



Formative Evaluation of the Partnership for Gender Equality



Prepared by the Evaluation Division (PRA)

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Acknowledgements

When our team embarked upon this evaluation, we had an ambition to build on our past experiences with conducting a feminist evaluation, and to push that approach even further. We wanted the evaluation itself to be an extension of the "Partnership for Gender Equality." We hope that this spirit of inclusion, participation and a shared commitment to learning is reflected in this report.

This evaluation benefited from the contributions of staff at Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund and its consortium partners, and from members of civil society in Canada and abroad. It was also greatly enriched by our extended team working in Colombia, Lebanon, Kenya and Nepal.

It is hard to accurately describe the moment in history we are living in, but the word "heavy" feels somewhat appropriate. Whether it has been conflicts, climate change and natural disasters, or assaults on human rights, the news we see each day makes it very easy to feel discouraged. Therefore, we owe the biggest "thank you" to the dozens of women's rights and feminist organizations from around the world that shared their time and their stories with us, either in person or online. You are why this program exists, and why it matters. And in the face of all the things that are going wrong in the world today, your courage to continue fighting for a better future gives us hope.

-The Evaluation Team

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Acronyms and symbols

In this report, **Partnership for Gender Equality (PGE)** refers to the partnership between Global Affairs Canada and the members of the Equality Fund Initiative consortium, formally governed by a contribution agreement. This includes the work that is undertaken jointly by Global Affairs Canada and the consortium members. **Equality Fund Initiative (EFI)** refers to the 3 consortium partners (the Equality Fund, Toronto Foundation and WUSC [World University Service of Canada]) and the programming they are responsible for. EFI also encompasses the sub-granting efforts of the African Women's Development Fund and other partner funds.

AWDF	African Women's Development Fund	KGAP	Partnerships for Gender Equality and Innovation Division (GAC)
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development	KSI	Education and Social Empowerment Division (GAC)
CFLI	Canada Fund for Local Initiatives	LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other sexual and gender identities. <i>*Variations of this acronym, such as LBQ or LBTIQ, are used in the report to refer to women-focused organizations</i>
EFI	Equality Fund Initiative	MGS	Gender Equality Division (GAC)
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom	OCIO	Outsourced chief investment officer
FGM	Female genital mutilation	ODA	Official development assistance
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy	OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
GAC	Global Affairs Canada	PGE	Partnership for Gender Equality
GAGGA	Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action	PRA	Evaluation Division (GAC)
GLI	Gender lens investing	SGD	Grants and Contributions Management Bureau (GAC)
IOA	Institutional and organizational assessment	WUSC	World University Service Canada
KFM	International Development Partnerships and Operations Branch (GAC)	WVL	Women's Voice and Leadership program

Executive summary

The Formative Evaluation of the Partnership for Gender Equality focused on the period from May 2018 to March 2023, examining the partnership between Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund consortium, and the programming delivered through the Equality Fund Initiative. The objectives of the evaluation were to examine the program's relevance, identify the early results, explore how it integrated feminist and locally led development principles, and highlight lessons learned for the department.

The evaluation found that the Partnership, and the programming it supported, was well aligned with Global Affairs Canada priorities and was highly relevant within the feminist funding ecosystem, injecting much-needed funds at a time when the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people were under threat. The flexible, multi-year core support extended to women's rights and feminist organizations was well-suited to their needs, though grantees felt that more investments were needed in convening and connecting partners.

The Partnership for Gender Equality and the Equality Fund Initiative reflected a conscious effort to shift power to women's rights and feminist organizations in the Global South. In many respects, the Partnership was a departure from a typical funder-implementer relationship, though performance measurement approaches remained more traditional. At a programming level, the Equality Fund Initiative offered a positive example of locally led development, shifting power and resources to self-led organizations representing diverse, structurally excluded communities that are often unable to access international funding.

The early results of the Equality Fund Initiative cut across multiple program areas and were generally positive. Poor market conditions impacted the early returns on gender-lens investment, though the fund has since rebounded. The fund mobilization and grant-making programs met or exceeded targets. The Equality Fund's growth as an organization has proceeded well amid challenging circumstances. Policy and partnerships efforts offered an encouraging example of integrated programming. The community-level results of the grant-making program were promising and as diverse as the organizations being supported. The lack of predetermined themes or outcomes was a strength of the program, but also posed challenges to achieving and communicating high-level, strategic results.

The Partnership for Gender Equality is an innovative platform for the department to leverage additional sources of funding in support of feminist programming, gender equality and human rights. However, it has had a limited impact on the department's overall approach to delivering international assistance. The department and the Equality Fund worked collaboratively to advance the cause of feminist funding, though disagreements over issues like reasonable capital preservation have proven challenging to navigate. Limited awareness of the program and its grantees was also a missed opportunity for Canada's missions in the Global South.

Summary of programmatic recommendations

1. Work with the Equality Fund to clarify key elements of the contribution agreement, including reasonable capital preservation as it pertains to long-term financial sustainability
2. Streamline and adapt the performance measurement requirements
3. Reassess the target and definition of external investor capital mobilization in the gender lens investment program
4. Support efforts to connect and convene GAC-funded women's rights organizations

Summary of corporate recommendations

5. Identify feminist programming innovations and good practices that can inform the department's approach to international assistance
6. Identify approaches to risk management used by the Equality Fund Initiative with its grantees that can inform how the department develops and manages partnerships

Program background



Photo credit: Red Umbrella Fund grantees, Ecuador

Background

Governance and institutional arrangements

At **Global Affairs Canada**, the Education and Social Empowerment Division (KSI), under the International Development Partnerships and Operations branch (KFM), is responsible for the Partnership for Gender Equality. The Gender Equality Division (MGS) also engages with the Equality Fund as the department's policy lead on women's rights organizations, and through the Global Alliance for Feminist Movements, a multi-stakeholder platform focused on mobilizing funding and support for women's rights and feminist movements.

There are 3 consortium signatories to the contribution agreement for the **Equality Fund Initiative**. The Equality Fund administers the grant-making program and is responsible for fund mobilization and providing gender-lens investment expertise and strategy. World University Service Canada (WUSC) provides capacity building and technical support to the grant-making program. The Toronto Foundation, which received the full \$300M contribution, acts as fiduciary partner. The Toronto Foundation is also responsible for the management of the investment fund, working with RockCreek, the outsourced chief investment officer. The African Women's Development Fund, though not a signatory, is a key strategic partner.

Program background

On May 25, 2018, the Minister of International Development called for the establishment of a “Partnership for Gender Equality,” an initiative that would take an innovative approach to addressing the funding shortfall for women's rights and feminist organizations in developing countries. Building on the announcement of the Women’s Voice and Leadership (WVL) Program in 2017, this new initiative was intended to further demonstrate Canada’s commitment to its then-new Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP).

At the Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver on June 2, 2019, the Minister announced that, following a call for proposals, the Equality Fund consortium had been chosen to establish this new partnership. A 15-year, \$300M¹ contribution agreement was signed in August 2019 with the Equality Fund (formerly MATCH International Women’s Fund), Toronto Foundation and World University Service Canada (WUSC) as signatories.

Program rationale and objectives

The Partnership for Gender Equality was intended to address the funding gap faced by women's rights and feminist organizations in developing countries. It was meant to provide a sustainable, predictable and flexible source of funding that would enable women's rights and feminist organizations to advance gender equality and empower women and girls. The program logic model can be found in [Annex 1](#).

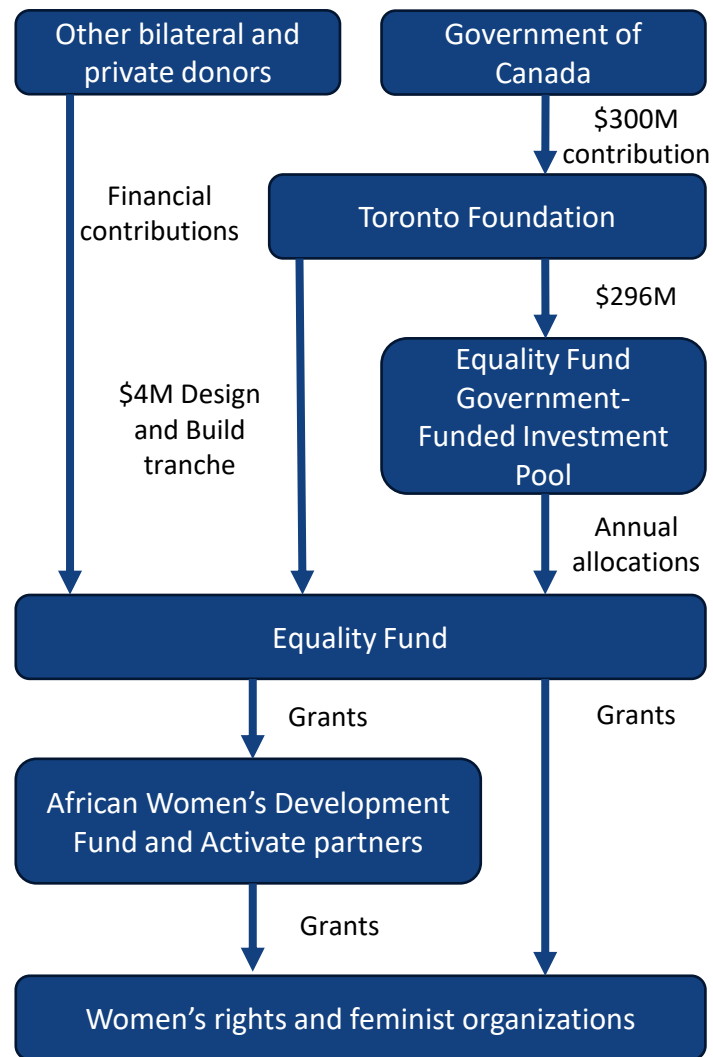
Both the Partnership for Gender Equality (PGE) and the WVL program were meant to address the funding gap for women’s rights and feminist organizations. However, despite having similar goals, WVL and the PGE used very different models. Rather than relying exclusively on official development assistance (ODA), as with the WVL program, the PGE brings together different funding sources including contributions from philanthropic foundations, individual donors and other bilateral donors. Global Affairs Canada's full \$300M commitment was transferred to the Equality Fund Initiative consortium at the outset of the initiative. Most of this funding served as an endowment-style fund that was meant to provide a long-term, sustainable source of revenue to fuel grant-making activities in perpetuity.

The Partnership for Gender Equality was also intended to have a catalytic role in shifting power and resources from different sources to women, girls and trans people. The model allowed the PGE to engage with diverse actors within the feminist funding ecosystem. This included the impact investment community, private philanthropic foundations, the global network of women’s funds, other bilateral donors, and feminist advocacy networks. An overview of the different elements of the feminist funding ecosystem is provided in [Annex 2](#).

¹ All figures in CAD unless otherwise stated.

Background

Flow of funds



Program areas

The contribution agreement for the initiative featured 4 program areas:

- **Design and build:** from the original \$300M contribution, \$4M was allocated to start-up costs over the first 5 years of the Partnership. The Equality Fund contributed a further \$1M. Dubbed the "design and build" phase, the goal of this program area was to expand and develop the newly created Equality Fund into a leading feminist fund capable of delivering its multiple programming streams.
- **Fund mobilization:** the fund mobilization program area was focused on attracting additional sources of funding from traditional and non-traditional donors, including individuals, foundations and governments.
- **Gender-lens investment:** the gender-lens investment (GLI) program area was intended to generate revenues to sustain the Equality Fund's grant-making operations, with \$296M of the original \$300M being used as seed capital for an endowment-style fund that is invested with an 100% gender lens. In addition to the financial returns, the GLI program sought to use its investments to increase access to financial capital for women, girls and trans people; scale products and services which support women; and address structural inequalities in access to finance. The program also sought to build greater awareness of GLI as an investment approach.
- **Global grant-making:** the primary goal of the Equality Fund Initiative was to move more money into the hands of women's rights and feminist organizations. The Equality Fund provided different types of flexible grants (see next page) which can be used for programming or organizational development as well as ongoing accompaniment and capacity development.

While not officially named as a program area in the contribution agreement, the Equality Fund Initiative's **policy and partnerships** work focused on influencing the funding ecosystem to shift power and move more money into the hands of feminist organizations. This included securing partnerships with other bilateral donors, engaging in multilateral cooperation efforts and advocating for feminist foreign policy decisions.

Investment and fund mobilization model

The Equality Fund Initiative is intended to provide \$300M in grants to women's rights organizations over a 15-year period. The model is based on realizing financial returns from the \$296M gender-lens investment fund, and receiving contributions from charitable giving and bilateral donors (target of \$155M over 15 years). Each year, an allocation from the investment fund would be transferred to cover grants and operating costs. The Toronto Foundation, as fiduciary partner, received the full contribution from Global Affairs Canada, and the investment program is delivered with the support of RockCreek, an investment firm, serving as the outsourced chief investment officer (OCIO).

Background: Overview of the global grant-making program

Three of the Equality Fund’s grant-making streams were active during the evaluation period. The final stream, Connect, is intended to support consortia and networks and to foster stronger connections within the feminist movement. Connect is not yet active, but a soft launch is planned for Year 4 of implementation in 2023/24. A map of where grants were provided is available in [Annex 3](#).

	Catalyze	Activate	Prepare, Respond and Care
Status	Active since 2019	Active since 2020	Active since 2022
Purpose	Provide core, flexible funding directly to women’s rights and feminist organizations in the Global South	Provide funding to women’s rights and feminist funds, of which 60-70% is on-granted to other organizations	Provide short-term rapid, responsive funding to women’s rights and feminist organizations in crisis settings
Cumulative disbursements as of March 2023	\$10.2M through 91 grants	\$21.2M through 24 grants; Activate partners have provided 501 on-grants (including AWDF's Catalyze grants)	\$3.7M through 18 grants
Average grant value	Between \$10K and \$100K per year	\$350K per year	\$260K per grant
Capacity-building approach	The Equality Fund hosted several online webinars on topics of interest. The cross-cutting approach to capacity building for all grantees is called Grants+. Partners received support from the Equality Fund to address self-identified priorities like institutional strengthening, resource mobilization and networking.		
Selection process	The initial recipients were "legacy" grantees from MATCH International Women’s Fund. An open call for proposals was launched in 2020; 2 cohorts of grantees were selected from this call by a global advisory panel. Catalyze grants in Africa were delivered by the African Women's Development Fund through calls for proposals twice per year.	Non-competitive grant-making process where eligible feminist funds were identified by the Equality Fund and invited to submit a proposal. Candidates were invited to "step up" to receive a grant right away, or to "step back" and accept one later, leaving funds for those with more urgent needs.	Initial pilot was launched with existing partners in response to Afghanistan and Ukraine crises. Subsequent grantees were selected from among existing Catalyze and Activate grant recipients, in addition to 4 new partners identified by the Equality Fund.
Regional breakdown of active partners	Africa (2), Asia/Pacific (24), Caribbean (5), Latin America (19), Eastern Europe (11), Middle East (8)	Africa (7), Asia/Pacific (4), Latin America (5), Europe (3), Global/regional (5)	Kenya drought (1), Lebanon crisis (3), Pakistan floods (1), Türkiye-Syria earthquake (6), Ukraine crisis (5)

Evaluation scope and methodology



Photo credit: Hamro Palo (Our Turn), Nepal

Evaluation scope and objectives

Evaluation scope

This evaluation covered the Partnership for Gender Equality from its development starting in 2018, through to implementation up until March 2023. It addressed i) the structure and function of the Partnership; ii) the Equality Fund Initiative programming across the 4 official program areas (GLI, grant-making, philanthropy, design and build) plus the unofficial “policy and partnerships program area,”; and iii) departmental systems, processes and policies as they pertain to the PGE.

The scope was determined collaboratively and with a recognition that other assessment exercises focused on the Equality Fund were also underway. Therefore, this evaluation **did not address**:

- the financial capacity of the Equality Fund, as this was addressed through a Financial Capacity Building Activity
- the long-term financial sustainability of the Equality Fund Initiative, as it was agreed that this would be better covered by a specialized assessment
- the Women’s Voice and Leadership – Caribbean Region project, as this was covered by the recent program evaluation as a case study

Evaluation purpose and objectives

This formative evaluation was intended to generate insights, findings, conclusions and recommendations to support strategic decision-making by GAC and EFI partners. It was also meant to facilitate internal and mutual learning among Partnership members. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. examine the **relevance** of the Partnership for Gender Equality for women's rights and feminist organizations and the broader feminist funding ecosystem
2. identify the **early results**, including unintended results, and lessons learned from the different program areas
3. explore the adoption of **feminist and locally led development principles** in the governance, ways of working, relationships and programming of the Partnership for Gender Equality
4. highlight the **lessons learned from establishing and providing ongoing support** to the Partnership for Gender Equality, and how this can expand the evidence base for innovative feminist programming at GAC

Evaluation approach

This evaluation applied a feminist approach, building on the lessons learned from the Women’s Voice and Leadership Formative Evaluation. More detail on the feminist evaluation approach is available in [Annex 4](#). The evaluation also intentionally integrated frameworks developed for past evaluations to enhance the comparability of results and to continue building an evidence base on feminist programming, locally led development, and the sustainability of women’s rights organizations. See [Annexes 5, 6 and 7](#), respectively.

The evaluation **triangulated findings** across different sources, methods and investigators, and employed a participatory sense-making approach to enhance the validity of the evaluation findings. This approach contributed to the credibility of the evaluation approach while ensuring that the report reflects multiple perspectives and voices.

