allows the organization to allocate resources where they are most needed, whether it's to cover the secretariat's operational costs, strengthen institutional capacities, or respond to the emerging needs of its members in local chapters, instead of being tied to predefined activities in a project proposal."*

> **"It's crucial for donors to get closer to communities, understand their realities, and adapt their requirements to truly support these vital organizations."**

Beyond flexibility, these relationships are based on trust and strategic partnership. Access to funding wasn't through a competitive call, but rather the result of an informal conversation and a personal relationship built over time. The high-trust relationship frees the organization from an enormous administrative burden and allows it to focus on its mission.

"The requested proposal was one page, the grant disbursement (1.8 billion rupiah) was made in full and in advance, and, most notably, the foundation does not require formal narrative or financial reports. They rely on continuous dialogue and the organization's own systems, which, in any case, conduct annual audits as a principle of accountability with public money."

Furthermore, as both interviewees stated, these donors act as strategic allies who offer support beyond money. For example, they actively supported PEREMPUAN AMAN in navigating the complex administrative and legal processes to register and receive funds directly from the United States, acknowledging language barriers and bureaucracy. This type of support *"demonstrates a facilitator and partner role, not just a mere funder."*

On the other hand, examples of practices that presented some challenges for the organization were highlighted throughout the interviews. Despite a collaboration of almost seven years, the relationship with a donor ended, not due to a lack of results, but because of administrative issues. This donor demanded reporting based on quantitative indicators—how many hectares claimed, how many policies intervened—an approach that, according to the organization itself, does not take into consideration the substantive change the movement seeks in gender-power relations and democratization at the family and community level.

"They asked us for reports with numerical indicators, with lots of numbers. And we tried to explain to them that the change we want to promote wasn't always perceptible or demonstrable through numbers. These are social and cultural changes that have to do with narratives, with the place of women, with access to financial autonomy, and that the kind of reports they asked for were completely unrelated to the work we do."

"We seek donors who value qualitative changes in power relations and the building of political awareness among Indigenous women, beyond just numbers."

Additionally, it was mentioned that the experience of receiving intermediate funds also demonstrates the limitations of rigid models. This mechanism requires submitting semi-annual work plans and reports that limit the organization's flexibility and adaptability. These practices, focused on compliance and control, impose an external logic that does not align with the dynamic and contextual reality of PEREMPUAN AMAN's work.

"It's crucial for donors to get closer to communities, understand their realities, and adapt their requirements to truly support these vital organizations."

Members of the Ipetí-Emberá community of Panama prepare lunch with WiGSA members.
Photo by Tova Katzman for Rights and Resourcse Initiative, 2023.

Finally, the experience recounted by the organization's staff demonstrates that access to funding has depended almost exclusively on its president's leadership and personal connections. The organization does not have a formal fundraising department; everything falls on the leadership team's shoulders, which creates a high dependency on a single person and puts the movement's sustainability at risk.

This reveals a significant systemic flaw: The current funding ecosystem primarily rewards organizations not for their impact but their ability to navigate a network of personal relationships. This model is inherently inequitable and places immense pressure on individual women leaders. It also recalls how the lack of funding for institutional capacity-building to secure staff dedicated to fundraising directly affects individuals in leadership positions and increases impact in the entire organization.

Barriers of intersectionality: Being a woman and being Indigenous

Throughout the interviews, there has been a recurring theme about the double discrimination faced by PEREMPUAN AMAN as an Indigenous women's movement.

On the one hand, *"as women, we face deeply ingrained gender barriers within our own communities. This includes the need to ask for permission from our families or community leaders to participate in activities or travel, as well as being exposed to situations of jealousy and violence when we gain some visibility and autonomy."* On the other hand, *"we face gender biases outside our communities when interacting with donors. I have witnessed the need for a man's presence to be taken seriously, and how donors underestimate our work, viewing it as 'domestic' rather than a relevant political agenda."*

As Indigenous people, *"we face donors' incomprehension of our knowledge systems, our forms of community organization, and our worldview, with them instead expecting Western NGO models that don't fit our reality."*

The intersection of these two identities exacerbates the barriers, creating a situation where they must fight for legitimacy on multiple fronts simultaneously.

In this context, funding is not only ineffective but can be actively detrimental. *"For example, when a donor, even with good intentions but lacking context, pressures us to focus on traditionally masculine topics like hectares and territorial control, without parallel awareness-raising work with the men and women in the community, the result can be an increase in tension and resistance from both male leaders and women in positions of power within the community."* In this way, a funding requirement can, in practice, increase risks for women in vulnerable sociopolitical conditions at the community level (that is, women from lower classes, women who are not in leadership positions, or women who are not part of elite groups within the community) and undermine the very empowerment process it aims to support.

Foundation for Community Initiatives

General characteristics

The Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) is an emblematic, national women's organization deeply rooted in rural communities with a comprehensive mission encompassing forest governance, women's land rights, the fight against gender-based violence, and economic empowerment. Its main office is not in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, but in the rural county of Mangibi—a strategic decision reflecting its commitment to proximity and community relevance.

