Why Wait?

How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women's Rights Organisations

With contributions from

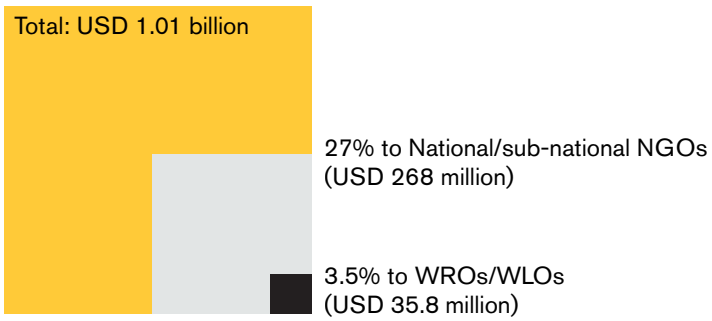
development initiatives

Summary:

Women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs/WLOs) are a critical driving force in providing effective gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services to women and girls impacted by conflict and displacement. WROs/WLOs are the best placed to understand the needs of women and girls and deploy context-specific strategies that can make a lasting impact to increase gender equality and end GBV. Organisations that root their response in feminist thought have long been championing increased partnerships and funding to WROs/WLOs.[1] Through this sustained advocacy the role of WROs/WLOs is increasingly recognised within policy by donors, the United Nations (UN), and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)[2] under the wider rubric of localisation.[3]

Despite this rhetorical recognition at policy level, funding to WROs/WLOs has been and remains incredibly low. WROs/WLOs face different and persistent barriers than other national and subnational organisations. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) found that 90.7% of WROs/WLOs feel that their organisation's existence is at risk due to lack of institutional funding or core funding. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that it allocated only 35.8 million of its Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) to WROs/WLOs in 2021, which is a mere 3.5% of the total sum.[4] In contrast, OCHA successfully distributed 27% (US$268 million) of its US$1.01 billion CBPF allocation directly to national and sub-national organisations in the same year.[5]

CBPF allocations to WROs/WLOs relative to total allocation and allocations to NNGOs, 2021.



Source: OCHA CBPF annual report 2021

1. See, for example, the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Programme: https://ww2preventvawg.org/ & Mama Cash and AWID, 2020. Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How bilateral and multilateral funders can resource feminist movements. https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MovingMoreMoney_FINALFINAL.pdf
2. See for example, the Global Action Plan resulting from the Generation Equality Forum; the Women, Peace and Security Humanitarian Action Compact.
3. The Grand Bargain (Official Website). https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain
4. OCHA. County-Based Pooled Funds 2021 In Review. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/CBPF_2021_inReview_masterlayout_20220607.pdf
5. Ibid.

A new analysis by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), with contributions from Development Initiatives, provides analysis and insights from across three contexts, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Ukraine, to reveal the pervasive systemic barriers to WROs/WLOs accessing humanitarian funding. The qualitative analysis is based on interviews with WROs/WLOs working on GBV prevention and response. The quantitative data analysis focuses on one funding mechanism, the OCHA CBPFs, as an example of the wider challenges and opportunities for increased funding to national and sub-national organisations addressing GBV. The report is not exhaustive but, through its focused sample of primarily national and some sub-national WROs/WLOs and international organisations, provides a window into the barriers and opportunities for increased funding for national and sub-national WROs/WLOs. The feedback generated from across the three contexts of this report coalesce around a few major themes:

- WROs/WLOs struggle to meet many of the application criteria and requirements necessary to secure CBPF resources. These include fund sizes that are too large for many WROs/WLOs, the inability for funding applications to be made in local languages, and requirements for WROs/WLOs to have written policies in place specific to the UN. Respondents also reported the tendency of CBPF awards to go to organisations that already have a track record of partnership with the UN. These factors create a bias against smaller WROs/WLOs with no previous partnership profile and those with limited resources to invest in meeting UN requirements, which can foster unequal power relations within national and sub-national civil society. Additionally, evidence in this report suggests that WROs/WLOs experience a double-disadvantage when it comes to accessing funding, both as national or sub-national organisations competing with international and national actors for funds, and additionally as organisations being run by or focusing on women within wider patriarchal systems.