The evaluation was informed by the **utilization-focused evaluation** approach, with an emphasis on generating findings, lessons and recommendations that are relevant to stakeholders at GAC, the Equality Fund consortium and the wider feminist movement. The Evaluation Knowledge Translation Unit supported the evaluation team to iteratively develop a learning and influence plan that will guide knowledge-sharing efforts. The evaluation was conducted by a team of Global Affairs Canada evaluators, supported by local evaluators with feminist evaluation expertise in Colombia, Kenya, Lebanon and Nepal (see [Annex 8](#)).

Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions and sub-questions were developed through a participatory scoping and design process. They were developed based upon the priorities identified by stakeholders during the scoping phase, and align with the Equality Fund’s integrated feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy. The evaluation adopted an intersectional Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach. A more detailed version of this matrix is available in [Annex 9](#).

Evaluation Issue	OECD-DAC Criteria	Questions	Sub-issues
Relevance of the Partnership for Gender Equality	Relevance	1. To what extent and in what ways has the Partnership for Gender Equality Equality Fund Initiative responded to the needs of diverse women's rights and feminist organizations and the global feminist funding ecosystem?	1.1 Relevance to the needs of the feminist funding ecosystem (Finding 1) 1.2 Alignment with GAC policy objectives (Finding 1) 1.3 Relevance to the needs of grantee women's rights and feminist organizations (Findings 2 and 3)
Integrating intersectional feminist principles and locally led development	Relevance and effectiveness	2. To what extent and how has the Partnership for Gender Equality/Equality Fund Initiative integrated feminist principles and good practices for locally led development in its ways of working, relationships and programming?	2.1 Feminist principles in PGE model, governance structures and ways of working (Finding 5) 2.2 Shifting power among/between institutions (Finding 4) 2.3 Mutual exchange and learning (Finding 25) 2.4 Good practices for feminist programming (Findings 4 and 5 ; Annex 5) 2.5 Good practices for locally led development (Finding 6 , Annex 6) 2.6 Integrating intersectionality (Findings 7 and 8)
Early results and lessons learned from implementation	Effectiveness and coherence	3. What has been the early progress toward results, and lessons learned, from the different program areas of the Equality Fund Initiative?	3.1 Early progress towards results of the 5 program areas (Findings 9 to 23) 3.2 Results for marginalized communities (Stories of Change) 3.3 Factors affecting progress towards results (Findings 9 to 23) 3.4 Lessons learned from early stages of implementation (Findings 9 to 23) 3.5 Results of advocacy and influence efforts (Finding 15) 3.6 How well do program areas work together (Finding 15) 3.7 Unintended results (Finding 18)
Establishing and supporting the PGE	Effectiveness and efficiency	4. What has GAC learned from establishing and providing ongoing support to the Partnership for Gender Equality?	4.1 Innovative elements of the PGE model (Finding 24) 4.2 Factors for success/barriers (Findings 24 to 27) 4.3 Changes or innovations to GAC tools, systems, processes (Finding 25) 4.4 Departmental capacity and expertise (Finding 26)

Methodology

Whole-of-initiative document review and literature review

The evaluation included a review at the macro level of relevant GAC and EFI documents, including:

- GAC reports, policy and program documents (n = 24)
- Equality Fund reports, policy and program documents (n = 34)
- external reports and literature related to the feminist funding ecosystem (n = 9)

Additional literature reviews were also conducted for each of the thematic case studies.

Grant-making portfolio review

The evaluation integrated a review of the grant-making portfolio. This included a review of financial data to identify trends in geographic distribution, thematic priorities and disbursements.

The evaluation also included a more targeted review of grantee reports (n = 71). This was based on a purposive sample of grantees corresponding to the thematic case studies and country-level deep dives. Reports were reviewed using NVivo12 software, based on indicators set out in the evaluation matrix.

Key informant interviews

N = 71 people (59 women and 12 men)

Through a combination of virtual and in-person meetings, the evaluation team conducted 52 semi-structured individual and small group interviews with a sample of:

- current and former GAC staff and executives (n = 26 people)
- staff from the Equality Fund and consortium partners (n = 29 people)
- representatives of other bilateral donors (n = 3 people)
- thematic and civil society experts (n = 10 people)
- other government departments (n = 3 people)

Thematic case studies

N = 50 people (46 women, 3 men and 1 non-binary)

The evaluation included case studies on 3 themes identified jointly during the scoping and design phase: human rights for LGBTQI+ people, environmental justice and feminist responses to crises.

The case studies were informed by consultations with GAC, the Equality Fund and other civil society stakeholders. The data collection consisted of 36 remote interviews with grantees and other stakeholders (LGBTQI+ rights = 17, environmental justice = 12, feminist responses to crises = 7) in addition to in-person interviews during visits to the 4 case study countries.

Country-level deep dives

N = 600 people (512 women, 62 men, 20 non-binary)

Four countries were identified as case studies for in-person data collection: Colombia, Kenya, Lebanon and Nepal. While the Equality Fund's programming is not based on geographic strategies, these countries featured a critical mass of direct and sub-grantees from multiple grant-making streams and represented diverse regions and contexts.

The case studies were co-led by locally recruited evaluators, from each of the countries, who exhibited a strong commitment to participatory feminist evaluation. The case study approach was developed collaboratively with the program stakeholders in each country. Data collection consisted of participatory methods including interviews, workshops, community visits, and the gathering of photos and videos. Participants included GAC mission staff, grantees, other civil society organizations, bilateral donors and local government officials. The case studies included:

Colombia: 44 interviews and focus groups with 198 people (190 women, 5 men and 3 non-binary)

Kenya: 35 interviews and focus groups with 144 people (109 women, 21 men, 8 with other gender identities)

Lebanon: 16 interviews and focus groups with 62 people (57 women, 5 men)

Nepal: 42 interviews and focus groups with 196 people (156 women, 31 men, 9 non-binary)

Evaluation limitations and mitigation measures

Limitations



Multitude of concurrent monitoring, evaluation and learning activities

This formative evaluation overlapped with discussions related to the proposed transfer of authorities from WUSC and the Toronto Foundation to the Equality Fund, which raised concerns about duplicating efforts through multiple exercises. For example, the second financial capacity building activity took place at the same time as the evaluation. There were also concerns that case studies would create excessive burden on grantee organizations with limited capacity to participate, and who were already carrying out their own monitoring and reporting processes.

Challenge of evaluating and summarizing results from multiple program areas

The Equality Fund Initiative itself encompassed multiple program areas, each with their own complexities. A full, in-depth assessment of each program area would have proven challenging and time-consuming. No single framework could be used to assess the results of each program area. While there was an extensive performance measurement framework for the grant-making program, other programs had less detailed results frameworks, and in the case of design and build, there were no indicators for measuring success.

Challenge of assessing and summarizing results of the grant-making program

The grant-making program supported women's rights and feminist organizations working on diverse interventions in over 80 countries. The grant-making program was intended to contribute to building organizations' capacity, as well as enable results that advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The Equality Fund Initiative intentionally did not impose overarching strategic objectives or thematic pillars on its grantees. The diverse types of programming and lack of overarching program goals made it challenging to identify trends and adequately summarize results within the limited scope of this report.



Mitigation measures

Collaborative approach to data collection and clearly defined scope

The scope of the evaluation was determined with key stakeholders to avoid the risk of duplication and to target issues of greatest value. The evaluation team engaged proactively with the Equality Fund, GAC's Education and Social Empowerment Division (KSI) and the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to avoid overburdening grantees, and involved grantees in the planning through a co-design process. Rather than planning separate monitoring activities, KSI staff joined the data collection missions to Colombia and Nepal, and the Equality Fund joined in Colombia.

Drawing on existing frameworks where possible and developing additional frameworks where it was not

Results frameworks were developed for each of the program areas. These drew on existing data sources, and identified areas where additional data would need to be collected. The level of detail for data collection varied for each program area, considering feasibility and the interests of evaluation stakeholders.

Developing case studies to identify and communicate results

Given the complexity and importance of the grant-making program, a series of case studies was developed. These case studies provided a framework by which to identify trends in results within a given unit of analysis. Three thematic case studies were identified that cut across different program areas and encompassed grantees around the world, in addition to 4 country case studies. The evaluation team leveraged the Equality Fund's change matrix as a framework for organizing gender equality and women's empowerment results, and drew on frameworks developed for past evaluations to assess results related to organizational capacity strengthening.

Findings: Relevance of the Partnership for Gender Equality

Relevance

Photo credit: Association des femmes des medias, Democratic Republic of Congo



Relevance

The global gender backlash

In March 2023, UN Secretary General António Guterres said that gender equality is “vanishing before our eyes.”ⁱ The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and conflict have stalled progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and eroded past gains for women and girls.ⁱⁱ

The rights of women and LGBTQI+ people have increasingly been threatened by a concerted “gender backlash.” According to the United Nations, “...in the 2010s trans-national movements organized around fighting ‘gender ideology,’ which sees gender as a tool of ‘an ideological colonization’ that aims to destroy the traditional family and family values...”ⁱⁱⁱ These movements are supported by a sophisticated network of state and non-state actors.^{iv} It is also well-resourced: from 2013 to 2017, the “anti-gender” movement received over US\$3.7B in funding—more than triple the funding for LGBTQI+ groups globally.^v The backlash has manifested itself in legislation targeting LGBTQI+ people, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and in rollbacks of sexual and reproductive rights globally.

ⁱ “Gender equality is ‘300 years away,’ U.N. chief warns.” (2023). The Washington Post. [Link](#).

ⁱⁱ “The Gender Snapshot 2023.” (2023). UN Women. [Link](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ “Gender equality and gender backlash.” (2020). UN Human Rights. [Link](#).

^{iv} “Tip of the Iceberg.” (2021). European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. [Link](#).

^v “Meet the Moment.” (2020). Global Philanthropy Project. [Link](#).

1. The Partnership for Gender Equality responded to the funding gap for women's rights and feminist organizations in the Global South and was well-aligned with departmental priorities.

In 2018, it was estimated that only 1% of the global sum of gender-focused ODA went directly to women's rights and feminist organizations.¹ While in subsequent years the total volume of funding dedicated to gender equality has increased, bilateral ODA to women's rights organizations and movements actually fell, from US\$581M in 2018-19 to US\$574M in 2020-21.²

Despite the important role they played in advancing gender equality, women's rights and feminist organizations typically operated with limited budgets. Of the nearly 4,000 women's rights and feminist organizations registered with the Global Fund for Women, nearly half operated with a budget of less than \$30K a year.³ The funding shortfall was particularly acute for organizations representing diverse or structurally excluded communities, such as sex workers, the LGBTQI+ community, youth, and refugees. The median budget for LBQ groups in 2017 was less than US\$12,000; one third of them had never received external funding.⁴ Many grassroots women's rights and feminist organizations are not legally registered, further limiting their ability to access international funding.

The Partnership for Gender Equality was an important injection of resources at a time when funding for women's rights organizations had stagnated. It also came at a time when the challenges facing women's rights and feminist organizations were multiplying, including climate disasters, conflict and the effects of the global gender backlash (see sidebar). These needs continued to grow; in 2022-23, Activate grantees were only able to fund less than half of their eligible applications—an indication of how many needs remain unmet.

The PGE was the second flagship initiative launched under the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), following Women's Voice and Leadership. It reiterated the commitment to shifting more resources to women's rights organizations, recognizing their catalytic role in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity, particularly in the Global South. The Partnership also reflected the emerging priority of locally led development, offering a long-term, sustainable vehicle for supporting women's rights organizations in the Global South.

The inclusion of gender-lens investment and philanthropy components reflected the department's priorities for seeking out new, innovative partnerships and leveraging additional sources of funding beyond ODA, echoing the Addis Ababa Agenda on Financing for Development. The Partnership for Gender Equality was launched in 2019, the same year that GAC launched the International Assistance Innovation Program and the Sovereign Loans Program.

² “Aid Focused on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.” (2020). OECD-DAC. [Link](#).

³ “Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment.” (2023). OECD. [Link](#).

⁴ “Vibrant Yet Underresourced.” (2020). Mama Cash and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. [Link](#).

⁵ “Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing?” (2021). AWID. [Link](#).

Relevance to the needs of women's rights and feminist organizations

2. The support provided through the Equality Fund Initiative responded well to the needs of women's rights and feminist organizations in the Global South, offering the flexibility and stability organizations needed to pursue their work.

The international assistance that does reach women’s rights and feminist organizations tends to be short-term and project-based. Grantee organizations were critical of how these project-based funding opportunities offered little space for local perspectives and were primarily shaped by donor priorities. There was also limited flexibility to adapt project activities to respond to emerging needs or priorities. This restrictive approach reflected a hierarchical donor-recipient dynamic rather than a genuine partnership. In contrast, women's rights and feminist organizations reported that the support they received through the Equality Fund Initiative responded well to their organizational needs and allowed them to focus more of their efforts on achieving positive change in their communities. The approach reflected a spirit of partnership and respect for local perspectives. The Equality Fund Initiative effectively addressed the following priorities identified by women's rights and feminist organizations:

Most important needs for women’s rights and feminist organizations	Support offered by the Equality Fund Initiative
Feminist partnerships	Grantee organizations emphasized the value of feminist partnerships grounded in more equitable engagements between funder and grantee. Partners described their relationship with the Equality Fund, and with Activate partners, as being based on trust, respect and care. Grantees appreciated the timely and personalized communication they received and how the monitoring and reporting processes focused on reflection and support rather than exclusively on accountability. Grantees emphasized that this type of partnership is relatively rare among more traditional donors.
Core funding	Equality Fund Initiative grants could be used for core organizational expenses. This allowed grantees to adequately pay their staff and invest in organizational needs, like IT systems or office space. It also allowed organizations to invest in their own capacity and reduced the need to chase project-based funding. Core expenses were rarely covered by more traditional/project-based types of funding.
Flexibility	Equality Fund grants were "theme-agnostic," allowing flexibility to grantees to determine their own priorities rather than pursuing those identified by the donor. In addition, Equality Fund grants could be used to respond to emerging needs and priorities; it was not onerous for grantees to adapt their plans. This flexibility allowed grantees to respond to emerging crises, even outside of the dedicated crisis funding stream.
Multi-year support	The Equality Fund was recently able to extend multi-year grants to its Catalyze and Activate grantees. This provided a sense of stability and financial security, especially at a time of high inflation in many countries. “Multi-year” still fell short of being "long-term," and not all Activate partners provided multi-year grants. Multi-year commitments to existing partners also implied a trade-off, as the Equality Fund had limited flexibility to extend grants to new recipients. However, grantees who did receive multi-year grants had the stability to better plan their activities, maintain staffing levels, and pursue organizational growth.

Relevance to the needs of women's rights and feminist organizations

3. Grantees expressed interest in a more systematic approach to networking, capacity building and emphasizing the importance of investing in self-care and wellbeing.

While the design of the Equality Fund Initiative's grant-making program responded well to the priorities of women's rights and feminist organizations, there were some aspects where grantees identified a desire for additional support, as described below. The most notable gap was networking opportunities. A dedicated grant-making stream called Connect will be piloted in the coming years; however, in the absence of this stream, grantees felt there were few opportunities to interact with other funded organizations in their own country, or in other regions. It is worth noting that this was also a major gap identified during the Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation and will be a priority for the next round of funding.

Most important needs for women's rights and feminist organizations	Support offered by the Equality Fund Initiative
Networking opportunities	Grantees expressed a strong desire to connect with others in their own country, region or other parts of the world who share common interests and struggles. This was especially critical at a time when they were facing systematic assaults on the rights of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people. As a global fund with an intentional approach of not having countries of focus, the Equality Fund tended to have few (e.g. fewer than 3) direct grantees in a given country, aside from a few "critical-mass" countries like Lebanon. This made convening activities more challenging, especially with the Connect stream not yet active.
Capacity building	The Equality Fund's Grants+ capacity-building approach allowed for on-demand support to grantees based on their stated needs. Activate partners typically offered close accompaniment to their grantees, especially in terms of finance and administrative capacity building. Under Grants+, the Equality Fund worked with partners to address self-identified priorities like institutional strengthening or resource mobilization. Most of the Grants+ support consisted of general support such as check-ins and assistance with reporting. Most grantees appreciated the approach to capacity building, though some called for more dedicated or structured training opportunities. They also suggested that exchanges among grantees could also be a form of capacity building that would leverage local knowledge.
Investing in people	The Equality Fund's flexible core grants could be invested in expenses related to staff wellbeing and self-care. Several grantees highlighted how they have used this support to pay for counselling services, team retreats or employment benefits for staff. While this flexibility was available, the overwhelming scale of needs facing grantees required them to prioritize limited resources. This meant that self-care could sometimes be deemed less critical. Several grantees called for greater emphasis on self-care in the grant-making program.

Findings: Integrating intersectional feminist principles and locally led development

Relevance and effectiveness

Photo credit: Equal Ground, Sri Lanka



Integrating feminist principles

Feminist understandings of power

This formative evaluation was designed to offer insights into one of the learning questions from the Equality Fund's monitoring, evaluation and learning strategy, namely, "How are we shifting power across all 3 pillars our work?"

JASS, a leading feminist organization, describes power as being dynamic and relational. Power is a component of any relationship and is not inherently good or bad. Power can manifest itself explicitly in the rules and systems that govern our work, but it can also take the form of internalized beliefs and social norms.^{vi}

Power is a major aspect of the ongoing discussions around feminist and locally led development. However, some stakeholders expressed critical views, arguing that the very idea of "shifting power" was embedded in a colonial understanding of power residing solely in the Global North. The Equality Fund's website states that:

"...shifting power is about much more than what we fund. It demands that we examine *how* we resource movements, and how we can disrupt the colonial and patriarchal practices that continue to be so deeply entrenched in our field."^{vii}

ⁱ"Big Ideas: Power." Just Associates. [Link](#).

^{vii}"Shifting Power to Catalyze Movements: Our Inclusive Grantmaking Journey." Equality Fund. [Link](#).