Identity, purpose, and structure

From its inception, FCI set out to work directly with local communities, recognizing that women have historically been marginalized from decision-making processes and control over natural resources. The organization identified that, in the Liberian context, many women depend on agriculture and forests for their livelihoods but lack legal property rights or a voice in managing these resources. This reality motivated a group of women leaders to form an organizational structure that could support, empower, and give visibility to rural women, promoting their active participation in community life and political advocacy.

Throughout its trajectory, FCI has consolidated its agenda, focused on defending local women's rights to land and natural resources, and on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The organization has developed institutional capacities to implement training, mentorship, and leadership development programs and to document and systematize community experiences and challenges. Additionally, FCI has committed to creating community networks and alliances, understanding that social transformation requires collective work and strengthening ties among women and communities.

FCI's main lines of work include training and mentoring women and community leaders, documenting local experiences and issues, and creating community networks and alliances to strengthen collective advocacy. The organization also develops training programs in entrepreneurial leadership and access to credit and spearheads initiatives to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence.

FCI's agenda covers several strategic areas:

- **Forest governance and sustainable management of natural resources:** FCI promotes women's active participation in the management and decision-making processes concerning forests and other natural resources. It works to ensure that women not only have access but also legal property rights over land, which involves influencing regulatory frameworks and community practices.

- **Land and tenure rights:** The organization promotes the recognition and protection of local communities' legal rights—especially those of women—to land and resources. This area is crucial in a context where agriculture and forest use are vital for family livelihoods, and where women often face legal and cultural barriers to exercising control over these assets.
- **Fight against sexual and gender-based violence:** FCI comprehensively addresses the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in rural communities. This includes awareness-raising activities, support for victims, and promoting safe and equitable environments for women and girls.
- **Capacity development and economic empowerment:** The organization develops training programs in entrepreneurial leadership, mentorship, and access to credit for rural women. These initiatives aim to strengthen women's economic autonomy and capacity to undertake and lead productive projects, primarily in the agricultural sector, which is the main source of income in the communities where they operate.

In terms of structure, FCI has evolved from a small group of women leaders into an organization with a board of directors, a professional management team (comprised of an executive director, a program director, and a financial manager), and a network of locally hired community mobilizers.

The board of directors is at the structure's apex, responsible for strategic oversight, key decision-making, and ensuring the institutional mission. This board supports the executive team's work and ensures transparency and accountability.

The management team consists of the executive director, program director, and financial manager. The executive director is primarily responsible for the organization's operational and strategic direction, institutional representation, and fundraising. The program director coordinates project planning, implementation, and monitoring, while the financial manager handles resource administration and financial reporting.

At the operational level, FCI has program coordinators and project leaders who oversee the execution of activities in various thematic areas, ensuring the quality and impact of interventions. These coordinators work closely with community mobilizers locally hired in the communities where projects are implemented. This strategy allows FCI to maintain a constant presence on the ground, strengthen local ownership of processes, and adapt actions to the specific realities of each context.

For specialized projects or those requiring technical knowledge, FCI engages external consultants who provide expertise in areas such as forest management, political advocacy, or gender-based violence response.

Budget and types of funding

FCI's funding model is heavily reliant on project-based funds. In fact, 99 percent of the funds the organization receives come from project funding, while only 1 percent accounts for flexible or institutional (core) funding. This situation means that virtually all funds are tied to specific projects with rigidly predefined activities and outcomes.

FCI has stated that the organization has never had access to flexible funding.[16]

Even though it proposes including funds for institutional strengthening or staff salaries, donors often reject it, insisting that personnel costs must be covered by activity lines and be limited to a small percentage (e.g., 25 percent) of the total budget, with the majority (75 percent) allocated to direct activities. This lack of flexibility restricts FCI's ability to adequately support its staff and respond to unforeseen needs in local communities, such

16 Excerpts, quotes, and testimonies in this section are from interviews conducted on May 15, 2025.

as financial support for women's livelihood activities or follow-up on gender-based violence cases.

FCI's main funding sources include bilateral donors, private/philanthropic foundations, and international NGOs.

Funding experience

FCI's funding model primarily relies on obtaining funds from international donors, international allies, and cooperation agencies that support projects related to forest governance, land rights, and gender equality in Liberia.

> **"The perceived 'lack of capacity' in local or women-led organizations is, therefore, not an internal failure, but a direct result of the design of the funding system that keeps us in a state of chronic institutional precariousness."**

Currently, the executive director serves as the focal person for fundraising and fund management. However, there is an intention to professionalize this area by hiring a resource mobilization officer who would take on fundraising responsibilities. This decision addresses the need to diversify funding sources and strengthen institutional sustainability, given that reliance on a single person for resource mobilization can pose a risk to project continuity. However, FCI's intention to professionalize fundraising clashes with the rigidity of some donor funding models. As noted throughout the interviews, *"donors often refuse to fund institutional strengthening or the hiring of key management staff, such as a fundraising team."*

This suggests that FCI's perceived lack of fundraising capacity is not an internal deficiency in planning or skill, but rather a direct result of a funding system that is unwilling to invest in the institutional capacity of its local partners.