- The absence of WROs/WLOs in leadership and decision-making related to CBPF allocations contributes to the pervasiveness of barriers described above. This includes the historical lack of inclusion on CBPF Advisory Boards, which play a key role in working with the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) regarding the strategic vision of each country fund and distribution of funding.[6] The lack of inclusion in leadership opportunities and decision-making processes emerges as a wider theme across all three contexts, beyond the scope of the CBPFs. For instance, despite progress over recent years to include more WROs/WLOs in country level GBV coordination structures, such as the GBV Sub-Clusters and other humanitarian fora, respondents reported being relegated to providing information within humanitarian processes, rather than being able to lead decisions about response priorities and activities. This raises critical questions regarding the international humanitarian system's appetite and ability to share power with WROs/WLOs.

- Quantitative analysis tracking CBFP allocations for GBV interventions in Afghanistan, DRC, and Ukraine shows how these barriers play out in cents and dollars for national and sub-national organisations. CBPF allocations for GBV interventions have fallen in Afghanistan from 2017-2022, and the localisation target of 25% was not met for CBPF allocations to GBV in Afghanistan and Ukraine in 2022. The proportion of CBPF allocations for GBV going to national and sub-national organisations has increased in DRC over the last several years, meeting the 25% localisation target in 2022.

The insights in this report contribute to a growing critique from feminist humanitarian organisations that progress on localisation is too slow, too unambitious, and that WROs/WLOs in particular continue to be marginalised. And yet, WROs/WLOs agree that positive practices regarding funding and forming partnerships do exist. These include international actors being willing to adapt funding amounts and funding criteria, increased flexibility, and partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding. The report compels us to ask the question, "Why wait?" to implement these practices and fund WROs/WLOs.

6. OCHA. 2022. Country-Based Pooled Funds Global Guidance. https://www.unocha.org/our-work/humanitarian-financing/country-based-pooled-funds-cbpf/cbpf-global-guidelines

Where is the money? An Analysis of CBPF funding for GBV

Tracking CBPF funding to national/sub-national organisations for GBV projects is an important step in attempting to understand funding levels to WROs/WLOs. Quantitative analysis tracking CBFP allocations for GBV projects in Afghanistan, DRC, and Ukraine confirm that there remain pervasive barriers to accessing CBPFs for national/sub-national organisations. Analysis below is not able to capture the percentage of funding going to WROs/WLOs, as it is not possible to disaggregate by WRO/WLO in publicly available data. The forthcoming UN OCHA One Grant Management System (One GMS) will enable grantees to self-identify as WROs/WLOs, a welcome development that should be monitored.

Funding trends across contexts

1. From 2017-2022, the average GBV allocations of CBPFs failed to meet their 25% localisation targets in two of the contexts surveyed: 24% in Afghanistan and 17% in DRC (In Ukraine, this average is not available, as CBPF allocations for GBV have only been identified from 2022).
2. The proportion of CBPF GBV allocations to national/sub-national actors has increased in DRC from 2017-2022, but it has decreased in Afghanistan over the same period. DRC is the only context surveyed that has met the 25% localisation target for CBPF GBV allocations in 2022.

Afghanistan CBPF trends in GBV allocations

- The breakdown of allocations of pooled funding for GBV projects during 2017-2022 was, on average: national/sub-national NGOs, 24%; UN Agencies, 22%; INGOs, 54%. This is compared to around 17% of allocations to national/sub-national actors out of total fund allocations for all sectors in Afghanistan during the same period.
- The last GBV allocations from the pooled fund to national/sub-national organisations directly were made in 2020. Only 6% of overall GBV pooled funding in Afghanistan reached national/sub-national organisations in 2022, through cascaded funding, while the vast majority of the GBV pooled funding in Afghanistan went to INGOs and UN agencies. In contrast, the fund has increased its total allocations every year since 2020, and 44 national/sub-national organisations received allocations directly from the pooled fund in Afghanistan in 2022.

DRC CBPF trends in GBV allocations

- The breakdown of allocations of pooled funding for GBV projects during 2017-2022 was, on average: national/sub-national NGOs, 17%; UN Agencies, 39%; and INGOs, 44%. In contrast, 33% of the DRC CBPF funding was channelled directly to national/sub-national NGOs across all sectors during the same period.
- Pooled funding for GBV projects channelled directly to national/sub-national organisations is increasing in DRC, within the context of the overall fund allocations decreasing in recent years. In 2022, total allocations to the DRC pooled fund reduced by over a third, but funding to GBV has increased year-on year, suggesting an increase in the prioritisaiton of GBV. In 2022, 40% of overall GBV pooled funding in DRC ultimately reached national/sub-national organisations in 2022 (with 26.5% channelled directly).