4. The Partnership for Gender Equality was a significant shift away from traditional donor-implementer dynamics, with the exception of reporting and performance measurement.

The PGE reflected Global Affairs Canada's aspirations as a feminist donor and has been a significant departure from the department's usual ways of working, embodying many good practices for feminist programming (see [Annex 5](#)). Putting \$300M in upfront funding in the hands of a women's fund was a strong signal to the feminist ecosystem of the value of this initiative and the willingness to shift power.

The relationship between the Equality Fund and Global Affairs Canada reflected a willingness to work together and advance common goals. This was particularly evident in joint efforts at resource mobilization and advocacy within the feminist funding ecosystem (see pages [25](#) and [27](#)).

Some elements of the relationship remained more traditional. The department's risk appetite was a source of internal friction as the Partnership was being formed. Reporting practices also followed standard approaches. While key performance indicators were introduced as an innovative element, the Equality Fund was still expected to report annually on an extensive performance measurement framework. While reporting timelines were adapted, the framework followed a typical GAC model and program stakeholders agreed that it was cumbersome, time-consuming to monitor and not fully aligned with the program's information needs.

5. The Equality Fund Initiative demonstrated a clear commitment to shifting power in favour of feminist activists from the Global South in both its design and its implementation.

The Equality Fund Initiative demonstrated very good alignment with feminist principles in both its design and implementation (see [Annex 5](#)). The voices of feminist leaders, including those from the Global South, have been prominent in the Equality Fund Initiative from the design phase onwards. After the announcement of the PGE, a series of consultations was launched in partnership with the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) that engaged over 1,000 activists in 66 countries.

In the grant-making program, the Equality Fund has experimented with different approaches to shifting power. For example, in 2020-21, the Equality Fund called upon its global advisory panel of feminist leaders from the Global South to select the final cohort of Catalyze grantees from a list of eligible applicants.

Navigating questions of power has been particularly challenging for the gender-lens investment program. The concept of gender-lens investment has attracted criticism from feminist organizations, who argue that it co-opts feminist language and diverts resources from already underfunded organizations.⁶ To grapple with these critical views, the Equality Fund has assembled an Investment Advisory Council that includes investment experts from the Global South and feminist activists.

⁶"Gender Impact Investing and the Rise of False Solutions: An Analysis for Feminist Movements." (2023). AWID. [Link](#).

Locally led development

Localization at Global Affairs Canada

While not a new concept, locally led development has received increasing attention from bilateral donors in recent years. While there is no universally accepted definition of localization, Global Affairs Canada's internal working definition is: "Shifting decision-making, resources, power, capacity and project management to local partners, including national and subnational governments, and/or national and local CSOs."

At the 2022 Effective Development Cooperation Summit, Canada and 14 other bilateral donors endorsed a statement in support of locally led development. With this statement, Canada committed to shifting and sharing power to ensure local ownership; to working to channel high-quality funding as directly as possible to local actors; and to publicly advocating for locally led development approaches.

Two recent evaluations, the Evaluation of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) and the Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation, piloted a framework for assessing locally led development, that has also been applied to this evaluation. A table showing the alignment of the Partnership for Gender Equality with this framework can be found in [Annex 6](#).

6. The Equality Fund Initiative's grant-making model reflected many good practices for locally led development.

Equality Fund Initiative grants go to local organizations in ODA-eligible countries, either directly through the Equality Fund or through their Activate partners. The Equality Fund's Catalyze and Activate grant streams do not require recipients to work on specific themes. Catalyze grants are not tied to a specific set of activities, and grantees have the freedom to allocate some, or all, of their grant towards core expenses.

This model provided a powerful example of locally led development by allowing women's rights and feminist organizations to set their own priorities, invest in their organizational capacity, and pursue their missions as informed by local realities. It also allowed them to create decent employment opportunities for staff who are, in many cases, drawn from the very same structurally excluded communities they are serving.

The strategic partnership with the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) also demonstrated a strong commitment to locally led development. While not a signatory to the contribution agreement, AWDF played a pivotal role in shaping the proposed design of the Equality Fund Initiative and continued to guide the EFI through its seat on the Equality Fund board and the Investment Advisory Council. AWDF was also responsible for delivering the Catalyze grant-making stream in Africa, in recognition of its role as a leading feminist voice on the African continent.

The Activate stream, which provided grants to women's and feminist funds, served as a mechanism for further tailoring grant-making systems to diverse local contexts. This included the use of local languages for applications and reporting. Through sub-granting, the Activate stream has been successful in reaching nascent organizations, including those receiving grants for the very first time. Activate partners were also effective in reaching unregistered organizations, including those unable to legally register due to political restrictions (e.g. LGBTQI+ organizations).

The Equality Fund and its Activate partners have been able to provide grants to diverse, grassroots organizations that would otherwise have difficulty accessing international funding. This reflected the Equality Fund and its partners' strong connections to local feminist movements, as well as their heightened tolerance for fiduciary risk compared to more traditional NGOs or other funders. The Equality Fund and its partners managed risk through a trust-based approach to partnership, with an emphasis on regular communication with grantees rather than additional reporting requirements.

Intersectionality and inclusion



Trans-inclusive feminism

LGBQ women's organizations face considerable challenges accessing stable, flexible funding; these problems are often magnified for trans and intersex women.ⁱ Recent campaigns in many countries have specifically targeted trans people.

The Equality Fund Initiative supports several transgender women's organizations. COMCAVIS TRANS in El Salvador has been advocating for trans people's rights to legally change their name to match their gender identity. Pink Life in Türkiye used a crisis grant to repurpose and expand their clothing bank program. This was used to assist trans and other victims of the February 2023 earthquake who were prevented from accessing humanitarian relief.

Image Source: COMCAVIS TRANS, El Salvador.

^{viii} "Vibrant Yet Underresourced." (2020). Mama Cash and Astraera Lesbian Foundation for Justice. [Link](#).

7. The Equality Fund Initiative has been informed by an intersectional feminist perspective and has reached a wide variety of self-led women's rights and feminist organizations.

An intersectional feminist approach has informed all of the Equality Fund Initiative's program areas to some extent. For example, as part of the design and build process, there have been intentional efforts to diversify the Equality Fund's board. Through its gender-lens investment criteria, the Equality Fund also demonstrated a commitment to investing in firms that value diversity and inclusion.

The grant-making program prioritized funding to organizations that are self-led rather than merely working on behalf of a structurally excluded community. The Equality Fund Initiative has been able to reach a diverse sample of grantees, including sex workers, women with disabilities, LBTQI+ people and others.

The Prepare, Respond and Care grant-making stream demonstrated the importance, and value, of an intersectional approach. Grantees have been able to target relief efforts towards communities that are often excluded or underserved by conventional humanitarian assistance, such as LBTQI+ people (see example in sidebar), ethnic minorities (see [page 33](#)) or female-headed households (e.g. with cash transfers in Kenya).

While Equality Fund Initiative grantees are very diverse, stakeholders identified groups that could be further supported in future cohorts. These included women with disabilities, Indigenous women, migrant and domestic workers, Dalit women, religious minorities, and rural peasant women. Certain regions, like the South Pacific, Central Asia and Francophone Africa, could also warrant further attention.

8. There were concerns about barriers to accessing funding for organizations that were less integrated into the international feminist movement.

The Equality Fund Initiative grant-making program has used a variety of selection mechanisms (see [page 9](#)). These included open calls for the Catalyze stream. For the Activate stream, the Equality Fund invited eligible funds to participate in a non-competitive grant-making process. Activate partners distributed their own sub-grants through regular open calls. With the Prepare, Respond and Care pilot, grants have primarily gone to existing partners. The variety of selection mechanisms demonstrated inherent trade-offs between shorter-term engagement with a larger pool of grantees and longer-term, more in depth engagement with a smaller pool. With the use of such a variety of different selection mechanisms, the pathways to receiving Equality Fund Initiative support were not immediately apparent to prospective grantees. Some stakeholders suggested that the selection processes tended to favour organizations with existing connections to the international feminist movement or those with the tools to seek out international funding opportunities.

Findings: Early results and lessons from implementation

Effectiveness and coherence

Photo credit: MONFEMNET National Network NGO, Mongolia



Results: Design and build

Assessing progress on design and build

MATCH, the Equality Fund's predecessor, traces its history back to 1976. However, prior to taking on the Partnership for Gender Equality, the Equality Fund had never managed an initiative of this scale. This necessitated a period of rapid organizational growth, which was designated as the "design and build" program area in the contribution agreement. It is expected that, once the Equality Fund has developed sufficient capacity, WUSC and the Toronto Foundation will exit the initiative.

Despite being a program area, there are no measures of success for design and build in the contribution agreement or the performance measurement framework. In the absence of such measures, the evaluation drew on program documents, including capacity assessments and the recent financial capacity building activity. Interviews were also an opportunity to reflect on progress toward design and build goals.

Universal's Institutional and Organizational Assessment (IOA) model was used as part of the design and build analysis.^{ix} For reasons of scope, the evaluation did not complete a full, detailed assessment of all elements of the IOA model. The findings of the IOA analysis can be found in [Annex 10](#).

^{ix} Charles Lusthaus et al. (2002). Organizational Assessment: A Framework for Improving Performance. IDB, IDRC. [Link](#).

9. In the space of a few years, the Equality Fund has made significant strides along its "design and build" journey. Going forward, building integrated program strategies and monitoring, evaluation and reporting functions will be critical.

The first 5 years of the Equality Fund Initiative were designated as "design and build," with the Equality Fund developing its capacities to manage the full initiative. The Equality Fund has made significant progress in developing its governance structures and its internal systems and processes, while rapidly expanding its staff and the scale of its operations. This progress was especially notable when set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The support and expertise of the Toronto Foundation and WUSC have been very valuable. However, the model provided limited opportunities for the Equality Fund to demonstrate fiduciary and investment management capacity, since the Toronto Foundation's systems were being used. Instead, there will be a series of capacity assessments in the lead-up to the proposed transfer of authorities from WUSC and the Toronto Foundation to the Equality Fund. The extent of these assessments has created tensions around the degree of financial scrutiny expected of the Equality Fund. The evaluation did not assess the Equality Fund's financial capacity, as per the agreed upon scope.

Progress was uneven in some areas. The grant-making program's monitoring and evaluation systems were well-established, but there was less capacity to measure and communicate the impact of advocacy efforts and gender-lens investing. The Equality Fund developed an overarching monitoring and evaluation strategy, but it was not yet fully operational. As the organization matures, there is also a need to strengthen integrated planning across programs to enhance implementation and the ability to tell a coherent story of impact.

10. The COVID-19 pandemic proved challenging, but also presented new opportunities as the Equality Fund embraced virtual work.

The PGE's contribution agreement was signed only 7 months before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. Like other organizations, the Equality Fund quickly shifted towards remote work. While this presented logistical challenges, it also created opportunities. The Equality Fund realized cost savings by significantly reducing its office footprint, and has shifted to a remote-by-default staffing model.

The Equality Fund now has staff across Canada and internationally. This allowed the Equality Fund to be physically closer to its partners and to act as a convener in some countries and regions. As this transition to remote work was unanticipated, there is not yet a clear strategy to leverage the possibilities offered by international recruitment, or the role that "locally engaged", regionally based, staff could play in the effective implementation of the Equality Fund Initiative.

Results: Fund mobilization*



Advancing feminist philanthropy

The Equality Fund Initiative has combined fundraising with promoting its [Principles for Feminist Funding](#). Stakeholders argued that the Equality Fund has played an influential role in advancing the thinking around philanthropy, especially in Canada. For example, in January 2021 the Equality Fund launched The Conversation, a year-long donor journey consisting of virtual events with leading feminist activists. The program raised nearly \$930K from 76 donor partners, 45 of whom were new to the Equality Fund. In March 2023, the Equality Fund and the Ford Foundation partnered with the High Commission of Canada in the United Kingdom to host an event with potential partners to promote feminist philanthropy.

*Intermediate outcome 1400: sustained flow of funds to support EF grant-making
Image source: Equality Fund, credit Darren Bando.

11. The Equality Fund has exceeded its fundraising targets, providing the organization with flexibility to expand its grant-making operations in the early years and increasingly establishing itself as a respected global women's fund.

As of March 2023, the Equality Fund had raised \$45.6M, surpassing the target of \$39.3M, and was well on track toward the target of \$155M over 15 years. The Equality Fund has also secured significant forward commitments from philanthropic and bilateral donors, including a recently announced US\$10M contribution from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. This demonstrated the model's potential to crowd in additional funding.

These successes came despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, market instability and the increasingly high cost of living in Canada. Rates of charitable giving have steadily declined in Canada: over the past 10 years, 5% fewer Canadians have been donating to charity. In 2022, economic uncertainty pushed many donors to delay their giving until the end of the tax year.⁷ This included high-net-worth individuals, a key donor segment targeted by the Equality Fund for its fundraising. With this uncertainty, the Equality Fund shifted its strategy to place more emphasis on securing bilateral partnerships.

In March 2023, the United Kingdom officially announced a £33M contribution to the Equality Fund Initiative. The United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) is the second bilateral funder to contribute to the Equality Fund, with its contribution going solely towards the grant-making program. Aside from the financial implications, many stakeholders remarked that FCDO's contribution had a strong symbolic importance for the Equality Fund. As one leading expert on philanthropy expert stated during an interview, "The fact that they got funding from the U.K. is a huge win. This shows that it isn't a one-off, they are a global fund and not just a Canadian creation."

The FCDO funding also represented a success for the broader Partnership for Gender Equality, demonstrating Global Affairs Canada's added value as a strategic partner advocating for greater resourcing of the feminist movement. The Equality Fund's policy and partnerships team worked closely with staff from Global Affairs Canada on outreach efforts with FCDO, leveraging Canada's diplomatic networks. Staff from KSI have also implemented an ongoing head of mission engagement strategy at selected missions to aid in the pursuit of additional bilateral funding for the Equality Fund and the broader feminist movement.

These successful fundraising efforts have given the Equality Fund greater flexibility to respond to emerging needs, such as its special appeal for funds to support Afghan human rights defenders fleeing the Taliban. It has also provided increased resources and flexibility to respond to a major criticism from the feminist movement, namely the perceived slow pace of grant-making in the initiative's early years of the initiative.⁸

⁷"The Giving Report." (2023). Canada Helps. [Link](#).

⁸"High Hopes and High Expectations: Feminist Movement Recommendations to the Equality Fund." (2020). AWID. [Link](#)

Results: Gender-lens investment*

Gender-lens investing at Global Affairs Canada

Gender-lens investing (GLI) is an approach that integrates gender analysis into investment decisions. It seeks to generate financial returns but also support the inclusion of women, girls, transgender people and other groups that are structurally excluded from financial systems.

The Government of Canada has engaged in several initiatives related to GLI. At the 2018 G7 Summit, Canada helped launch the 2X Challenge that raised \$11.4B in capital for women's economic empowerment by development finance institutions and the private sector. Canada's development finance institution, FinDev Canada, applies a gender lens to its investment decisions. FinDev Canada is a member of 2X Global, a GLI industry group.

At Global Affairs Canada, the International Assistance Innovation Program has sought to promote GLI, including through the Advancing Research and Investment Standards for Gender Equity (ARISE) project. ARISE is intended to deepen the capacity of women's rights organizations and other community service organizations to create sustainable partnerships with investors.

*Intermediate outcome 1400: sustained flow of funds to support EF grant-making and intermediate outcome 1500: increased use of GLI as a strategy

12. In its early years, the EFI saw lower than expected investment returns, though these have since improved.

The cumulative rate of return for the initiative thus far stands at 2.2%, below the "low" scenario target of 3.64%. This rate of return was achieved in particularly difficult market conditions due to the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, traditional investment portfolios lost more than 20% of their value; during the same period, the Equality Fund investment portfolio had an unrealized loss of only 10.2%. Performance has since improved, and the portfolio was valued at \$296.1M as of March 2023, contributing \$18.3M in annual allocations to the initiative.

13. The program has not yet made progress on mobilizing external investor capital.

The Equality Fund Initiative established a target to mobilize \$255M in external investor capital, but thus far has attracted only \$5M through a contribution from their consortium partner, the Toronto Foundation.

Unlike in the original proposal for the initiative, the Equality Fund does not have an in-house investment management function, relying instead on an outsourced chief investment officer. This means that the Equality Fund cannot *directly* mobilize capital. With the recent creation of Equality Fund-branded products with RockCreek, and the launch of their GLI criteria, there are *indirect* pathways to mobilize investor capital. However, stakeholders from both GAC and the Equality Fund questioned whether the \$255M target for capital mobilization was realistic, or even possible, given the current program structure.

Some stakeholders proposed that an expanded definition of capital mobilization based on promoting the GLI criteria would be more viable and better leverage the Equality Fund's unique value proposition as an organization that has fully aligned its investments with its mission.

14. There have been some early examples of increasing access to finance for women entrepreneurs, though the composition of the investment portfolio may limit the potential for gender impact.

Most of the Equality Fund's investments were held in public markets. As an endowment without a predetermined annual allocation for operations, a large share was needed to maintain liquidity. Of the total portfolio, 82% was invested in North America and Europe, where data was available to screen investments against the GLI criteria but the potential for gender impact was more limited. Tangible gender equality results were more evident through the private debt and equity investments, where there were some examples of financing women-led small and medium enterprises in the Global South. As these investments mature, additional efforts will be needed to measure and communicate their contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Results: Policy and partnerships*



Advocating for feminist responses to crises

The Equality Fund has advocated for the Government of Canada and other donors to take a feminist approach in responding to crises. Two major priorities have been the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

For example, the Equality Fund jointly published an op-ed with a leading Afghan women's rights activist and, in April 2022, made a submission to the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan. The submission called for greater resourcing for, and diplomatic engagement with, Afghan women's rights organizations.