Gender-related barriers

Over the years, FCI has faced significant challenges, especially concerning donors' lack of understanding regarding the gender perspective and the importance of supporting women-led initiatives. The main obstacle identified is that funding proposals tend to incorporate a generic line about gender but lack a deep analysis of how intersectional inequalities affect women in specific contexts or concrete mechanisms to ensure they truly benefit from projects. FCI describes it as *"a formal requirement, where calls are generalized and often only include a phrase indicating that gender must be considered."*

This superficiality translates into a trust and recognition gap with direct financial consequences. As pointed out, *"despite acknowledging the key role of women in forest governance, donors show a reluctance to mobilize sufficient funds for our work."*

An inherent tension is identified between FCI's holistic and transformative mission and the fragmented and rigid nature of project-based funding, which is the predominant mode of support the organization receives. FCI's mission, which encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions of rural women's lives, requires considerable flexibility to respond to emerging and complex needs that arise from fieldwork. However, current funding models often pigeonhole the organization into rigidly predefined activities, which limit its ability to achieve comprehensive impact. For example, as mentioned, *"we have encountered limitations in directly supporting women's livelihood interventions or in following up on gender-based violence cases, simply because it was not possible to contemplate the original design of the project, due to the donor's rigid format."*

Meanwhile, interviewees stated that *"organizations led by men access considerably larger amounts of funding, perpetuating structural inequalities in resource access."*

This dynamic forces FCI to adopt survival strategies that, while pragmatic, can compromise its autonomy. The organization often has to form consortia with international or male-led local NGOs to have a greater chance of accessing funding and positioning itself as a partner rather than the project leader.

In this way, as pointed out, *"by accepting a minor partner role in charge of the gender component, FCI runs the risk of seeing its transformative agenda diluted and perpetuating the perception that male organizations are the primary and most reliable managers of large funds."* This is a survival solution that can solidify a structural problem, undermining the ultimate goal of strengthening autonomous and fully funded women's leadership.

> **"The demand to present 'five years of audits' for a community organization is an example of a requirement that systemically favors large international NGOs over us as a local organization."**

The importance of institutional and long-term funding

The second major obstacle identified by the organization is the overwhelming dominance of project-based funding. All of the funds FCI receives are tied to specific projects with rigidly predefined activities and outcomes. The organization explicitly states, *"we have never had access to flexible or institutional (core) funding."*

This rigidity has devastating consequences for institutional health and programmatic effectiveness. First, it stifles sustainability and organizational development. Second, instead of being seen as an essential investment, personnel costs are treated as an expense to be minimized, with arbitrary caps (e.g., 25 percent for staff and 75 percent for activities) and the demand that salaries be justified within specific activity lines. This logic prevents FCI from investing in its own structure, such as hiring a fundraising team.

Thus, a vicious cycle of capacity and vulnerability is thus created. Donors demand high administrative and fiduciary capacity as a condition for granting funds, but simultaneously refuse to finance the development of that capacity.

"The perceived 'lack of capacity' in local or women-led organizations like FCI is, therefore, not an internal failure, but a direct result of the design of the funding system that keeps us in a state of chronic institutional precariousness."

The rigidity of project funding is clearly manifested in FCI's experience with a funded five-year project focused on sustainable forest governance. During implementation, FCI's work in the communities brought to light critical needs that, although directly related to women's well-being and empowerment, were not contemplated in the original project design.

On the one hand, opportunities arose to strengthen women's economic autonomy through agricultural cooperatives. *"These women, whose livelihood depends on the land, needed initial capital to launch their initiatives. However, the project budget did not allow for allocating funds for this purpose, limiting the intervention to theoretical training without the necessary financial support for practical application."* On the other hand, FCI's work also identified cases of sexual and gender-based violence that required a response and follow-up. Again, *"the funding structure did not include resources to address these situations, and we were left without the capacity to offer comprehensive support to victims."*

This example is paradigmatic because a project that's successful on its own terms (forest governance) can, at the same time, be inadequate for holistic, people-centered development. The rigidity of the funding prevented FCI from capitalizing on opportunities and responding to vulnerabilities that its own intervention had helped identify, thereby limiting its transformative impact.

Furthermore, the current funding model generates high fragility in local partners by prioritizing short-term projects and neglecting investment in institutional capacity. The situation described for FCI, where the critical fundraising function falls on one executive director, is a clear indicator of institutional risk. If this key individual is unable to continue, the entire organization faces an existential threat.

"This act of trust and adaptation, which transcends purely contractual logic, is the essence of an effective partnership."