Ukraine CBPF trends in GBV allocations

- This study did not identify any Protection/GBV projects for the first three years (2019-2021) of the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, based on publicly available OCHA datasets.
- In 2022, only one GBV project was identified, amounting to US$1.13 million (0.6% of total CBPF allocations in 2022). This project was allocated to a UN agency, and a third (32%) was then sub-granted to two national NGOs. This is in contrast to the overall CBPF in Ukraine, where in 2022, 18 national/sub-national organisations received allocations from the Ukraine CBPF directly, amounting the 23% of the allocations total (a figure that was down from 39% in 2021).

Recommendations

Given the centrality of WROs/WLOs in achieving gender equality, the international humanitarian sector must invest in WROs/WLOs if we are to end GBV globally. Donors and international humanitarian agencies need to adopt a feminist lens to humanitarian reform that can unlock funding and partnerships for WROs/WLOs and create space for those actors to take on leadership and strategic decision-making. The following recommendations – based on inputs from WROs/WLOs – suggest specific changes at both operational and policy level to ensure commitments to localisation, feminist approaches, and aid effectiveness can be realised.

Funding for WROs/WLOs:

UN agencies, donors, and INGOs should critically interrogate their funding criteria, learning from changes and successes of other actors, to identify barriers for WROs/WLOs and then modify their policies to better meet WROs/WLOs where they are. Recommendations include:

- Reform criteria for CBPF applicants that continue to be prohibitive to WLOs/WROs across sectors, including removing the minimum fund threshold, allowing applications in relevant languages, and making it easier for organisations who have not previously worked with the UN to successfully access funding.

- Provide support to enable WROs/WLOs across sectors to develop operational policies required by the UN, through small grants and technical support via Humanitarian Coordinators and CBPF Advisory Boards.

- Meet localisation commitments within each cluster, inclusive of the GBV sub-sector, by ensuring that a minimum of 25% of GBV allocations through CBPF go to WROs/WLOs directly.

- Ensure that funding that is sub-granted to WROs/WLOs is passed on with the same level of flexibility and duration as it was received, including with core funding.

- Scale up resources to feminist funds that are already WRO/WLO-friendly in their processes and practices, so that feminist funds can increase grant-making in humanitarian contexts and to GBV-focused WROs/WLOs.

Leadership and decision-making of WROs/WLOs:

UN agencies, donors, and INGOs must cede leadership and decision-making roles for WROs/WLOs across all humanitarian fora, such as Advisory Boards and clusters/sub-clusters, and within program design. International actors should also engage strategically with existing networks of WROs/WLOs, meeting organisations where they are. Recommendations include:

- Reform CBPF Advisory Boards to achieve equal representation between international and national representatives, with WRO/WLOs making up at least half of the national representation.

- Systematise leadership space for WROs/WLOs, including by increasing the number of WROs/WLOs that co-lead country and sub-national GBV AoRs/Sub-Clusters, to drive increased accountability to WROs/WLOs.

- Increase the membership of WROs/WLOs in GBV Sub-Clusters so that there is a critical mass of WROs/WLOs as decision-makers within Sub-Clusters, and remove barriers to participation in these Sub-Clusters by providing financial resources and capacity sharing initiatives.

- Ensure the Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming (GBV Minimum Standards) are accessible and relevant– including translations into relevant languages – and contextualised in partnership with WROs/WLOs.

Accountability to WROs/WLOs, and equitable partnerships:

UN agencies, donors, and INGOs such as IRC, have made numerous commitments to localisation of the humanitarian system and to WROs/WLOs. They now have a duty to deliver and establish partnerships that prioritise equity, trust, and accountability. Recommendations include:

- Improve tracking and transparency of funding to WROs/WLOs based on the forthcoming updated Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) definition of WROs/WLOs, with donors holding UN agencies and INGOs accountable by requesting information on funding to WROs/WLOs and GBV.

- Increase the number of partnerships that international actors have with WROs/WLOs and the quality of these partnerships with WROs/WLOs, in line with feminist principles, throughout the entire funding and project cycle.

- Translate positive practice and lessons learned on increasing leadership and funding for WROs/WLOs into effective policies, including through initiatives like the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Programme and from actors including feminist funders and the Call to Action on GBV in Emergencies.

- Ensure diversity of WROs/WLOs which receive pooled funding to increase inclusion of sub-national WROs/WLOs and solidarity between larger/national WROs/WLOs and smaller/sub-national WROs/WLOs, including by sharing expertise and knowledge.