The Equality Fund has also amplified messaging from its grantee partner, the Ukrainian Women's Fund, on the importance of an intersectional approach to providing humanitarian assistance and the role that women's organizations can play in crisis response.

*Intermediate outcome 1300: Enhanced capacity of feminist funding architecture

Image source: Equality Fund.

15. The Equality Fund's policy and partnerships efforts contributed to expanding the role of women's rights and feminist activists in global policy-making spaces. These efforts complemented the grant-making program and effectively leveraged the partnership with Global Affairs Canada.

"Policy and partnerships" is not an official program area identified in the contribution agreement; however, it has been an important element of the Equality Fund Initiative. Policy and partnerships refers to the Equality Fund's work to secure bilateral partnerships, such as the one with FCDO, and also to its advocacy efforts. This included participating in discussion forums, making presentations to donors and parliamentarians, and publishing op-eds. The Equality Fund also participated in different coalitions such as Dignity Network Canada, a network of civil society organizations involved in advancing the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ people globally.

The Equality Fund's advocacy work touched on diverse topics, including the climate-gender nexus, feminist foreign policy, and women, peace and security. These efforts were informed by regular outreach and consultations with grantee partners and focused on amplifying the priorities and voices of feminist activists from the Global South. This demonstrated the Equality Fund's potential as integrated organization where grant-making relationships informed advocacy efforts, and where the Equality Fund could leverage its relationships with donor governments and the international community to create space for feminist activists.

The collaborative relationship between Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund was very evident in their work on policy and partnerships. There were regular coordination meetings to develop strategies for outreach to potential bilateral donors, which yielded results with FCDO's recent contribution to the Equality Fund. Global Affairs Canada's legitimacy and global networks were major assets in efforts to shift more funding to feminist organizations.

Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund both played important roles in establishing the Alliance for Feminist Movements, a unique, multi-stakeholder grouping that brings together members from governments, women's rights and feminist organizations, and philanthropic funders such as the Ford Foundation. The Alliance is focused on mobilizing additional funding and political support for feminist movements. The Gender Equality Division (MGS) and KGAP, the division formerly responsible for the Partnership for Gender Equality, worked closely with the Equality Fund to shape the Alliance. This exemplified how the Partnership for Gender Equality could draw from the relative strengths of Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund to advance the cause of feminist funding.

Results: Grant-making*

Thematic priorities

While grantees are not required to work on specific thematic priorities, they are asked to identify up to 3 key issues of focus. The most commonly reported thematic priorities for Year 3 Catalyze grantees were:

Violence against women

(44 organizations)

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

(28 organizations)

Feminist leadership capacity

(21 organizations)

LBTIQ rights

(20 organizations)

Leadership and rights for young women and girls

(19 organizations)

*Intermediate outcome 1100: Enhanced capacity of selected women's organizations to advance gender equality and empower women and girls; Intermediate outcome 1200: Enhanced collective action; and contributions to Ultimate outcome 1000: Increased enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and the advancement of gender equality in ODA countries

16. The Equality Fund has exceeded its targets for grant disbursements, and is now one of the largest feminist funds in the world.

As of March 2023, the Equality Fund had disbursed \$35M in grants, exceeding the target of \$30.6M. This represented 11% of the 15-year target of \$308M in grant-making disbursements. In 2022-23, the Equality Fund scaled up its grant-making considerably, disbursing \$20.5M. Moving forward, the Equality Fund is targeting annual disbursements of approximately \$20M. By comparison, in 2022, leading women's funds like Mama Cash and the Global Fund for Women disbursed approximately \$7.9M and \$22.6M, respectively.

17. Communicating the impact of the Equality Fund Initiative's diverse, local-level interventions was challenging.

Grantee efforts were intentionally diverse given the "theme agnostic" granting approach (see sidebar). Grantees operated in more than 80 countries, and at different scales. The average Catalyze grant was worth \$50 to \$60K per year, while Activate sub-grants were as small as \$5K per year. This diversity meant that aggregating and reporting on contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment results at a program level was challenging.

The relatively small and diffused nature of the interventions, combined with the noted gaps in movement-building and collective action at this stage, also raised questions about how individual grantee efforts can contribute to broader systemic change.

18. Increasingly frequent climate disasters, conflict, and assaults on the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people have limited the results that can be achieved through feminist programming.

The early years of the Equality Fund Initiative have coincided with a host of crises that have disproportionately affected women and girls. This "polycrisis" context and the concerted efforts to roll back the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people have proven challenging for women's rights and feminist organizations.

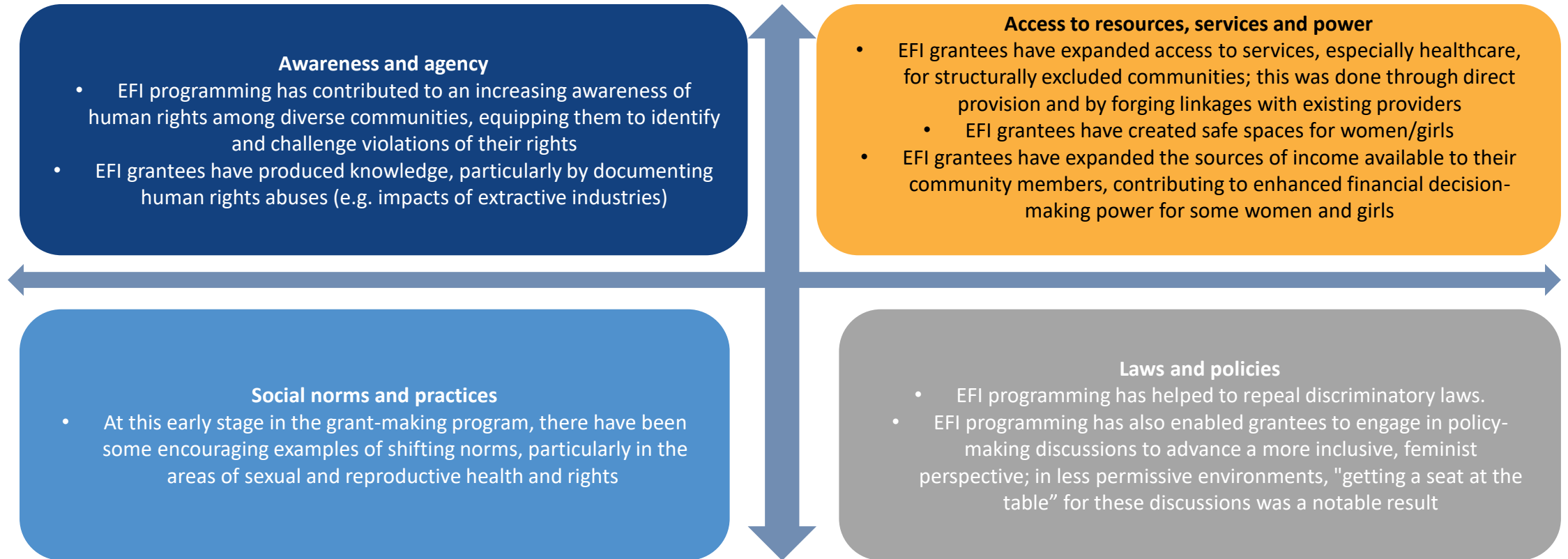
Equality Fund Initiative grantees reported facing harassment and violence from state authorities and from their communities, and had to navigate discriminatory laws and policies that limited their access to foreign funding. Many requested anonymity in the Equality Fund's public reporting to avoid further backlash. Linear progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment was not possible in certain situations where organizations were facing crises. This was exemplified by the plight of LGBTQI+ organizations in many parts of the world, whose very existence was being threatened by discriminatory laws and violence. Stakeholders emphasized that, in such a context, funders need to rethink what constitutes a "result."

Results: Grant-making*

Contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment

19. There is emerging evidence that the Equality Fund Initiative has contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment, especially in terms of raising awareness and expanding access to services.

The Equality Fund's direct grantees reported on gender equality and women's empowerment results using the change matrix illustrated below. For this evaluation, the change matrix was used to identify early results achieved by Equality Fund Initiative grantees across the thematic and country case studies, including grantees supported by Activate partners. The most frequently reported results were changes in awareness and agency, and expanding access to resources, services and power. Changing social norms and laws and policies are more complex, long-term processes. As expected, there was less evidence of these types of outcomes at this early stage of implementation. However, Equality Fund Initiative grantees did make some important early contributions toward influencing social norms, laws and policies. Additional details on the results achieved by grantees are provided on pages [32](#) and [33](#) and in the [case study appendix](#).



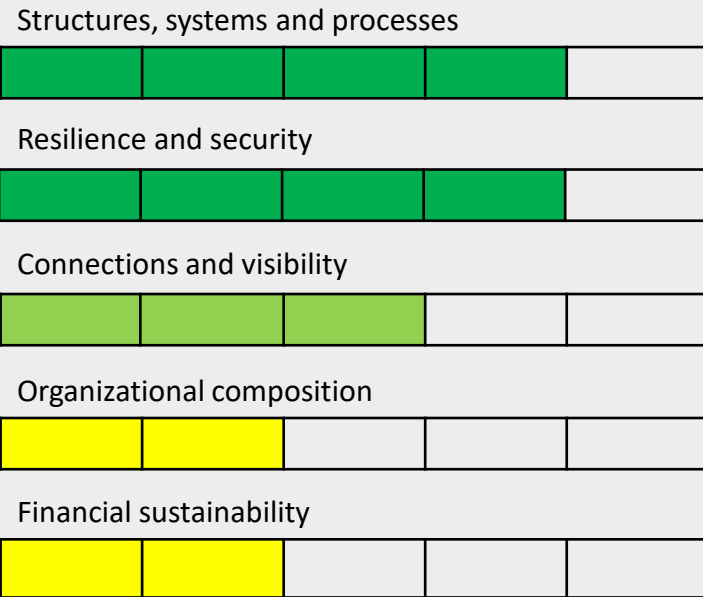
*Intermediate outcome 1100: enhanced capacity of selected women's organizations to advance gender equality and empower women and girls; intermediate outcome 1200: enhanced collective action; and contributions to Ultimate outcome 1000: Increased enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and the advancement of gender equality in ODA countries

Results: Grant-making*

Contributions to strengthening grantees' capacities

Grantees' organizational sustainability framework

GAC's Evaluation Division (PRA) and Gender Equality Division (MGS) have developed a framework for assessing contributions to organizational sustainability for grantees, recognizing that it is not purely financial (see [Annex 7](#)). Based on case study data, at this early stage the Equality Fund Initiative has contributed to each of the 5 dimensions to varying degrees:



*Intermediate outcome 1100: Enhanced capacity of selected women's organizations to advance gender equality and empower women and girls

20. The Equality Fund Initiative has contributed to strengthening the organizational capacity of grantees by providing opportunities for organizations to reflect, refine their systems and invest in their own people.

Through a combination of flexible core funding and its Grants+ approach to capacity building, the Equality Fund Initiative enabled grantees to strengthen their internal systems, particularly those related to finance and due diligence. Organizations were able to invest in new IT systems to improve their financial reporting, and to refine their administrative systems. This was especially important for Activate sub-grantees, many of whom had limited experience managing donor funds and benefited from the hands-on accompaniment they received. The stability and flexibility of multi-year core support also enabled many organizations to develop new strategic plans, something that would have been difficult to accomplish had they been focused on chasing other short-term project funds.

Another area of focus was resilience and security. Equality Fund Initiative grantees often worked on issues that were traumatic for staff, like supporting victims of gender-based violence. As self-led organizations, many grantees hire staff from communities facing discrimination or persecution. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of investing in safety and mental health to ensure the sustainability of their organizations. For example, one organization in Lebanon used its grant to cover the costs of psychosocial counselling for staff. Other grantees improved the physical security of their offices or enhanced cyber-security systems to protect their online presence.

21. The support offered through the Equality Fund Initiative has enabled grantees to maintain, expand or strengthen their existing programming and to launch new initiatives to advance the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Several grantees highlighted how funding from the Equality Fund Initiative kept their organization afloat at a time when funding opportunities were scarce and costs were rising. Many others highlighted how this funding allowed them to launch new programming or expand existing programming to different communities or regions. Some grantees also hired staff to enhance programming capacity in certain aspects of their work, like monitoring and evaluation or communications.

The Prepare, Respond and Care grant stream has enabled organizations that already work on crisis response to expand their operations, responding to high-profile situations like Ukraine but also to less prominent crises. Prepare, Respond and Care has also enabled partners with no previous experience with crisis response to launch new initiatives. For example, Jumuiya Women Fund in Kenya launched a cash transfer program targeting female-headed households affected by drought conditions.

Results: Grant-making*

Contributions to strengthening collective action and the feminist movement



Making a case for gender and climate

It is widely acknowledged that climate change disproportionately affects women and girls. The Equality Fund Initiative has supported the participation of women from the Global South in international meetings, emphasizing their role as stakeholders in the fight against climate change. The Centre for 21st Century Issues (C21st) is a Nigerian advocacy organization supported by the African Women's Development Fund. C21st used their grant to attend several meetings leading up to COP26 in Glasgow. C21st has also served as an observer for the Green Climate Fund, advocating for greater funding for African women's organizations.

Image Source: Centre for 21st Century Issues, Nigeria

*Intermediate outcome 1200: Enhanced collective action and intermediate outcome 1300: enhanced capacity of feminist funding architecture

22. The Activate grant stream has contributed to strengthening the feminist funding ecosystem by putting more money into the hands of local feminist funds and enabling them to better support diverse grassroots partners.

The Activate grant stream supported existing feminist funds, with 60-70% of each grant being sub-granted to other women's rights and feminist organizations. In addition to advancing the cause of locally led development, the Activate stream contributed to strengthening the organizational and programming capacity of feminist funds, which play a critical role in the funding ecosystem. Newer funds like VidaAfroLatina and the Doria Feminist Fund were able to disburse their first-ever grants, and others like the Jumuiya Women Fund launched new grant streams. These partners have also been able to dedicate time and resources to developing their own grant systems.

The Activate stream has allowed recipients to offer more grants and to expand their support to different regions or constituencies. The flexible nature of Equality Fund Initiative grants had a trickle-down effect, as Activate partners could target their grants based on their understanding of the needs in their community, rather than the priorities of a given donor. The multi-year nature of Equality Fund support also had a downstream effect. For example, ISDAO, a relatively new LGBTQI+ fund in West Africa, stated that its Activate grant has allowed it to offer multi-year support to its own grantees for the first time.

23. The existing grant-making streams have made some contributions to expanding grantees' networks and access to advocacy and learning spaces. There was a strong desire for additional support to develop these networks.

The final grant-making stream, Connect, is intended to support movement-building efforts. In the absence of this stream, some grantees have used their EFI funding to attend or host gatherings (see sidebar). For example, Urgent Action Fund Africa was able to support 10 disability rights organizations to participate in the second Feminist Republik Festival in Kenya in November 2022 (see [page 63](#)).

The Equality Fund has also supported their grantees' participation in different forums. At the Women Deliver 2023 Conference in Kigali, the Equality Fund facilitated meetings between its grantee partners and potential funders, such as the Government of Canada. In 2022, the Equality Fund hosted a convening event for its 6 grantees in Lebanon, which led to new programming collaborations among the partners. Lebanon stood out as a promising, but isolated, example of the Equality Fund playing a convening role. Grantees expressed an eagerness to see the Equality Fund more actively play this role, and for more opportunities to connect with one another to advance collective advocacy efforts and to learn from each other.

Results: Grant-making Stories of change

The following stories of change are drawn from the 4 country-level deep dives. A summary of case study findings can be found in the appendix beginning on [page 61](#).

Confronting female genital mutilation (FGM) in Kenya	Coming together in the face of Lebanon's crisis	Building a shared understanding of feminism in Colombia	Gaining the confidence to speak up in Nepal
<p>Kosomion Women Group is made up of about a dozen women from rural Baringo County, Kenya. In 2023 they received their first-ever grant from Jumuiya Women Fund, one of the Equality Fund's Activate partners.</p> <p>FGM is a very common practice in this region and is growing more prevalent among girls as young as 11 years old. Kosomion members gave a series of presentations at local schools about the dangers of FGM and, to their surprise, 11 girls facing FGM came to them and asked for help. Undaunted, Kosomion connected the girls with local shelters and even took 5 of them into the members' own homes. They are now using the grant from Jumuiya to pay for the girls' school fees. Shifting attitudes toward such a deeply entrenched practice will be difficult, but Kosomion is taking the first courageous steps.</p>	<p>Lebanon is enduring a complex economic and political crisis that was worsened by the effects of COVID-19. Lebanon's once vibrant feminist movement is contending with increasing hostility to the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people.</p> <p>The Equality Fund supports 5 Catalyze grantees in Lebanon and 1 regional Activate partner. Their work is diverse, ranging from providing sexual health services to documenting oral histories. The grantees also include self-led organizations from the Syrian and Palestinian refugee communities.</p> <p>In the face of so many challenges, the Equality Fund has facilitated connections among its grantees, some of whom are now delivering projects together. Together, they are keeping an inclusive movement alive at a time of great uncertainty.</p>	<p>Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres is a social movement that raises awareness about the impact of armed conflict on women, and advocates for their inclusion in peacebuilding in Colombia. In 2023, Ruta Pacifica organized a series of workshops, entitled <i>Cartografías</i> (mapping), for members to discuss the impact of feminism on their lives. The workshops also equipped participants with tools to facilitate similar discussions in their own communities. During one session, a participant described to the evaluation team how</p> <p><i>"What we are doing today is collectively building a lifestyle around feminism. Listening to perspectives and stories from different territories helps us open ourselves up and connect with our sisters, enabling us to listen and embrace each other in sisterhood."</i></p>	<p>Stigma and harmful cultural practices related to menstruation are still prevalent in many parts of Nepal, including <i>chhaupadi</i>, a practice that requires women and girls to stay in a separate hut during their menstrual cycle.</p> <p>While laws have been passed to protect the rights of women and girls, changing socio-cultural norms is a complex process. Hamro Palo (Our Turn), an Equality Fund grantee in Nepal, conducted workshops in schools to build girls' awareness on menstrual health and their rights.</p> <p>These workshops have helped to increase the girls' knowledge, as well as their confidence. As one girl shared with the evaluation team: <i>"We can now talk openly with friends and teachers about menstruation. Earlier I used to think what others would say; now I am not afraid... I can openly talk about anything, I can talk without fear or without shame."</i></p>

Results: Grant-making Stories of change

The following stories of change are drawn from the 3 thematic case studies. A summary of case study findings can be found in the appendix beginning on [page 61](#).