By not providing core, flexible, and long-term funding, the international cooperation system is creating a cycle of dependency and vulnerability that contradicts the desired goal of fostering local ownership and leadership.

Excessive administrative demands

The third obstacle highlighted is the enormous administrative burden imposed by donors. As mentioned by FCI's management team, *"we have to handle multiple operational and strategic functions, and that creates difficulties in meeting demanding administrative and reporting requirements."* This burden consumes valuable time and resources that could be dedicated to the mission and acts as a barrier to entry into the funding system.

The obstacles begin even before the application. FCI reports that accessing calls for proposals is a challenge in itself, citing complex online platforms (like the European Union's PADOR system or UN Partner Portals), insufficient application deadlines, and information channels that don't reach local organizations on time.

Furthermore, eligibility criteria are often inadequate and exclusionary for grassroots organizations. *"The demand to present 'five years of audits' for a community organization is an example of a requirement that systemically favors large international NGOs over us as a local organization."*

Certain bilateral donors' accountability mechanisms are described as particularly inflexible, with very difficult and rigid templates and processes. This bureaucratic complexity reflects a conception of risk focused exclusively on the donor and their fear that funds will not be spent exactly as budgeted.

However, *"the true danger is not that FCI uses funds slightly differently than planned, but that the funding, due to its own rigidity, fails to achieve the desired development results, disempowers local actors, and becomes irrelevant to the context it aims to transform."*

Good practices

FCI has also experienced funding relationships that are highly effective. These good practices are based on trust, flexibility, and co-design.

The relationship with some international allies is illustrative. Despite initial rigidity, the project's duration (five years) and a relationship of trust allowed for constructive dialogue. Halfway through the project, FCI was able to successfully advocate for the inclusion of additional unplanned activities, such as the creation of a document that simplifies land rights laws for women in the communities. As noted in the interviews, *"this product, defined by local need and not by the donor, became a valuable tool for the entire consortium. This experience shows that long-term funding, combined with an openness to adaptation and flexibility, allows projects to evolve to be more effective."*

Furthermore, a collaboration with one of its donors exemplifies the power of co-design. The donor worked with FCI and other partners from the proposal development phase to ensure that gender considerations were a central axis and not a secondary, general issue.

"It was ensured that partner organizations worked directly with women in the communities, integrating the gender approach intentionally from the beginning. This contrasts sharply with the more common approach of adding gender to an already designed project."

Finally, the experience with a donor regarding personnel costs is a paradigmatic case of a relationship based on mutual learning. Following a field visit to Liberia, the donor's staff directly understood the challenges the FCI team faced, including the personal risks taken to reach remote communities. As a result, the donor revised their internal policy and informed FCI that they could now pay more attention to personnel costs as a form of motivation and retention.

"This act of trust and adaptation, which transcends purely contractual logic, is the essence of an effective partnership."

Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora

Identity, purpose, and agenda

Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora (Red MAAD) is a social movement. Its central purpose, synthesized in its 2021 theory of change, is to foster powerful leadership positioned to fight against patriarchy, racism, all forms of discrimination, multiple violences, and the vulnerability of

Afro-descendant women. Red MAAD is a transnational network that articulates the voices of 283 grassroots organizations and 567 individual members across 10 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The majority of member organizations are Black women's organizations, constituting 69.6 percent of the total, although there are also some mixed ones formed by Afro-descendant women and men. One notable aspect is the seniority of many of these organizations, with over 60 percent having more than 10 years of existence, some even since the 1980s. Most of them are legally constituted and have bank accounts. The large number of organizations and individual members and the trajectory and formality of many of the grassroots organizations reveal deep community roots and vastly accumulated experience in the Afro-descendant movement.

top: An Afro-descendant woman visits the Ipetí-Emberá community of Panama in the main Maloka of the Alto Bayano Collective Territory, Panama.
Photo by Tova Katzman for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023

bottom: Women gather to prepare food outside of Tebat Pulau, Sumatra, Indonesia.
Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

The network is dedicated to making visible the reality of discrimination and human rights violations faced by Afro-descendant women in socioeconomic, political, and cultural spheres through actions ranging from political advocacy to training and support. Red MAAD seeks to influence governmental and intergovernmental bodies for the formulation and implementation of public policies that recognize and respect ethnic, racial, and gender identities. It also fights for the fulfillment of international conventions and agreements that affirm the rights of Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin American, and diaspora women.