Responding to Uganda’s anti-homosexuality law	Empowering Indigenous women and environmental activists	An inclusive response to the invasion of Ukraine
<p>In May 2023, Uganda passed the <i>Anti-Homosexuality Act</i>. The new law increased existing penalties against same-sex conduct and introduced new crimes such as "promotion of homosexuality." Those convicted of "aggravated homosexuality" could face the death penalty.</p> <p>Even before the law was passed, discrimination and violence against LGBTQI+ Ugandans had been steadily increasing. The passage of the law has escalated into a full-blown crisis for LGBTQI+ people in Uganda.</p> <p>The Equality Fund Initiative supported grassroots LGBTQI+ organizations in Uganda through grants disbursed by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and UHAI EASHRI. These grants supported networking and advocacy training, as well as funding for self-care and providing safe space for affected communities.</p> <p>When the law was passed, the grants provided grantees with the flexibility and resources to shift to crisis response, including funds to help affected persons escape from persecution. As the crisis evolved, the support provided by AWDF and UHAI EASHRI was a lifeline for LGBTQI+ Ugandans.</p>	<p>At least 33 human rights defenders were murdered in the Americas between January and April 2023 alone, with most of these killings targeting environmental activists. Women defenders often face additional gendered risks, as do Indigenous women and others with intersecting identities.</p> <p>The Equality Fund Initiative supports 2 networks of women human rights defenders in the Americas. IM-Defensoras and La Red Latinamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Sociales y Ambientales are dedicated to supporting human rights defenders, particularly those pushing back against the negative effects of mining and large infrastructure projects in their communities.</p> <p>Much of their work focuses on documenting human rights abuses. IM-Defensoras has used Equality Fund support to upgrade its registry of human rights violations against women defenders. The data it has gathered is regularly cited by local and international media. La Red has used the support from the Equality Fund to translate into English their research on the impacts of mining, especially for Indigenous women. This has allowed the organization to extend its advocacy work even further.</p>	<p>The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a devastating effect upon women and girls, including increasing the risk of gender-based violence. It has also forced millions of Ukrainians to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees, at least 70% of whom are women and girls.</p> <p>The Equality Fund has responded to the invasion through its advocacy work, (see page 27). Through the grant-making program, the Equality Fund has supported the Ukrainian Women's Fund, feminist funds in neighbouring Georgia and Poland, the Global Resilience Fund and the Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism.</p> <p>These grantees have provided direct relief, paying special attention to structurally excluded communities including LGBTQI+ people, Roma people, and Black and other racialized people displaced by the war. Women's Fund Sukhumi in Georgia used its grant to cover rent expenses for 23 Ukrainian families, and FemFund in Poland converted its office space into an emergency shelter for refugees. These efforts underscored the value of feminist organizations as local crisis responders.</p>

Findings: Lessons from establishing and supporting the Partnership for Gender Equality

Effectiveness and efficiency

Photo credit: Jumuiya Women Fund, Kenya



Innovation in the Partnership for Gender Equality

Timeline for the development and launch of the PGE

- 
- May 25, 2018: Call for partnership launched by Minister of International Development
 - Sept-Oct. 2018: Domestic round tables held
 - Nov. 2018-Jan. 2019: Round tables held in London, New York and Nairobi
 - Dec. 2018-Jan. 2019: Open call for expressions of interest
 - March-April 2019: Development and submission of final proposals from shortlisted candidates
 - June 2019: Equality Fund consortium announced as successful candidate
 - August 2019: Contribution agreement signed
 - October 2019: First disbursement of funds for design and build phase
 - March 2020: Amended contribution agreement signed

24. The Partnership for Gender Equality was a deliberate effort to develop an innovative approach to resourcing the feminist movement. High-level political support and the policy cover provided by FIAP helped create an environment conducive to innovation, but also put significant pressure on staff involved in developing the initiative.

The Partnership for Gender Equality was a major priority for the Minister of International Development. Canada's hosting of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference added further pressure to develop and announce the initiative in a timely manner. Stakeholders reflected that the high-level attention created an environment that allowed for, and necessitated, innovation. KGAP (the former PGE task force) at GAC was able to draw upon the resources it needed from across the department and was able to develop an innovative program that represented a significant departure from the usual approach to delivering international assistance.

However, these pressures took a personal toll on those involved. Staff faced high expectations and a heavy workload, to the detriment of their work-life balance and overall wellbeing. The burden fell especially heavily on staff of the Grants and Contributions Bureau (SGD), who had also played a pivotal role in the development of the Women's Voice and Leadership program not long before.

25. The Partnership for Gender Equality necessitated extensive adjustments to existing GAC processes and tools. While the changes were far-reaching for this initiative, they have had limited impact on the department's broader approach to international assistance.

The Partnership for Gender Equality adapted the existing authorized programming process, adding innovative elements like an external advisory committee and a 2-stage application process. The standard contribution agreement was heavily modified to meet the needs of a 15-year agreement with an investment component; elements included upfront multi-year funding and an alternative budget format based on cost proportionality.

The Partnership for Gender Equality served as an example of what feminist programming could look like at GAC, and what changes would be needed to deliver it. The Equality Fund has widely promoted its model, including during a "risk hackathon" hosted by the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative. However, aside from a few more recent examples, such as the partnership with the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) consortium, these changes have had limited influence on broader international assistance programming. Beyond the department, the process to develop the Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund at Employment and Social Development Canada took direct inspiration from the PGE.

Departmental capacity to support the PGE

Lessons learned: process to Establish the Partnership for Gender Equality

KGAP's internal [lessons learned report](#) identified 8 guiding principles to consider when designing and implementing innovative initiatives:

1. expect to learn and pivot as the process proceeds
2. draw on the full range of tools, strategies and mechanisms for innovation in GAC and the Government of Canada more broadly
3. use a tailored approach, one that allows for continuous learning, to respond to the unique needs of an innovative and complex initiative
4. line up staffing and corporate services to ensure the team composition is up and running from the start of the design process
5. ensure a clear negotiating team structure and authorities are in place to achieve the successful negotiations of funding agreements and financial mechanisms
6. ensure that the process is aligned with the Government of Canada Code of Ethics to mitigate potential conflicts of interest
7. draw on existing expertise and engage a broad stakeholder community
8. approach managing risk as an enabling factor rather than solely as a barrier

26. The Partnership for Gender Equality required a fundamentally different role and set of competencies for GAC to serve as an active partner.

Given its innovative model, developing and supporting the Partnership for Gender Equality required a unique set of technical competencies. Gender gender-lens investment was frequently mentioned as a knowledge gap for the department. The department also encountered challenges in assessing financial models and then structuring a contribution agreement to accommodate a 15-year endowment-style fund. Moving into implementation, the technical expertise required to monitor the investment fund remained a challenge.

As departmental lead, the Education and Social Empowerment Division (KSI) had the traditional role of monitoring the implementation of the contribution agreement. Beyond that, its staff also coordinated extensively with the Equality Fund on advocacy efforts and outreach to potential bilateral funders (see pages [25](#) and [27](#)). Navigating the traditional project management role alongside the expanded role of strategic feminist partner proved challenging at times. This included establishing shared expectations for reporting, monitoring, and financial oversight of the initiative.

One element that proved particularly challenging was reaching an agreement on the initiative's 15-year financial model. "Reasonable capital preservation" was not clearly defined in the contribution agreement and has been interpreted differently by GAC and the consortium partners. Resolving this issue has required extensive discussions and generated tension between partnership members. While there has been recent progress toward an agreement, this remained an outstanding concern during the evaluation period.

27. The limited awareness of the Partnership for Gender Equality across geographic branches and Canada's missions abroad was a missed opportunity for engagement.

While the Equality Fund does engage extensively with GAC, there was limited awareness of the PGE across the department. This was evident during the evaluation team's interactions with Canada's missions in Colombia, Kenya and Lebanon. KSI's recent outreach efforts have primarily focused on securing additional bilateral partners for the Equality Fund rather than connecting with geographic branches and Global South missions.

The Equality Fund listed its grantees in its annual reports to KSI, but this was not shared widely with missions or geographic desks, nor did it include the Activate sub-grantees. This meant that Canada's missions and geographic desks were unaware of Equality Fund Initiative grantees operating in their countries. Aside from posing a risk in terms of coherence (as some Equality Fund grantees are also funded through other GAC programs), this was a missed opportunity to fully engage with local feminist movements, especially given the networks developed through the Women's Voice and Leadership program.

Conclusions



Photo credit: Evaluation Team, Colombia

Conclusions

The Partnership for Gender Equality as an innovative approach for GAC to support women's rights and feminist organizations.

The Partnership for Gender Equality reflected the department's commitment to innovation in supporting women's rights and feminist organizations and mobilizing additional sources of funding. It served as an important injection of funds at a time when donor support for women's rights organizations had stagnated, and when women's rights were under threat.

The establishment of and support for the Partnership for Gender Equality demonstrated a willingness to shift beyond traditional funder-implementer relationships. To develop the initiative, the department was able to adapt existing processes and tools and introduced elements like upfront multi-year funding and an expanded financial capacity-building activity. However, limited expertise at GAC with endowments and gender-lens investment proved challenging during the design and implementation of the Partnership. It has also been challenging for Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund to agree on a definition of reasonable capital preservation and on the approach to ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the initiative. GAC's expanded role as a feminist strategic partner in the initiative was a novel experience, and navigating the traditional project management role alongside the role of strategic feminist partner proved challenging at times. There are opportunities to explore alternative approaches to accountability and performance measurement to further shift these dynamics.

The department has been able to effectively leverage its international networks and convening power, working collaboratively with the Equality Fund to advance the cause of feminist funding. The department's contributions as a partner were constrained by the limited awareness of the Equality Fund Initiative and its grantees among Canada's missions abroad, geographic branches and teams responsible for similar programming. This was a missed opportunity, especially given the networks built with feminist organizations through the Women's Voice and Leadership program.

The Equality Fund Initiative as a program to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Equality Fund Initiative brought together multiple program areas to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. It combined its grant-making operations with thought leadership on the role of feminist principles in investing, philanthropy and foreign policy.

The grant-making program, which sits at the core of the initiative, has rapidly scaled up its operations, distributing over \$20M in grants during its third year. Three of the 4 grant-making streams are active, with the final stream to be piloted in Year 4 of implementation.

The support offered through the grant-making program was well-suited to the needs of women's rights and feminist organizations. Multi-year core grants offered the stability and flexibility for organizations to invest in their own capacity and to advance their work with less pressure to seek out project-based funding. Going forward, grantees called for further investments in networking and convening. Support from the Equality Fund Initiative is contributing to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the diversity of results across the EFI portfolio and the complex trajectories of social change have made it difficult to date to tell a coherent story about the initiative's contributions to collective impact.

The Equality Fund Initiative has engaged extensively with questions of power. The Equality Fund created space for voices from the Global South to shape its work through consultations and advisory committees. The initiative has offered a powerful example of locally led development, shifting resources and decision-making power to a diverse cohort of women's rights and feminist organizations in the Global South, and shifting away from a project-based approach to funding. Some challenges remain in ensuring that the various grant mechanisms offered by the Equality Fund Initiative are sufficiently well known and accessible.

Recommendations and considerations



Photo credit: Balance Promoción para el Desarrollo y Juventud, A.C..
Mexico

Programmatic recommendations

The following recommendations are directed at the departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality at Global Affairs Canada. They relate to programmatic issues and areas for improvement. For an additional set of non-binding suggestions for the Equality Fund Initiative, see [page 43](#).

1

Clarifying key parameters for the Partnership (Findings [25](#) and [26](#))

In preparation for potential revisions to the contribution agreement, the departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality should work with the Equality Fund to clarify key parameters for the partnership that were not sufficiently defined in the original contribution agreement. This includes the concept of “reasonable capital preservation” as it pertains to long-term financial sustainability for the initiative. The departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality should draw upon relevant expertise within the department and outside, as needed, to advance these discussions.

2

Performance measurement (Finding [4](#), [17](#) and [18](#))

The departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality should work with the Equality Fund to streamline and adapt performance measurement requirements to better reflect the information required for effective project management, and better capture meaningful results.

3

Investor capital mobilization (Finding [13](#))

The departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality should work with the Equality Fund to reassess the target for external investor capital mobilization as part of the gender-lens investment program. They should determine if there is a continued need for such a target and, if so, how a revised approach can better reflect the objectives of the initiative, its structure, and the potential pathways for mobilizing investor capital.

4

Connecting and convening (Findings [3](#), [22](#) and [27](#))

To support efforts to connect and convene GAC-funded women's rights organizations, the departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality should:

- work with the Equality Fund and relevant geographic branches to develop a strategy for facilitating connections between Canada's missions and EFI grantees (if grantees wish to participate)
- share this approach with FCDO and other potential bilateral donors, as needed, to support interactions between grantees and diplomatic missions of other donor countries
- work with the Gender Equality Division, in its role as coordination lead for the Women's Voice and Leadership Program, to identify opportunities to connect and convene GAC-funded women's rights and feminist organizations

Corporate Recommendations

5 Taking stock of feminist approaches to programming (supported by findings [1](#), [2](#), [4](#), [5](#), [25](#), and [27](#), and the [WVL formative Evaluation](#))

Background:

The Feminist International Assistance Policy was introduced in 2017, reflecting an ambitious approach to reorienting Canada’s international assistance towards women and girls in all their diversity. It resulted in 2 flagship programs: the Partnership for Gender Equality and the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program. The formative evaluations of these 2 programs highlighted the department’s successes in feminist programming and the good practices that could inform other international assistance programs. The evaluations also highlighted the risk that the flagship programs could become “silos of feminism” within an otherwise traditional donor, with little impact on the broader approach to international assistance.

Recommendation:

Global Affairs Canada should identify feminist programming lessons learned and good practices from the PGE and WVL programs that could and should influence the department’s approach to international assistance; ensure that these emerging lessons and good practices are shared widely among relevant divisions/programs; and integrate these lessons and good practices in international assistance programming guidance and policy direction.

6 Addressing barriers to new partnerships (supported by findings [2](#), [4](#), [6](#); the [WVL formative Evaluation](#) and the [CFLI evaluation](#))

Background:

Recent evaluations have repeatedly highlighted Global Affairs Canada’s limited risk appetite, and its overt focus on fiduciary risk, as an impediment to developing new partnerships, including with local organizations in the Global South. For example, the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation found that the department’s approach to risk limited its ability to fund local women’s rights organizations. The CFLI Evaluation found that the CFLI’s approach to risk management did not align with its willingness to be a risk-tolerant program and often resulted in missions’ reluctance to partner with newer, less-experienced local organizations. Balancing a desire for innovation with the department’s risk appetite was also a challenge in setting up the Partnership for Gender Equality.

These programs have used different strategies to address the question of fiduciary risk when working with local or new partners, with varying degrees of success. The Equality Fund and its Activate partners have shown a willingness to work with organizations that traditional donors often perceive to be “risky”; this is an example of the positive role that intermediaries can play.

Recommendation:

In the context of its Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative, Global Affairs Canada should consider the approaches used in the Partnership for Gender Equality/Equality Fund Initiative to address risk and how they can inform a revised approach to developing, funding and managing partnerships, including with local organizations.

Considerations for Global Affairs Canada

Better managing the demand for surge capacity

The process of developing the Partnership for Gender Equality was intensive, and it encountered challenges identified in previous evaluations and reviews. Developing a new flagship program often means relying heavily on staff with specialized expertise. These are valuable career opportunities, but they can take a toll on staff's mental health and wellbeing. This can be especially challenging for those trying to balance care responsibilities at home.

Global Affairs Canada's recent [Public Service Employment Survey results](#) underscored concerns about managing workloads and stress. Surge capacity will inevitably be needed in certain situations, such as when delivering on a new priority or developing a new initiative.

In such situations, the department should consider how best to allocate resources while safeguarding staff wellbeing. Reflecting on their own work, Equality Fund Initiative grantees emphasized the importance of dedicating resources for wellbeing, and prioritizing rest after periods of great exertion.

Feminist funds and locally led development

While Global Affairs Canada has not developed a specific policy on locally led development, elements of this approach are evident in the Feminist International Assistance Policy, especially with regards to women's rights organizations.

Locally led development does not eliminate the need for intermediaries; in some cases, intermediaries add significant value. Feminist funds are a type of intermediary that have demonstrated an ability to reach grassroots organizations representing structurally excluded communities. Aside from their reach, the way feminist funds partner with local organizations embodies many good practices for locally led development, emphasizing trust, respect and care.

As the department continues to explore various approaches to locally led development, it will be important to consider the role of intermediaries and the type of intermediaries best suited to advancing an approach that effectively shifts power and resources to advance gender equality and other objectives.

Measuring, reporting and communicating results

In 2023, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada reported that "Global Affairs Canada did not comprehensively monitor or report outcomes against policy goals." The ability to tell a coherent story about the impact of Canada's international assistance programming has been an ongoing challenge, as noted in this evaluation and previously in the WVL and CFLI evaluations. This programming supported a wide range of activities based on diverse local needs that are challenging to adequately summarize. Furthermore, social change programming is inherently complex, and is especially difficult given the current global context.

Traditional reporting approaches grounded in a linear understanding of social change and predetermined expected outcomes have proven ill-suited to capturing the true impact of Canada's international assistance programming. In responding to the Auditor General's findings, it will be important to consider alternative approaches to measuring and communicating the results of social change programs, especially those with a strong locally led approach.

Suggestions for the Equality Fund

The following suggestions are directed at the Equality Fund Initiative. They do not constitute formal recommendations and do not have an associated management response and action plan. However, the departmental lead for the Partnership for Gender Equality is encouraged to work with the Equality Fund to integrate these suggestions.

1

Grant-making strategy (Findings [2](#), [3](#), [7](#), [8](#) and [22](#))

As the grant-making program matures, the Equality Fund should assess the strategic role of each grant-making stream as part of a package of complementary mechanisms to support women's rights and feminist organizations. Consider factors like:

- the specific strategic objective for each stream;
- the type of organization each stream seeks to support, and what goals they are seeking to achieve;
- how to balance long-term commitments to partners with the flexibility to respond to emerging needs and reach new groups;
- selection mechanisms and approaches to outreach that create opportunities for organizations from underrepresented communities and regions
- types of non-financial support, including capacity building
- complementarities between streams

2

Networking and movement building (Findings [3](#), [17](#) and [22](#))

The Equality Fund should continue developing the Connect stream to address grantees' desire for more networking opportunities within countries, regions, globally and by themes/constituencies. The Equality Fund should leverage networking as a tool for capacity building (where organizations can share their expertise and experiences) and for aligning efforts toward shared goals.

3

Self-care and wellbeing (Findings [3](#) and [18](#))

The Equality Fund should further emphasize the importance of self-care and wellbeing for grantees, especially in a challenging global context. It should explore different approaches that could enhance the support that the Equality Fund Initiative provides.

4

Monitoring and evaluation (Findings [9](#), [14](#) and [17](#))

The Equality Fund should continue strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning systems across the program areas to better measure, understand and communicate collective impact. It should pay particular attention to gender-lens investing and advocacy and what data might be necessary to demonstrate overall impact.

5

International recruitment (Findings [3](#) and [10](#))

The Equality Fund should further explore opportunities to recruit staff internationally. It should consider how this can support the design-and-build process in recruiting different forms of expertise, and consider diverse perspectives. It should also consider how intentional recruiting of international staff can contribute to the delivery of the grant-making program and strengthen ties with grantees in different regions.

Annexes



Annex 1: PGE logic model

LOGIC MODEL FOR THE PARTNERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY											
Ultimate outcome	1000 Increased enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and the advancement of gender equality in ODA countries										
	<i>Grant-making and capacity development</i>						<i>Investment and fund mobilization</i>				
Intermediate outcomes	1100 Enhanced capacity of selected women's organizations (WOs) in ODA countries to advance gender equality and empower women and girls			1200 Enhanced collective action by selected WO and movements in ODA countries to advance gender equality		1300 Enhanced capacity of feminist funding architecture to effectively fund WO and movements in ODA countries		1400 Sustained flow of funds to support EF grant-making		1500 Increased use of gender-lens investing as a strategy to both deliver positive returns and support greater gender equality	
Immediate outcomes	1110 Increased access to core, flexible, multi-year funding for selected WO to design and deliver innovative social change programs and advocacy	1120 Increased ability of selected WO to design and deliver innovative social change programs and advocacy	1130 Increased organizational capacity of selected WO	1210 Increased knowledge and skills among women's rights activists and WO of how to effectively collaborate and take action	1220 Increased access to core, flexible, multi-year funding for selected WO consortia to develop movement capacity and collaborate on collective action	1310 Increased ability of selected women's funds to fund and support WO in ODA countries	1320 Increased knowledge of individual and institutional funders, policy makers and other stakeholders of the positive impacts of funding WO	1410 Positive returns on gender-lens investment funds	1420 Increased resources/funding by individual and institutional funders to the EF in support of granting programs	1510 Increased awareness among funders and feminist organizations of GL investing as a tool to support gender equality	1520 Increased knowledge of investors of the gender equality and financial benefits of gender lens investing

Source: KGAP-developed logic model January 2020. Outputs removed in this version.

Annex 2: The feminist funding ecosystem(s)

The Equality Fund was created with the goal of bringing together the philanthropic sector, the private sector, civil society and governments to collectively advance gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition to its direct grant-making relationships with women's rights and feminist organizations in the Global South, the Equality Fund has been able to connect with different strands of the funding ecosystem through its multiple program areas. This ecosystem approach allowed the Equality Fund to leverage different sources of funding and to take advantage of various opportunities for advocacy and influence.

Gender-lens investment actors

Gender-lens investing is an emerging field of impact investing. Some estimates suggest that more than \$12B is being invested with a gender lens.⁹ The ecosystem includes private and institutional investors, as well as organizations such as Criterion Institute and 2X Global, which seek to promote the gender-lens investment approach.

⁹"The Data Shows Gender Lens Investing is Growing." (2021). Veris Wealth Partners. [Link](#).

Philanthropy and private/family foundations

Of the estimated \$1.5T in philanthropic funding globally in 2017, only 0.42% reached women's rights and feminist organizations.¹⁰ However, major funders such as MacKenzie Scott and the Ford Foundation are increasingly focused on gender equality. Networks such as Gender Funders CoLab have pushed for more feminist approaches to philanthropy.

¹⁰ "Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing?" (2021). AWID. [Link](#).

Women's rights and feminist organizations

Women's rights and feminist organizations are diverse in their size, structure and areas of focus. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is one of the leading global networks, with more than 6,000 members in over 180 countries. Women's rights and feminist organizations also collaborate in national or regional networks.

¹¹ "Official development assistance for gender equality and women's empowerment: A snapshot." (2023). OECD. [Link](#).

Bilateral funders

According to the OECD/DAC, in 2021 Canada reported that 90% of its ODA had gender equality as a significant or principal focus. The next highest donors by share of gender equality funding were the Netherlands (82%), Ireland (81%) and Iceland (81%). In terms of volume of funding, the top donors were Germany, the EU, Japan, United States and France.¹¹

Feminist and women's funds

The Prospera International Network of Women's Funds has a membership of 47 international, regional and national women's and feminist funds. Collectively, these funds provide an average of \$120M in grants per year in 172 countries. Leading funds include the Global Fund for Women, Mama Cash, the Black Feminist Fund, FRIDA and the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice.

Annex 3: Grant disbursements, 2022-23

Grant disbursements by region

Africa Asia & the Pacific Caribbean Europe Latin America Middle East



Source: 2022-23 Equality Fund Initiative annual activity report

Annex 4: Feminist evaluation approach

Ethics, privacy and protection

This evaluation involved in-person and virtual data collection with a variety of stakeholders, including those from structurally excluded communities. Given the inherent risks of engaging these communities, the evaluation paid careful attention to questions of power, privilege and safety.

Working with local evaluators in Colombia, Kenya, Lebanon and Nepal was a key strategy in ensuring participants' safety and inclusion. Prior to data collection in these countries, the local evaluation teams completed a "Participation and Inclusion Plan" that outlined the potential risks and barriers to participation that participants identified during the design consultations. The local evaluators were responsible for addressing these concerns. Inclusion methods included offering transportation stipends, identifying safe venues for discussions and providing interpretation into local languages.

These efforts contributed to a safe, enriching experience for participants, and advanced the Evaluation Division's ongoing learning about ethical evaluation practices.

This evaluation applied a **feminist evaluation approach**, building on the lessons learned from the Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation. Feminist principles informed every stage of the evaluation process, from scoping and design to analysis and reporting. The Evaluation Division defines a feminist evaluation as one that:

- focuses on gender equality
- fosters an inclusive and intersectional approach
- supports transformative change
- promotes ownership and shifts power
- acknowledges position and privilege
- takes an activist stance

The evaluation used participatory and collaborative approaches to ensure that different voices and perspectives, including those that are usually not or less heard, played an active role in shaping and informing the evaluation process and its findings. This included the support of an advisory group and engagement with grantees through an extensive participatory sense-making process.

While the evaluation was conducted using a mixed methods approach, there was a strong emphasis on qualitative methods. These approaches enabled a participatory feminist approach and were suitable for answering the chosen evaluation questions. This approach also necessitated intentional efforts to engage with questions of power, and to develop strategies to ensure the safety of all participants (see sidebar). Some of the ways a feminist approach was integrated included:

 Design Extensive and consultative design process with key stakeholders	 Collaboration A collaborative and participatory approach to working with Partnership members	 Recruitment Recruiting local evaluators with strong ties to the feminist movement
 Methods Using participatory data collection methods both in person and remotely	 Sense-making Participatory sense-making workshops with Partnership members and grantees	 Learning Developing evaluation products tailored to the needs of diverse audiences

Annex 5: Alignment with feminist principles

As part of the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation, the Evaluation Division developed a list of 10 principles for effective feminist programming. These principles were refined, and the overview here reflects the alignment at the level of both the Partnership, and the Equality Fund Initiative programming.

Principle	Partnership for Gender Equality	Equality Fund Initiative
1. Transform unequal power relations embedded in funding practices by ensuring feminist leadership and grassroots involvement in the design and operationalization of the initiative.	The design of the PGE reflected a more horizontal, equitable approach than that of traditional grants and contributions programming. The Partnership design reflected an engagement with relevant actors in the feminist funding ecosystem.	Voices from the Global South heavily informed the design of the EFI. The African Women’s Development Fund has been a strategic partner from the early stages. The extensive consultations held with AWID reflected the Equality Fund’s willingness to listen, respond and be held accountable. In its operationalization, the EFI has ensured that feminist leadership from the Global South is represented on advisory committees that guide its work. Grantees also emphasized the equitable and human-centred partnerships they have experienced through the initiative.
2. Consider risk management and crisis response strategies to protect feminist activists in contexts of violence and insecurity.	N/A	Risk and safety are major considerations for the EFI. There are policies in place to safeguard the identity and security of Equality Fund grantees when needed and/or requested. A dedicated crisis stream was piloted, including support for funds with extensive experience supporting activists and organizations working in difficult contexts.
3. Adapt funding priorities and practices to the needs of feminist organizations and activists, not the other way around.	Global Affairs Canada’s systems and processes were extensively adapted to enable the formation of the PGE. Aside from the central focus on women’s rights organizations, Global Affairs Canada’s thematic funding priorities do not influence the operations of the PGE.	The EFI’s grant-making streams reinforce the autonomy of women’s rights and feminist organizations to define their own strategic priorities and agendas. Feminist funds supported through Activate follow a similar ethos. Grantees reported that grant-making processes are easy to navigate and have been adapted and refined to meet their needs.

Good alignment

Partial alignment

Poor alignment

Could not assess

Annex 5: Alignment with feminist principles

Principle	Partnership for Gender Equality	Equality Fund Initiative
<p>4. Select partner organizations based on their commitment to feminist principles, practices and policies, on their ability to represent the diversity of feminist movements and on their knowledge of the context in which they operate.</p>	<p>In assessing potential candidates for the PGE, Global Affairs Canada emphasized the importance of understanding the feminist funding ecosystem and integrating feminist principles into the program strategy. The Equality Fund was identified as a strong candidate with extensive connections to feminist leaders, including in the Global South. The inclusion of the African Women’s Development Fund as a strategic partner further enhanced the Equality Fund Initiatives as a prospective partner.</p>	<p>The EFI has adopted an intersectional approach to grant-making and has been able to support a diversity of self-led organizations. The relationships between the Equality Fund and its grantees demonstrate a strong commitment to feminist principles, reflected in a sense of mutuality, trust, respect and transparency. Grantees appreciated the regular check-ins through various means of communication, and an overall sense of horizontality in the way they relate to the Equality Fund and its partners.</p>
<p>5. Provide long-term core funding as well as capacity-building support to women's rights and feminist organizations, including small grassroots and nascent organizations.</p>	<p>The PGE is a 15-year, upfront contribution to an organization that espouses feminist principles. The funding agreement allows the Equality Fund to provide flexible, core support to grassroots women’s rights and feminist organizations. The design-and-build program area provided dedicated funding to support the growth and organizational development of the Equality Fund.</p>	<p>The EFI provides multi-year core grants through its Catalyze funding stream and multi-year grants to its Activate partners. The Activate stream is especially well-adapted to providing support to grassroots and nascent organizations, many of which typically do not have access to international funding. Capacity building is primarily provided on an as-needed basis, and through active accompaniment throughout the grant-making process.</p>
<p>6. Agree to medium to long-term programming cycles and focus on strategic-level outcomes that aim at larger societal change.</p>	<p>The PGE has been described as one of the largest and longest-lasting contribution agreements that Global Affairs Canada has ever signed. The Partnership, with the inclusion of an investment component, was focused on building a sustainable source of funding for women’s rights and feminist organizations. GAC and the Equality Fund have worked collaboratively to advance strategic goals of strengthening the feminist funding ecosystem.</p>	<p>The EFI provides multi-year grants, though these fall short of being “long-term.” Not all Activate partners provide multi-year grants. The initiative intentionally does not impose thematic priorities on grantees, meaning that their areas of intervention are diverse and disparate. This limits the ability to use the grant-making program to achieve strategic-level outcomes related to certain issues or causes. However, the policy and partnerships program area advances strategic-level outcomes through advocacy work.</p>

Good alignment

Partial alignment

Poor alignment

Could not assess

Annex 5: Alignment with feminist principles

Principle	Partnership for Gender Equality	Equality Fund Initiative
<p>7. Adapt system and processes within the institution to be coherent with feminist principles and to be viable for small organizations to become and remain part of the program (due diligence, accountability, contracting, risk assessments, monitoring and evaluation).</p>	<p>The PGE was established through a heavily adapted contribution agreement. The structure of the initiative shifted risk and due diligence responsibilities for the grant-making program to the Equality Fund. While key performance indicators were introduced, Global Affairs Canada’s standard reporting practices apply, and a multitude of capacity assessment exercises during the design-and-build phase created a heavy burden of compliance.</p>	<p>The EFI represents a shift away from project-based funding, and grant-making processes have been adapted accordingly to respond to the needs of grantee partners. For example, application processes have been heavily streamlined and include non-competitive partner selection processes. Reporting has also been structured to minimize the burden on grantees, with more personalized outreach and a focus on the most significant changes, rather than standardized measures of progress and accountability. Activate partners have been able to further adapt their grant-making processes to better respond to diverse contexts and the needs of small or nascent organizations.</p>
<p>8. Promote engagement from other donors, particularly through multi-stakeholder initiatives.</p>	<p>Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund have worked collaboratively on outreach efforts to potential bilateral donors. The successful engagement with the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and ongoing efforts to secure additional funders, are meant to position the Equality Fund Initiative as a global platform for funding women’s rights and feminist organizations. Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund also collaborated to help launch the Alliance for Feminist Movements, which brings together participants from civil society, government and private philanthropy.</p>	<p>The Equality Fund has, in some cases, been able to connect its grantees with donors such as Global Affairs Canada through its advocacy work and in support of resource mobilization efforts. However, Canadian (and British) diplomatic missions abroad were not well-connected with the Equality Fund and its grantees, which limited their ability to advance shared goals.</p>

Good alignment

Partial alignment

Poor alignment

Could not assess

Annex 5: Alignment with feminist principles

Principle	Partnership for Gender Equality	Equality Fund Initiative
<p>9. Build on the expertise of activists and civil society actors involved in the feminist funding ecosystem.</p>	<p>The application and design process for the PGE was informed by engagements with civil society actors and philanthropists. This included round tables in London, New York and Nairobi, and the formation of an external advisory committee to support GAC. These engagements were primarily with stakeholders from the Global North, with a greater emphasis on private philanthropy and investors, given GAC’s own capacity gaps. It should be noted that the design of the PGE came shortly after the development of the WVLP Program, which included a wide-ranging consultative approach that sought out perspectives from Global South activists.</p>	<p>The design of the Equality Fund Initiative was informed by extensive consultations with the feminist movement during the design-and-build phase. These consultations, held in partnership with AWID, engaged over 1,000 activists and organizers from at least 66 countries in the Global South. The Equality Fund promotes ongoing engagement with feminist activists through its Investment Advisory Council and has expanded and diversified the membership of the organization’s board. Feminist leaders have also been involved in grantee selection processes for the Catalyze stream.</p>
<p>10. Promote movement building across regions and issues through programming, advocacy and policy dialogue.</p>	<p>Global Affairs Canada and the Equality Fund collaborated to help launch the Alliance for Feminist Movements. This was a clear example of how the partners have promoted a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together diverse members to advocate for more resources for women’s rights and feminist organizations. The partners have also collaborated on advocacy efforts in other international networks, such as the Generation Equality Forum.</p>	<p>The EFI has supported a number of networking and movement-building activities and has helped to amplify the voices of feminist activists from the Global South in different policy-making spaces. The Equality Fund’s convening efforts in Lebanon stand out as a successful example of movement-building. However, there was a recurring demand from grantees to more systematically create spaces for exchange and learning across regions and issues, so that grantees could learn from each other.</p>

Good alignment

Partial alignment

Poor alignment

Could not assess

Annex 6: Alignment with locally led Development Principles

As part of the Evaluation of the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, the Evaluation Division developed a framework for assessing locally led development. This framework has since been refined and applied to both the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program and the Equality Fund Initiative.