Among their main agenda is the fight against gender and racial violence, including disappearances and femicides. As network members point out, they have managed to change the understanding of violence with an intercultural, intersectional perspective, encompassing police violence, violence against human rights defenders, and developing care protocols and self-care practices. Interestingly, one interviewee noted: *"This is the easiest topic for them to secure funding for. Red MAAD's ability to obtain funds more easily for violence-related issues is a strategic adaptation we make to donor priorities."*[17]

In turn, the fight against structural and everyday racism is a central pillar of Red MAAD's agenda. However, this is a topic for which, as its Coordinator points out, *"there are no specific funds aimed at working on issues of racial discrimination and racial justice. The main barrier to funding is the absolute invisibility of structural racism that donors do not perceive."*

17 Excerpts, quotes, and testimonies in this section are from interviews conducted on May 7–8, 2025.

The network also addresses issues of poverty, social exclusion, and unequal access to rights in the territories. Despite the importance of these topics, *"funding for environmental and territorial issues is very difficult to secure on an ongoing basis, resulting in very dispersed initiatives."*

Red MAAD promotes the presence and leadership of Afro-descendant women in decision-making spaces. This includes timely participation in decision-making within the network itself, which has highly collective processes. It also focuses on political training for advocacy in international forums.

Key activities include training and capacity-building through its Almarí Coriolan Afro-feminist School, workshops, and events. Red MAAD also engages in advocacy and observation, highlighting its Observatory of Afro-descendant Women to monitor violence and racism, as well as political advocacy in national and international forums. Furthermore, it provides territorial support and accompaniment, including violence response programs and strengthening local organizations through resource mobilization. Complementarily, the network develops digital campaigns for collective action and narrative disputes, and implements self-care practices for its members, recognizing the importance of well-being in activism.

Organizational structure

Red MAAD operates with a governance structure established in its statutes, led by a Coordinating Committee. The committee, currently composed of nine individuals: two coordinators for Andean countries, two for the Central American isthmus, one for the Caribbean, one for the Southern Cone, one for the diaspora, and two for Brazil. Committee members meet once a month and its function is to direct the organization, operationalize the strategic plan, provide political guidance, and make decisions.

The network's major decisions are made in assembly, which reflects—as noted by all interviewees—a *"very horizontal, very collective, highly democratized decision-making"* work scheme. In the assembly, all organizations have an equal voice and vote, although for elections, one vote per country is assigned to level representation to ensure balance among countries with different numbers of member organizations.

This structure gives it invaluable legitimacy and territorial roots, though at times, as noted in the interviews, *"it clashes with the culture of donors, who often expect interlocutors with clear hierarchies and agile, centralized decision-making processes."*

The network is currently undergoing a particular moment in its legal, administrative, and fiscal structure. In 2024, its legal operating status in Nicaragua was revoked—an event described as an act of political persecution, highlighting an inherent risk in human rights defense work in the region[18]—which forced the organization into a forced relocation and to currently operate under the fiscal umbrella of a member organization in Panama.

In this situation of great instability and uncertainty, Red MAAD quickly found creative solutions, which involved relocating to Panama City, renting an office in the financial district, and forming a new administrative team. The decision to rent a furnished office in a financial district building in the City is a precautionary measure, as they cannot risk investing in buying and equipping their own office because *"we don't know when funding will be cut and we'll have to pack up and each go back to working from home."*

Although the network's legal status was transferred from Nicaragua to Panama, Red MAAD still maintains staff in Nicaragua.

As observed, Red MAAD's employment structure is mixed, combining volunteer work and contracted staff. The work of the members of the Coordinating Committee, which directs the organization, is voluntary and unpaid. Many of these activists have other paid jobs and dedicate only a percentage of their time to activism.

18 Excerpt from an interview conducted on May 7, 2025.

Budget and types of funding

The data show a significant reliance on project-based funding, which accounts for 80 percent of the organization's income, while institutional funding represents only 20 percent. The typical duration of grants ranges from 18 to 24 months.

In that regard, as observed and confirmed during interviews, *"the network practically lacks institutional support funds, depending exclusively on project-based funding. This funding modality, with an average duration of two years, generates considerable uncertainty and hinders the network's long-term sustainability."*

Thus, an apparent short-term financial stability coexists within the network with a widespread feeling of medium- and long-term uncertainty.

"*True sustainability is not simply a matter of having funds in the bank account. It is, fundamentally, a matter of predictability. The ability to plan strategically, to invest in long-term capacity development, to retain talent, and to take calculated risks depends on the certainty that the organization will continue to exist and have resources beyond the 18 or 24-month cycle of a project."*

On the other hand, it's important to understand the financial situation of the organizations that make up the network. The institutional weakness of many of them reveals the enormous gap between realities on the ground and the expectations of international donors. Data from an internal survey conducted by Red MAAD is telling: 61.9 percent of the organizations are primarily self-funded; 64 percent managed a total budget of less than US$5,000 in the last two years; and 37 percent do not have their own headquarters, operating from members' homes.

Funding experiences

Red MAAD obtains funding primarily through personal contacts and participation in calls shared by other organizations and networks. The general coordinator is the main person responsible for fundraising, and her work largely depends on personal connections.