Dimensions of locally led development	Rating	Explanation
Location of partner organization	☹	The signatories to the contribution agreement are all Canadian-based organizations.
Level of direct funding to local organizations	😊	Through the Equality Fund and its Activate partners, grants are provided to women’s rights and feminist organizations in ODA-eligible countries.
Nature of partnership	😊	Equality Fund Initiative grantees appreciated the trust-based, feminist partnerships they enjoyed with the Equality Fund and its Activate partners.
Local ownership and leadership – programming design	😊	The Equality Fund did not impose thematic priorities on its grantees. While some Activate partners did have thematic funding pillars, they were broad enough to allow on-grant recipients to focus on issues of the greatest importance to them.
Local ownership and leadership – programming management	😊	The Equality Fund and its Activate partners did not impose activities on their grantees, effectively transferring power for day-to-day programming decisions.
Local ownership and leadership – governance	😊	The Equality Fund Initiative did not fund organizations a project basis. Decision making was left to grantees, rather than imposing structures on them.
Local ownership and leadership – monitoring, evaluation and learning	😊	The Equality Fund Initiative adopted flexible reporting approaches that reduced the burden on grantees and emphasized gathering narratives of change.
Relevance of capacity building to organizational needs	😊	The Grants+ approach was grounded in a recognition of organizations’ existing capacity, and offered the possibility to request additional support as needed.
Operational and administrative requirements	😊	The Equality Fund and Activate partners have adopted simplified application, reporting and due diligence approaches to minimize the burden on applicants and grantees.

😊= Good alignment

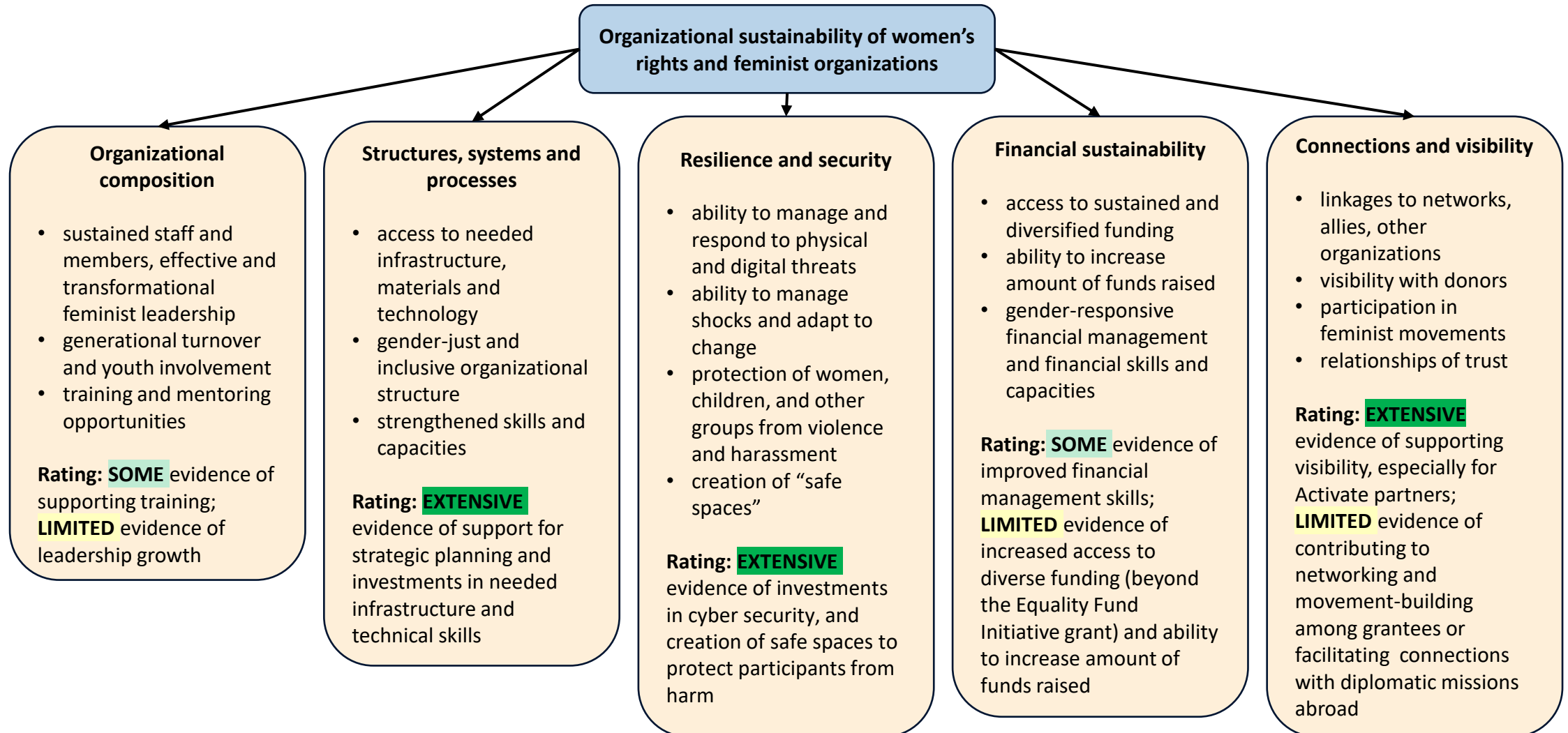
☺= Partial alignment

☹= Poor alignment

⚠= Could not assess

Annex 7: Sustainability model for women’s rights and feminist organizations

This framework was developed collaboratively by the Evaluation Division (PRA) and Gender Equality Division (MGS) as part of the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation. It was used as a data collection and analysis tool to assess contributions to strengthening the organizational capacity of Equality Fund Initiative grantees. It was applied during data collection in the 4 country case studies and as part of the grant-making portfolio review using NVivo 12 software.



Annex 8: The evaluation team and additional contributors

The evaluation team

Core evaluation team

(Global Affairs Canada Evaluation Division)



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Core contact group

The evaluation team relied heavily on the support and input of the evaluation core contact group, made up of staff from the Equality Fund, WUSC, Toronto Foundation and KSI. The Equality Fund grant-making team was also instrumental in developing and implementing the case study approach.

Deep-dive case study participating organizations

The following organizations directly participated in our case studies and supported us with logistics, participating in data collection and offering their insights during the analysis process.

Colombia	Fondo Lunaria	Vida Afro Latina
	Ruta Pacifica	GAAT
	Red Umbrella Fund	
Kenya	African Women's Development Fund	UHAI EASHRI
	Jumuiya Women's Fund	Urgent Action Fund Africa
	Numun Fund	
Lebanon	CRTD-A	Knowledge Workshop
	Doria Feminist Fund	Marsa
	Gharsah	PWHO
Nepal	The Story Kitchen	Hamro Palo (Our Turn)
	Tewa	National Indigenous Disabled Women Association of Nepal
	International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)	Urgent Action Fund Asia/Pacific

Advisory group

The evaluation was supported by an advisory group, whose membership included thematic experts at Global Affairs Canada and other members of the feminist funding ecosystem.

Annex 9: Abridged evaluation matrix

Evaluation Issue	Evaluation Question	Evaluation Sub Questions	Lines of Evidence
Relevance of the Partnership for Gender Equality/Equality Fund Initiative (Relevance)	1. To what extent and in what ways has the Partnership for Gender Equality/Equality Fund Initiative responded to the needs of diverse women's rights and feminist organizations, feminist movements and the global feminist funding ecosystem?	1.1 To what extent has the establishment of the Partnership for Gender Equality responded to the needs of the feminist funding ecosystem? Has it contributed to filling an identified gap? Has this changed over time?	Whole-of-initiative document review Literature review Key informant interviews
		1.2 To what extent does the Partnership for Gender Equality align with the policy and programming goals of the Feminist International Assistance Policy? How does it compare with other GAC initiatives in support of women's rights and feminist organizations?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews
		1.3 To what extent and how have the different forms of support and engagement provided by the Equality Fund Initiative responded to the needs of diverse women's rights and feminist organizations?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews EFI grant-making portfolio review Case studies

Evaluation Issue	Evaluation Question	Evaluation Sub Questions	Lines of Evidence
<p>Integrating intersectional feminist principles and locally led development</p> <p>(Relevance and effectiveness)</p>	<p>2. To what extent and how has the Partnership for Gender Equality / Equality Fund Initiative integrated feminist principles and good practices for locally led development in its ways of working, relationships and programming?</p>	<p>2.1 To what extent and how have the Partnership for Gender Equality’s model, governance structures, and ways of working embraced feminist principles? What has worked well? What were the challenges? What lessons can be learned to date?</p>	<p>Literature review Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews</p>
		<p>2.2 To what extent and how have the Partnership for Gender Equality model, governance structure and ways of working enabled power to be shifted i) among/between partner institutions; and ii) to women’s funds and women’s rights and feminist organizations in the Global South? What has worked well? What were the challenges? What are the lessons learned to date?</p>	<p>Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews Case studies</p>
		<p>2.3 To what extent has the relationship between GAC and Equality Fund Initiative partners allowed for mutual exchange and learning? In what ways are these exchanges influencing the respective institutions?</p>	<p>Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews</p>
		<p>2.4 To what extent does the design and implementation of the Equality Fund Initiative’s programming reflect emerging good practices for feminist programming? How and to what extent is power being shifted in the different program areas?</p>	<p>Whole-of-initiative document review Literature review Key informant interviews Case studies</p>
		<p>2.5 To what extent does the Partnership for Gender Equality model reflect good practices for locally led development?</p>	<p>Whole-of-initiative document review Literature review Key informant interviews Case studies</p>
		<p>2.6 To what extent and how has the Equality Fund Initiative’s programming integrated an intersectional approach to account for the multiple and overlapping identities of women, girls and non-binary people?</p>	<p>Literature review Document review Key informant interviews Case studies Portfolio review</p>

Evaluation Issue	Evaluation Question	Evaluation Sub Questions	Lines of Evidence
Early results (Effectiveness and coherence)	3. What has been the early progress toward results, and lessons learned, from the different program areas of the Equality Fund Initiative?	3.1 What early progress has been made toward results for the i) global grant-making; ii) fund mobilization; iii) gender-lens investing; iv) design and build; and v) policy and partnerships program areas?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews EFI grant-making portfolio review Case studies
		3.2 Are there any results from the various program areas that can be highlighted specifically for marginalized and underrepresented communities?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews EFI grant-making portfolio review Case studies
		3.3 What factors (positive and negative) have affected the progress toward results from the i) global grant-making; ii) fund mobilization; iii) gender-lens investing; iv) design and build; and v) policy and partnerships program areas?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews EFI grant-making portfolio review Case studies
		3.4 What lessons can be learned from the early stages of implementing the i) global grant-making; ii) fund mobilization; iii) gender-lens investing; iv) design and build; and v) policy and partnerships program areas?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews Case studies
		3.5 To what extent have the advocacy and influencing efforts of Global Affairs Canada and Equality Fund Initiative partners contributed to positive changes in the feminist funding landscape? What lessons can be learned from these efforts?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews Case studies
		3.6 How well do the Equality Fund Initiative’s key programs (global grant-making, fund mobilization, gender-lens investing, design and build, policy and partnerships) work together under “one roof”?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews Case studies
		3.7 Have there been any unintended results (positive or negative) of the programming or engagements by the members of the Partnership for Gender Equality?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews Case studies

Evaluation Issue	Evaluation Question	Evaluation Sub Questions	Lines of Evidence
Establishing and supporting the PGE (Effectiveness and efficiency)	4. What has GAC learned from establishing and providing ongoing support to the Partnership for Gender Equality?	4.1 What aspects, if any, of the Partnership for Gender Equality are innovative? How does the initiative and its model differ from more conventional grants and contributions programming at GAC?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews
		4.2 What have been key success factors and barriers in establishing and providing ongoing support to the PGE?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews
		4.3 What changes and/or innovations were made to existing systems, processes and/or tools in order to establish and provide ongoing support to the Partnership for Gender Equality? What worked well? What challenges remained?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews
		4.4 To what extent has Global Affairs Canada had the necessary capacities and expertise to establish and provide ongoing support to the Partnership for Gender Equality? Are there still gaps that need to be addressed?	Whole-of-initiative document review Key informant interviews

Annex 10: Equality Fund's progress on organizational capacity development

Organizational Capacity	Areas of Progress
<i>Strategic leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Equality Fund has established a diverse and capable board to provide strategic oversight and guidance to the organization -The Equality Fund's co-CEOs were recognized as providing valuable leadership during the design and build process -Respected program-level leadership is in place for most-program areas, though turnover in the gender-lens investment and philanthropy programs has proven challenging
<i>Program management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Equality Fund's program areas have developed high-level strategies, with varying degrees of detail -There are gaps in integrated planning across program areas, with some siloing of programmatic efforts
<i>Process management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Grant-making processes and systems are well-developed and functional -Monitoring and evaluation systems for grant-making are well-developed, but less developed for other program areas and at an initiative-wide level
<i>Human resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Equality Fund has nearly reached its target staffing level, and has put in place the necessary policies and procedures for managing human resources effectively -The Equality Fund is attracting skilled staff that fit the needs of the organization -There is no clear strategy on how to more systematically use remote hiring to extend the organization's reach and to recruit specific skill sets or language profiles (e.g. French) that are currently limited
<i>Financial management</i>	<p>This dimension was not assessed based on the agreed scope and a forthcoming transfer readiness assessment. The recently completed financial capacity building activity noted that the Equality Fund has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -developed comprehensive financial management policies and procedures that are well-documented, though some versions are still in draft form -comprehensively documented administrative and accounting financial policies and procedures
<i>Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The Equality Fund has successfully shifted to a virtual-by-default model, with a reduced office footprint -The Equality Fund has put in place the necessary IT systems (e.g. Salesforce) for its core functions

Appendix: Case study summaries



Photo credit: The Story Kitchen, Nepal

Colombia



Fondo Lunaria is one of the Equality Fund’s Activate partners in Colombia. Fondo Lunaria’s grant-making approach reflects principles of intersectional feminism, with a strong commitment to anti-racism and the inclusion of queer and trans women. Approximately 30% of its sub-grant recipients are Afro-Colombian, a community that has been disproportionately affected by racism, conflict and displacement. Approximately 70% of Fondo Lunaria’s recipient organizations are legally unregistered.

Fondo Lunaria noted that the flexibility offered by feminist funders such as the Equality Fund, with no predetermined thematic priorities, was a supporting factor in being able to reach such diverse grantees.

Image Source: Evaluation team, Colombia.

Colombia experienced 50 years of civil conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which disproportionately affected women, especially Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women. In 2016, the Colombian government and FARC signed a peace agreement. Women’s rights and feminist organizations have been a powerful force in the public debate on the legacy of the conflict. They have also played an important role in advocacy efforts to defend territory and promote gender equality and the rights of structurally excluded communities.

The Equality Fund supported 2 major women’s movements in Colombia: Fondo Lunaria (through the Activate stream) and Ruta Pacifica De Las Mujeres (through the Catalyze stream). GAAT, a Colombian transgender women’s organization, also received Catalyze funding. VidaAfrolatina, a regional fund focused on Black communities, and Red Umbrella Fund, a global sex workers’ rights fund, had sub-grantees in Colombia.

This case study demonstrated the Equality Fund Initiative’s ability to reach a rich diversity of organizations, reflecting good practices for feminist, locally led development. The grantees and sub-grantees ranged from national-level networks to grassroots organizations that are not legally registered. Afro-descendant, young feminist and LBTQI+ groups have received significant support in Colombia. The Equality Fund Initiative funding also helped to promote young women’s leadership and political activism.

The support offered through the Catalyze stream helped organizations to strengthen their capacity in areas like policy advocacy and communications. Activate funding allowed recipients to expand their grant-making operations and reach diverse communities (see sidebar). Their sub-grantees also benefited from this support. For example, a Fondo Lunaria grantee described how “we learned how to keep accounting information and manage the forms. Thanks to this experience, our organization is now more organized and rigorous in the processes we develop.”

A key theme for partners in Colombia was movement building. While movement building was a noted challenge for the Equality Fund Initiative (see pages [18](#) and [31](#)), direct grantees and sub-grantees in Colombia were active in forging connections between diverse communities to build a stronger, more inclusive women’s movement. This included the *Cartografías* workshops organized by Ruta Pacifica (see [page 32](#)). Fondo Lunaria used its grant from the Equality Fund to establish a movement-building fund that would allow it to support specific activism efforts and different types of collective action.

Grantees called for additional support from the Equality Fund Initiative to support movement-building and consolidation of the feminist movement in Colombia. The evaluation team also identified opportunities to link the work of the Equality Fund Initiative with the Women’s Voice and Leadership Colombia project.

Kenya



The African Women's Development Fund has supported 16 grantees in Kenya, one of which was the Most At Risk Young Mothers and Teenage Girls Living with HIV Initiative (MOYOTE). MOYOTE is a community-based organization in Nairobi that operates a safe house for young mothers and women living with HIV. It has since grown into a support group for young people from 4 informal settlements who are engaged in sex work, using drugs or alcohol, or are experiencing sexual and gender-based violence. MOYOTE has provided a safe space for youth and helped them to acquire vocational and life skills. The organization also engaged with law enforcement, health-care workers and policy-makers to advocate for the rights of structurally excluded girls and young women.

Image Source: Evaluation team, Kenya.

Kenya is one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest economies and has a vibrant, diverse and well-developed civil society. Formal and informal women's rights organizations and activists in Kenya have a long history of challenging patriarchy and unequal power dynamics, and holding legislators and public officials accountable to national, regional and global human rights standards. With Kenya seeking to strengthen existing penalties against homosexuality, LGBTQI+ rights have been a major point of contention within the women's rights movement, straining relationships between more traditional women's rights organizations and explicitly feminist organizations. The African feminist movement defines itself by its intersectional, inclusive and activist approach, prioritizing the voices of structurally excluded communities that are underrepresented in the mainstream women's movement.

The Equality Fund's partners in Kenya were supported through the Activate stream. This included 3 partners based in Kenya: Jumuiya Women Fund, which provided grants in Kenya; UHAI EASHRI, which works across East Africa; and Urgent Action Fund Africa, which works across the continent. Two global funds, Numun Fund and Red Umbrella Fund, also had grantees in Kenya, as did the African Women's Development Fund.

The Kenya case study demonstrated the value of the Activate stream as a tool for achieving locally led development. The Activate stream allowed the Equality Fund to tap into the strong capacity of Kenya-based partners, and provided a pathway to reach organizations that would otherwise struggle to attract funding and capacity-building support. The sub-grantees represented some of Kenya's most marginalized communities, including sex workers and LGBTQI+ organizations (see example [page 33](#)), groups representing women with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, and women working in the garment and tea industries.

While there were a significant number of sub-grantees in Nairobi, others were spread throughout the country, and Activate partners contextualized their support to these communities. For example, Jumuiya Women Fund primarily supported nascent or unregistered organizations in rural areas. Its grants were relatively short (6-12 months) and small (less than \$10K) but came with extensive hands-on accompaniment. Some of their grantees leveraged this first experience as a grant recipient to legitimize their work and to secure other funding opportunities. The evaluation team suggested that more systematic data on whether sub-grantees access additional funding would further demonstrate the effectiveness of the Activate stream.

Sub-grantees worked on diverse issues, from economic empowerment to raising awareness about the harmful effects of certain cultural practices. Some provided legal or health services, while others provided vocational or agricultural training. Participants emphasized the importance of these activities in building their confidence and self-esteem. To amplify their efforts more widely, sub-grantees connected with community elders, faith leaders, law enforcement officers, health workers, educators and government officials. These efforts contributed to positive steps in changing social norms in their communities.

Lebanon



The Women's Humanitarian Organization (PWHO) supports Palestinian women, children and others living in refugee camps in Lebanon. Among its many initiatives, PWHO provides early childhood education to refugee children, including inclusive education programs for children with disabilities. Refugees in Lebanon have limited opportunities to work outside the camps, and PWHO takes great pride in the fact that 90% of its staff are Palestinian women who now have stable jobs. Support from the Equality Fund allowed PWHO to invest in its organizational capacity, including hiring a public relations officer who has been able to strengthen relationships with other actors inside the camps and throughout Lebanon, including with fellow Equality Fund grantees.

Image Source: PWHO, Lebanon.

Lebanon has been experiencing a complex economic and political crisis for the past several years, which resulted in a mass protest movement across the country beginning in October 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic compounded Lebanon's challenges, with real GDP contracting by as much as 26% in 2020. The country was further plunged into crisis on August 4, 2020, when the capital, Beirut, suffered one of the largest non-nuclear explosions in recorded history. The blast killed 218 people and left 300,000 residents homeless.

Lebanon has a rich history of civil society and feminist organizing. Unfortunately, gender inequalities have been exacerbated by the crisis, and the civic space for political organizing has narrowed. Women's rights and feminist organizations in Lebanon have struggled with an increasingly scarce funding landscape and an accelerating brain drain as many Lebanese seek to emigrate for better opportunities abroad.

The Equality Fund Initiative supported 5 organizations in Lebanon through its Catalyze grants and 1 organization, the Doria Feminist Fund, through an Activate partnership. Headquartered in Beirut, the Doria Feminist Fund works throughout the Middle East and North African region. The grantees are diverse in the constituencies they support, but also the issues they work on.

The Lebanon case study demonstrated the Equality Fund's potential role as a convener. In 2022, the Equality Fund organized a networking activity for its grantees that participating organizations greatly appreciated from a learning perspective. The activity also led to concrete collaborations. For example, Gharsah, which represents Syrian refugees, was able to form new connections with CRTD-A, an organization that focuses on issues such as citizenship rights. PWHO (see sidebar) was able to partner with a fellow Equality Fund grantee on sexual and reproductive health programming in Palestinian refugee camps. The Equality Fund's contributions to movement-building in Lebanon stood out, as this was seen as a gap in other countries.

Another key theme emerging from Lebanon was feminist partnerships. Catalyze grantees greatly appreciated their human-centred, trust-based relationship with the Equality Fund. One of the Equality Fund's project officers is herself of Lebanese descent, and grantees were adamant that having an Arabic-speaking counterpart who understood the Lebanese context was a crucial factor behind their successful relationship. Doria's grantees also appreciated having a funder they could relate to and communicate with easily.

The Equality Fund Initiative grants contributed to maintaining and expanding grantees' programming. This included providing affirming sexual health care and services for refugee communities, and documenting the stories of the feminist movement in Lebanon. These grantees provided safe spaces in difficult times, and affirmed the rights of women and gender-diverse people when these rights were increasingly threatened. Grantees suggested they would welcome opportunities to more actively engage with the Embassy of Canada to Lebanon, especially amidst the current gender backlash.

Nepal



Tewa, which means "support" in Nepali, is one of the Equality Fund's Activate partners. Its grantees are diverse and include women with disabilities and women from structurally excluded ethnic and religious communities (e.g. Dalit, Muslims, Madeshi ethnic group).

Tewa has dedicated considerable effort to building the capacity of its own sub-grantees. This included training sessions on monitoring and evaluation, and on how to integrate feminist principles. Tewa also implemented a mentorship program for some of its grantees, with a focus on developing youth leaders and succession plans in order to support the organizations' long-term sustainability.

Image Source: Tewa, Nepal.

Nepal has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and has a comprehensive legal framework for women's rights.¹² It also stands out on LGBTQI+ rights within the region: in June 2023, a landmark Supreme Court ruling ordered the Nepali government to register same-sex marriages, with the first taking place in November 2023.¹³

While legal rights are well-established in Nepal, implementation has been uneven. Nepali women and girls continue to face multiple forms of discrimination and gender inequalities, particularly those with intersecting identities. Women are underrepresented in the workforce and in elected offices, and Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia.¹⁴

The Equality Fund Initiative supported 3 Catalyze partners in Nepal, and 1 national women's fund through the Activate stream. Other regional and global funds, including Women's Fund Asia, Urgent Action Fund Asia and Pacific, and FIMI, the International Indigenous Women's Forum, also had sub-grantees in Nepal. Grantees in Nepal emphasized the importance of local women's funds like Tewa for extending funding to diverse, grassroots organizations that other donors often missed or excluded.

The Nepal case study underscored the importance of considering the intersecting identities of women. For example, one of the grantees in Nepal was the National Indigenous Disabled Women Association, an organization whose name itself is a clear expression of intersectionality. Its work supported Indigenous women, women with disabilities, rural women and those whose identities cut across these dimensions. Intersectionality, including addressing inequalities related to caste, was a key consideration for all the grantees in Nepal.

Grantees appreciated the flexibility of the Equality Fund Initiative's support. This was especially important in a country that experiences frequent natural disasters, but extended to other emerging issues as well. This flexibility was critical during the COVID-19 pandemic, as many organizations shifted to providing emergency relief supplies to structurally excluded households.

Given the disparity between legal rights and the actual experiences of women and girls, grantees in Nepal focused heavily on raising awareness of the rights that communities are entitled to and building their confidence to claim these rights. This included Hamro Palo's work with adolescent girls (see [page 32](#)) as well as Tewa's support for networks of local government officials from Dalit and other ethnic minorities. Leadership and legal advocacy training for grassroots communities equipped women to more actively engage in policy-making spaces, enriching these discussions with their diverse experiences. The efforts of Equality Fund Initiative grantees in Nepal equipped women and girls to more fully participate in social and political spaces.

¹² "Nepal must now deliver on promise of social justice – UN human rights expert." (2021). UN Human Rights. [Link](#).

¹³ "Nepal Registers Same-Sex Marriage – A First." (2023). Human Rights Watch. [Link](#).

¹⁴ "Nepal Country Profile." (2021). UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. [Link](#).

Environmental justice



As noted by the United Nations, “Indigenous peoples are among the first to face the direct consequences of climate change, due to their dependence upon, and close relationship with, the environment and its resources.”^x Environmental justice was a major priority for Indigenous organizations supported by the Equality Fund, particularly in relation to land rights and natural resource development. LILAK, a Catalyze grantee in the Philippines, hosted learning exchanges between members of the environmental movement, women’s movement and Indigenous communities. These were platforms to build shared understanding and advance collective action against the negative effects of extractive industries in their communities.

Image Source: LILAK, Philippines.

^x “Climate Change.” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Indigenous Peoples. [Link](#).

Climate change and natural resource development have led to severe human rights impacts, including social and gender inequalities, and the increased marginalization of certain communities. The movement for environmental justice is focused on upholding, protecting and fulfilling environmental and human rights and promoting an environmental rule of law.¹⁵

Environmental justice was a theme that cut across the Equality Fund Initiative’s various program areas. As part of its policy and partnerships efforts, in September 2021 the Equality Fund convened over 30 representatives from Global South women’s rights and feminist organizations for a Dialogue on Feminist Climate Action. This dialogue resulted in a report that was widely shared with participants at the COP26 meeting in Glasgow.

The gender-lens investment program also integrated environmental considerations, using environmental screens to ensure that the fund was not invested in companies engaged in environmentally harmful activities like unsustainable commercial logging. There were also positive screens to promote investment in companies committed to environmental sustainability. Companies supported through the investment portfolio had 42% lower CO₂ emissions and 25% lower energy usage compared to a global benchmark.¹⁶

The grant-making program supported a significant number of grantees focused on environmental justice. One of their main areas of focus was land rights, in recognition that women in many countries face legal challenges to controlling land. For example, FESA, an African Women’s Development Fund grantee in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hosted workshops for 160 women farmers. More than 37% of the training recipients were able to gain legal access rights to their land through their advocacy with the local authorities.

Equality Fund Initiative grantees created advocacy tools and documented human rights abuses, particularly in relation to mining (see [page 33](#)). They also extended support to human rights defenders through training and through legal and security assistance. Voice of Mitooma, an African Women’s Development Fund grantee in Uganda, was able to train 160 journalists, lawyers and women’s human rights defenders, and established a team of 17 female lawyers from across the country who could assist women facing environmental injustice. In Nepal, Activate sub-grantees provided legal aid to communities adversely affected by dams.

Environmental justice grantees were highly active in building networks and movements, despite this being a gap for the Equality Fund Initiative overall. Activate grantees like Fondo de Mujeres del Sur fostered connections among their own sub-grantees and supported them to participate in international forums. Grantees also forged connections between the environmental and women’s movements; for example, the Knowledge Workshop organization in Lebanon developed a book on eco-feminism in Lebanon and reached out to eco-feminists in Mexico and Ecuador.

¹⁵ “Environmental Justice: Securing our right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment.” (2022). UNDP. [Link](#).

¹⁶ RockCreek calculates a benchmark comparison to the MSCI All Country World Index.

Feminist responses to crises



One of the Equality Fund's main partners in advancing a feminist response to crises were the Urgent Action Sister Funds (UAF). The Equality Fund provided Activate grants to UAF Africa and UAF Asia/Pacific, as well as Prepare, Respond and Care grants to the global UAF for Feminist Activism. The UAFs provided rapid-response grants to activists and organizations for urgent and unanticipated needs. Given the current context, an increasing share of their work went towards crisis response. For example, UAF received targeted funding for Ukraine, and flexible support that was used to respond to crises such as those in Lebanon and Iraq. The Urgent Action Funds have also contributed to convening and movement building. For example, in November 2022 UAF Africa hosted the Feminist Republik Festival in Kenya, bringing together over 600 activists from Africa and the African diaspora.

Image Source: Urgent Action Fund, Kenya.

The global need for humanitarian assistance has continued to grow in recent years, with increasing numbers of people displaced by conflict and climate disasters, and countries grappling with the lingering economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women and girls are at the forefront of crisis responses, playing a central role in the survival and resilience of their families and communities. Women-led and feminist organizations are often the first to provide humanitarian assistance when governments and non-governmental organizations are unable to reach structurally excluded communities.¹⁷

While the volume of gender-specific international humanitarian assistance is increasing, very little reaches women's rights and feminist organizations. Data shows that "the proportion of total gender-specific funding directly provided to local and national actors has [fallen] from 4.8% in 2018 to 3.1% in 2020."¹⁸ In fragile and conflict-affected states, a mere 0.2% of total bilateral aid went to women's rights and feminist organizations.¹⁹

The Equality Fund Initiative sought to advance feminist responses to crisis through its policy and partnerships efforts. The Equality Fund raised awareness of the disproportionate impact of crises on women and gender-diverse people, as well as their untapped potential as key actors in crisis response. The Equality Fund has made specific recommendations to the Government of Canada to incorporate a feminist perspective in its responses to crises in Afghanistan, Sudan and Ukraine, and has amplified the voices of its grant-making partners.

The Equality Fund launched its Prepare, Respond and Care grant-making pilot ahead of schedule to respond to the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. The case study demonstrated that this stream has provided flexible, relevant and timely support to structurally excluded communities facing conflict, displacement and natural disasters. These grants leveraged women's rights and feminist organizations' proximity to these communities to ensure an intersectional response that acknowledges multiple forms of exclusion.

While Prepare, Respond and Care offered targeted funding for crisis response, the flexibility of the other streams meant that grantees in countries like Nepal could reallocate funding to respond to emerging needs and crises. Catalyze and Activate grants also supported organizations facing more protracted crises in countries such as Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Grantees emphasized that, in conceptualizing a "feminist response to crisis," funders must look beyond acute humanitarian crises to consider the "everyday crises" (e.g. female genital mutilation) and crises of exclusion (e.g. anti-LGBTQI+ laws). This may also necessitate more unconventional crisis responses; for example, Knowledge Workshop described its response to the complex crisis in Lebanon as "building bridges across communities... there is no legal or political space right now to advocate for better in our country. Our response is to build stronger communities, creating a foundation that can respond and push for better once that window opens."

¹⁷ "Beyond Crisis: A feminist humanitarian response that centers girls and young people." (2022). Global Resilience Fund. [Link](#).

¹⁸ "Funding for gender-relevant humanitarian response. (2022). Development Initiatives. [Link](#).

¹⁹ "Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General." (2020). United Nations Security Council. [Link](#).

Human rights for LGBTQI+ people



Aleanca (Alliance Against Discrimination of LGBT people) is an Albanian organization working to advance human rights for LGBTQI+ people. Aleanca's work is diverse and extensive; it provides sexual and mental health services, as well as direct financial support to community members in need. Aleanca also engages in policy advocacy, public activism and outreach with other civil society organizations. The financial support from the Equality Fund has helped Aleanca to retain its staff; according to Aleanca, "we have been focusing our effort for the past 2 years on how to grow instead of how to survive." Core funding from the Equality Fund allowed Aleanca to use other funding sources to expand the scope of its work. Aleanca has also done extensive outreach work, developing connections with the Roma community and disability rights activists to advance a more inclusive feminist movement in Albania.

Image Source: Aleanca, Albania.

Despite years of progress in many countries around the world, the rights of LGBTQI+ people came under serious threat in 2023. The global gender backlash continued to gain strength, specifically taking aim at feminism and the LGBTQI+ community. Threats of violence, either at the hands of state security forces or from the general public (especially through social media) escalated. It was noted that "Women (including LBQ activists) and trans human rights defenders appear to be particularly vulnerable to backlash and repression due to the use of sexualised violence to silence or intimidate them."²⁰

The Equality Fund Initiative supported human rights for LGBTQI+ people through its advocacy work. The Equality Fund is a member of Dignity Network Canada and has co-chaired its Advocacy and Government Relations Working Group. This group lobbied the Government of Canada on various issues related to LGBTQI+ rights and international assistance, including the response to Uganda's *Anti-Homosexuality Act*, sharing programming best practices with Global Affairs Canada's Pan-Africa program, and advocating for the appointment of a special envoy on 2SLGBTQI+ rights.

The Equality Fund Initiative has provided grants to LGBTQI+ organizations through its various grant streams. This included direct grants to LGBTQI+ organizations through the Catalyze stream, Activate grants to 2 LGBTQI+-focused funds, and numerous sub-grants provided by other Activate partners. The African Women's Development Fund supported a significant number of LGBTQI+ groups in East Africa.

Many grantees faced violence and repression and were forced to shift their efforts to emergency response programming. This was true of AWDF grantees in Uganda, as well as organizations supported by regional fund UHAI EASHIRI. These organizations were able to provide safe spaces and resources for their communities to flee from violence. One partner in Lebanon provided queer-affirming sexual health services—one of the only remaining providers to do so in a country facing a complex crisis.

LBQ and trans women can be sidelined in some countries' queer and feminist movements, and Equality Fund Initiative grants have supported efforts to build alliances and advance inclusion. For example, Equal Ground in Sri Lanka used its funding to expand Colombo Pride and bring in new, non-traditional allies.

Some grantees succeeded in forging connections with the public sector. For example, Triangle Project in South Africa succeeded in partnering with school authorities in Western Cape province, introducing a comprehensive curriculum that promotes understanding and tolerance of LGBTQI+ youth.

At a time of crisis, the Equality Fund Initiative supported efforts to advance rights for LGBTQI+ people where possible, and to protect LGBTQI+ people where it was not. This support was highly relevant and essential in the current context, and reflected a commitment to an inclusive, intersectional feminist approach.

²⁰ "Standing Firm." (2017). Mama Cash and Urgent Action Fund. [Link](#).