Red MAAD's strong reliance on personal relationships and its general coordinator's network of contacts for fundraising, instead of institutionalized and diversified mechanisms, raises a red flag because, despite being effective currently, this method is not scalable nor sustainable and generates a high degree of instability and uncertainty: *"Most of my time is dedicated to seeking money rather than to project administration."* Along these lines, she identifies a key weakness as the difficulty for organizations to "sell their project" in the five minutes of attention a donor grants, which is why she emphasizes as a very important recommendation to help them develop the capacity to clearly express *"who they are, what they do, what they want to do, and what they are asking for."*

The lack of funding for the racial justice agenda

Throughout the investigation, it became very clear that the most profound and determining mismatch between international funding and Red MAAD's purpose doesn't lie in issues of administrative capacity or governance structure. Instead, the central gap is linked to what the network itself defines as *"the blindness of the donor ecosystem to structural racism, at least in Latin America."*

Testimonies from the network's leaders are forceful. The fiscal sponsor states that *"100 percent of the obstacle has to do with the issue of racism and discrimination for being Afro-descendant. The problem isn't so much being women, but being Black women."* This perspective is corroborated by others in the organization who identify the lack of funding for racial justice as the *"system's major deficit."*

The problem manifests as an absolute invisibility of structural racism on the part of donors. Most of these actors haven't incorporated racism as a cross-cutting analytical theme in their funding strategies. As a result, there are no funding lines specifically dedicated to racial justice, and *"it's not a priority for anyone."* The funding that

does exist, besides being scarce, is *"very far removed from the contexts, from the realities, from the territories, and from what transversal racism implies in the lives of Afro-descendant women."*

Afro-descendant woman works in a field, Colombia.
Photo by Darwin Torres for Proceso de Comunicades Negras (PCN), 2023.

Red MAAD's explicit purpose is to fight for racial and gender justice and to dismantle interconnected systems of oppression. However, the implicit purpose of available funding is, at best, the promotion of a generic and often deracialized gender equality. This disconnect forces the network into a position of great effort and constant translation and adaptation, where its central political agenda must be inserted into frameworks that were not designed to contain it. Thus, most of the funds Red MAAD manages to access are categorized under the generic label of gender equality. While this theme is central to the network, the generality of the framework forces the organization to constantly translate its agenda.

Topics as specific and crucial as violence against Black women, sexual and reproductive rights from an Afro-feminist perspective, or the fight against racism in justice systems must be adapted and framed within the broader and often decontextualized objectives of donors. In practice, no funds have been created with the explicit purpose of addressing the intersection of race and gender as their central focus.

The importance of institutional and long-term financing

The network's funding is concentrated almost exclusively on project-based funds, with remarkably short durations, averaging two years. This means the network lacks institutional or flexible funds, which would allow it to cover its operational costs, salaries, infrastructure, and capacity-building according to its own strategic priorities.

Red MAAD finances its central structure by harmonizing small percentages of indirect costs allowed in different projects.

As the team's experience shows, the salaries of key personnel come from different donors. One donor covers two people, another donor funds another group of staff, and another donor funds a portion of the salary costs of other staff. This fragmentation not only generates an enormous administrative burden for the accounting team but also institutionalizes a precariousness that negatively impacts long-term planning capacity and personal salaries.

Administrative demands and language barriers

The network's accounting team noted that *"the administrative burden varies drastically among donors."* For instance, Red MAAD's experience with a philanthropic donor is described as *"agile and straightforward, with friendly accountability processes."*

On the other hand, working with systems like those of the UN is described as a *"more tedious burden."* An accountant confirmed that processes with current donors are manageable, but admits that her team is relatively new to centralized management from Panama and has not yet faced the more complex reporting cycles of all ongoing projects.

Adding to this is the language barrier. As an accountant explained, *"a significant portion of the documentation, including accounting report formats, arrives in English, which requires the network to make an additional effort and allocate resources for translation."*

Good practices

Red MAAD's relationship with their long-term philanthropic donor was identified as a positive experience built on three key pillars:

1. **The value of dialogue and trust:** The interaction with this donor is not perceived as a supervisory and controlling relationship but as one of dialogue and accompaniment. Regular meetings are held to monitor progress and for the foundation to share its priorities, giving the network a clear overview of mutual expectations. This honest and transparent communication was the key factor that allowed both parties to navigate the complex crisis of the legal status cancellation in Nicaragua. Red MAAD proactively informed its donors of the risk, and instead of withdrawing, they responded with flexibility and offered recommendations for finding a solution, such as using a fiscal sponsor.
2. **The importance of representation:** The network's leadership explicitly highlighted the decisive factor of having a member of Afro-descendant heritage among the donor's staff. In this case, Red MADD had the fortune to interact with an Afro-descendant woman. Her familiarity with the organizational processes of Afro-descendant movements and her understanding of the intersection between gender and race greatly facilitated dialogue. This ensured that the project design was genuinely inclusive and sensitive to the context.
3. **Flexibility in management:** Although the funding granted by the donor was for a specific project, its management demonstrated remarkable flexibility. The network was allowed to make budget adjustments and carry over unspent balances from one year to the next with a simple consultation and confirmation process. This practice, which might seem minor, is an indicator of a relationship based on trust and oriented toward achieving results, rather than rigid bureaucratic compliance.

Participants dance during the opening dinner at the first-ever Indigenous and Local Community Women's Forum in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.
Photo by Victoire Douniama for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

7. Recommendations

Closing remarks

The data and analyses presented show that while the recognition and visibility of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women as key players in the fight against climate change and conservation are increasing, deep structural barriers persist. These barriers are especially prevalent in accessing and managing funding. The significant deficit in flexible, long-term funding, coupled with the rigidity of traditional donation mechanisms, limits the organizational sustainability and autonomy of these women and their movements. This situation perpetuates a cycle where women not only face challenges accessing resources but also struggle to strengthen internal capacities and transform power dynamics. This demonstrates that a lack of adequate investment in funding is not just an economic shortfall but an obstacle to gender and racial justice in the environmental sector.

Despite these systemic barriers, the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) organizations have shown a remarkable capacity for management and resilience that the upcoming Pledge should highlight and strengthen. The report shows that these organizations, with their broad representation in over 60 countries, operate with solid organizational structures and a diversity of agendas ranging from land rights to the fight against gender-based violence. Their ability to forge strategic alliances and develop innovative resource mobilization strategies, even with limited budgets and minimal dedicated fundraising staff, is a testament to their strength and leadership. The evidence from case studies demonstrates that when provided with institutional and flexible funding, these organizations not only meet their objectives but can also adapt to emerging community needs and respond more holistically to crises. Therefore, **the new Pledge must adopt**

an approach that celebrates and enhances these capacities by committing to invest directly in the institutional strengthening of women-led organizations and trusting their expertise to mobilize funds autonomously and strategically.

In addition, the data underscores the urgency of reconfiguring funding systems to truly respond to the priorities and rights-based agendas of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women. This means shifting from a logic of control to one of trust, with flexible, long-term, and co-designed funding mechanisms that recognize women's organizations as strategic partners and not just as implementers of predefined projects. In this context, **the Pledge represents a crucial opportunity to revolutionize how funds are allocated and managed so that they respond to the priorities and methods of women on the ground. Recognizing and enhancing their resource management capabilities, combined with a funding approach based on trust, flexibility, and sustainability, will ensure that relevant data and experiences don't get stuck in bureaucratic reports.** Instead, they will strengthen local movements with real and lasting impact. Scaling up funding with a community and rights-based perspective not only helps close historical gaps but also fosters women's political autonomy and resilience as leaders in climate action and conservation.

To achieve true gender equity in global funding, donors need to change practices that perpetuate a vicious cycle of underfunding women's organizations. This ultimately forces women into volunteer work and reproduces the idea that women are subjects of unpaid work. This is detrimental to women's efforts in tackling the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Recommendations

The experiences and challenges Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations in the Global South highlight the urgent need for a systemic shift in international funding practices. The following strategic and practical recommendations, aimed at donors, policymakers, and organizations, seek to foster a deeper and more sustainable impact by aligning funding with the realities and purposes of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's movements.

Redesigning funding mechanisms: Toward flexible, institutional, and long-term funding

The predominance of rigid, short-term project grants is the primary inhibitor of sustainability and responsiveness for organizations like those integrating WiGSA. To counter this, WiGSA members recommend:

- **Establish dedicated funding lines for women's organizations and define percentages for gender strategies in funding topics and grant-making structures:** This will help to close the gap in direct funding to women's organizations operating at the ground level and ensure that mixed organizations receiving funds are committed to dedicating part of the funding received to support their women's groups' activities.
- **Establish dedicated funds for institutional strengthening:** Create specific funding lines not tied to programmatic outcomes, but to the strengthening of the organization itself. This should cover essential operational costs (salaries, rent, services), capacity development (such as professionalizing fundraising or improving financial systems), and investment in staff well-being.
- **Prioritize medium and long-term funding:** Make three-to-five-year funding the norm rather than the exception. As demonstrated by the experiences of some of the organizations interviewed, this provides the necessary stability for strategic planning, talent retention, and building trusting relationships with communities.
- **Utilize and expand pooled funds:** These mechanisms, which gather contributions from multiple donors, can distribute resources more agilely and with lower transaction costs for local partners, allowing donors to share risks and reduce individual administrative burdens.

Transforming the relationship: From control to trust and strategic partnership

The current power dynamic, where the donor controls and the partner complies, must be replaced with a true partnership based on trust, mutual learning, and the co-creation of solutions.

- **Simplify application and reporting processes:** Reduce the bureaucratic burden by shortening forms, accepting proposals and reports in simpler formats and local languages, and exploring alternative methods such as oral reports or conversational field visits. The experiences presented by organizations with single-page proposals and conversational accountability are models to expand.
- **Implement "Reverse Calls for Proposals" models:** Instead of donors predefining priorities, this model invites organizations, like members of WiGSA, to present their strategic agendas and needs, shifting power dynamics and ensuring that funding responds genuinely to local priorities.
- **Invest in donors' capacity to listen and adapt:** Donor staff must have the time, resources, and incentives to deeply understand the context in which they work. This means funding regular field visits (like those described in the case studies), establishing anonymous feedback mechanisms from partners, and training staff in contextual analysis and active listening.
- **Improve visibility and networking:** Increase the visibility of women's work in communities, especially in areas such as natural resources, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation. This is crucial for attracting more resources and should be part of collaborative alliances between donors and organizations.
- **Maintain open and direct conversations with donors:** Participate in events and forums to raise awareness of organizations' problems and needs without fear of being penalized and excluded from funding opportunities.

Inclusion of intersectional and transformative gender approaches

The current approach to gender integration is insufficient and often superficial. A shift toward intentional and transformative investment that addresses the underlying root causes and structural barriers of gender inequality is needed. It is important to recognize that Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women elsewhere experience exclusion and discrimination based on their ethnic identities, origin, education, socioeconomic status, etc.

- **Co-design projects with women's organizations from the outset:** The practice of donors ensuring that gender considerations are a central axis from the proposal development phase must become the norm. Involving women's organizations from the idea's conception ensures that the theory of change and activities are genuinely transformative and aligned with their priorities.
- **Be intentional and specific in supporting gender work:** Donors should avoid generalized proposals and instead design programs with concrete mechanisms to ensure that women are real beneficiaries, with a deep analysis of how inequalities affect Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and local community women in specific contexts.
- **Establish direct funding for women's organizations:** Donors must commit to allocating a specific percentage of their funds directly to women-led organizations, especially those addressing the intersectionality of gender and race. This helps correct the structural inequality in access to resources, where male-led organizations often receive considerably larger amounts.
- **Advocate for a change in mindset:** To value women's work and provide adequate funding, recognizing that they often do volunteer work and accept small funds due to a lack of alternatives, as well as acknowledging that they can work on traditionally male topics like access to land and resources. Donors must broaden their perception of women's capabilities and the scope of their

work. This includes acknowledging and actively funding women's engagements in traditionally male-dominated areas, such as land rights. By doing so, donors can challenge existing biases and empower women across diverse sectors.

- **Establish a connection between funding for human rights, women's rights, and climate and conservation:** Gender-based and racial-based discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion interconnect and affect the positioning of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in the climate and conservation funding architecture. Achieving global climate change and conservation goals must go hand in hand with eliminating discriminatory patterns against women. Funders for human rights, women's rights, and climate and conservation actions should come together to address the intersectional factors affecting women's access to funding.

The urgency of funding racial justice for Afro-descendant women

Afro-descendant women's organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean have highlighted the alarming lack of specific funding for initiatives that address racial justice, discrimination, and the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, especially Afro-descendant women. This absence severely limits the impact and sustainability of their work, perpetuating historical and structural inequalities. An urgent change is essential to make racial justice visible and position it as a central priority in the agendas of donors in the region.

- **Recognize racial justice as an explicit priority and overcome the donor ecosystem's "blindness":** Racial justice must be recognized and funded as an explicit priority, not as an accessory or cross-cutting issue.
- **Co-design projects with Afro-descendant women's organizations from the outset:** It is fundamental that donors integrate Afro-descendant women's organizations from the project design phase. This ensures that proposals respond to communities' realities, priorities, and knowledge.

Reinventing impact measurement: From quantitative reporting to systemic change evaluation

Donors should adjust standardized reporting templates and work with partners to co-design systems that capture the substantive change that organizations themselves value.

- **Co-design monitoring and evaluation systems:** This involves incorporating qualitative indicators that measure transformations in trust, political participation, dominant narratives, and power relations at the family and community levels.
- **Adopt new methodologies:** Use and fund evaluation methodologies more suitable for capturing complex, non-linear, and emergent results, such as outcome mapping or most significant change storytelling.
- **Fund learning, not just reporting:** Grants should include specific resources for organizations to conduct their own reflection, learning, and strategic adaptation processes. "Reports" to donors must transform from compliance exercises into spaces for strategic dialogue about challenges and learnings.

Necessary investment in strengthening the local ecosystem

The strengthening of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations cannot depend solely on their internal capacity to adapt to a rigid system. Donors must invest in the support ecosystem that allows these organizations to thrive.

- **Create specific funds for capacity-building:** These funds should be managed by the organizations and networks themselves, funding their identified priorities, such as purchasing accounting software, training in strategic communications, legal support for formalizing legal status, and paying fair salaries for administrative and fundraising staff.
- **Address access barriers:** Modify exclusionary requirements such as the demand for counterpart funds or prior audits for women's organizations operating with minimal resources. Facilitate access

to information on funding opportunities, overcome language barriers, and address information asymmetry.

- **Strengthen international networks and coalitions:** Facilitating women's participation in international networks and coalitions is useful for obtaining information, participating in campaigns for women's rights, and accessing discussion opportunities at national, regional, and global levels.