



The power of collaborative philanthropy: Giving together to address gender inequality

Why gender equality¹ is a pillar of social progress

The globe is heating up. Civil liberties are under siege. A deadly virus persists. Women's rights are rolling back. More people are forcibly displaced now than at any time in the past three decades². We know from the experience of COVID-19 that these emergencies do not affect people equally. Occurring against the backdrop of multilayered and interconnected social inequalities, the crises are producing profoundly unequal outcomes by race, religion, nationality, class, caste, ability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Gender inequality, interwoven with other forms of inequality, is compounding injustices. It is everywhere, hardwired into our mindsets, policies, and practices, slowing our progress on every issue. While there are myriad forms of gender discrimination, their root cause is the same—patriarchy.

Consider, for example, how rigid gender norms shape the impact of natural disasters, increasingly common given climate change. Men often share early warning and safety information to other men in public spaces, while women, because of public policies and social norms, tend to be in private spaces, caring for children or the elderly. In Sri Lanka, where it also is often considered inappropriate for women to swim, men outnumbered women survivors of the 2004 tsunami three to one.³ More broadly, women

are 14 times more likely to die during natural disasters.⁴ Further: the majority of people displaced by climate-linked natural disasters are women.⁵

Meanwhile, funding for efforts to stop or rollback gains that have benefited women and girls is on the rise. The Global Philanthropy Project estimates that, from 2008 to 2017, the aggregate revenue of US-based organizations associated with the anti-gender movement was \$6.2 billion⁶—including successful efforts to roll back sexual, reproductive, and children and young people’s rights, and the rights of migrant workers, Indigenous people, and others. Clearly, there is significant opportunity for new donors to engage.

The good news is that social justice movements that prioritize gender equality provide us with a vision of the transformational change that could be attained with flexible, sustained, community-driven investments. In the past few years there has been important progress across the globe:⁷ increased access to reproductive rights in Ireland and Argentina, health care and increased protections for domestic workers in Mexico, women-led movements securing land and intellectual property rights for Indigenous peoples, and a revitalized focus on gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the United States and other nations.

That movements be women-led is a theme you’ll notice throughout. A consistently effective means of breaking down patriarchy’s unequal outcomes is through supporting feminist movements, funding women-led organizations, and helping individual women. The benefits help women directly—and compound across issue areas, just as helping more Sri Lankan women learn to swim helps the children and others whom women care for in a natural disaster.

Philanthropy often works in siloes, prioritizing an “issue first” lens that doesn’t make the appropriate connections across fields—yielding a chronic underinvestment in gender equality and putting pressure on those organizations focused on gender and led by women to spend valuable time and energy trying to fit into more traditional issue-based siloes.

As threats to humanity mount—the climate crisis, the rise of authoritarianism, a global pandemic, extreme income inequality—funding girls’ and women’s collective efforts to solve these problems can offer the holistic solutions required. For example, supporting women in India’s Sunderbans mangrove forest would help them plant thousands of mangrove trees to protect themselves and their communities from cyclones and rains.

Despite this limited philanthropic investment, gender equality-focused work still manages to be a vital force for social change. With bold partnership from philanthropy, its impact will be transformational.

Today, there is growing momentum among donors to do more. Several individual and institutional donors, led by groups like Women Moving Millions and commitments at the UN-hosted Generation Equality Forums, are increasing their support for gender equality work and for women-led efforts across the globe, including in the Global South. In Lighting The Way, a report for philanthropy on the promise and power of feminist movements, Shake the Table and Bridgespan urge philanthropists to invest an additional \$6 billion by 2026 (\$1.5 billion annually) in feminist movements, especially those led by Black, Indigenous and other women of color.

There are a wide range of investment opportunities across the globe for donors interested in accelerating the transformative work of gender equality organizations. Collaborative giving options are one way for donors to support such organizations.

What are collaborative giving platforms?

Donors have long worked together, from informal giving circles to local fundraising campaigns. Collaborative giving vehicles—like funds, platforms, and other intermediaries—take these efforts to the next level, formalizing collective giving to amplify impact. They are philanthropic organizations and initiatives designed to bring donors together, provide deep subject matter expertise, and channel resources to the people and groups (e.g., non-profits/NGOs) best positioned to accelerate progress on complex issues.

Such vehicles enable funders to leverage their resources, mitigate individual risk, and deploy greater capital to address pressing global problems. These offer a range of options for donors to get involved—some pool money from donors but retain decision-making rights themselves, while others deeply engage donors in selecting the ultimate recipients; still others develop participatory processes to support communities in allocating dollars. The examples shared here represent a wide array of such vehicles.

Recent research conducted by The Bridgespan Group and funded by The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has identified hundreds of collaborative giving vehicles that have collectively channeled more than \$20 billion to social causes.⁸ The advantages they offer include:

- **Partnerships with other donors** who enable funding issues at a greater scale than donors could do on their own.
- **Specialized knowledge and important relationships** with community leaders and grassroots groups that would be otherwise inaccessible.
- **Potential for earlier detection and faster response** to emerging issues and opportunities that are more evident to those who are closer to, and hold deeper relationships with, communities served.
- **Coordination** in developing targeted, networked strategies led by community members to address complex issues.
- **Opportunities to engage** (depending on interest) with governance structures that offer a range of approaches—from hands off to deeper engagement with learning and decision making.
- **Efficiencies** that free donors from having to become experts in new fields and assure donors that priorities and realities on the ground are incorporated.

Giving collaboratively on gender equality

The above research highlights significant momentum in global collaborative efforts, in general, and momentum in the field of gender inequality. Working in partnership with Shake the Table (a project with a shared commitment to “resourcing movements for racial, gender, and economic justice”), Prospera (the international network of women’s funds), and others, we have identified over 100 funds that prioritize gender—and there are likely many, many more. In a recent survey of collaborative fund leaders, gender equality was the most cited primary issue for funds—with funds that report either a primary or secondary focus on gender comprising over half of survey respondents. These funds are collectively giving over \$1 billion in a single year—and have indicated they could absorb upward of \$11 billion annually.

While most funds (including many highlighted in the categories below) approach their work from multiple angles, donors may seek to invest in one of the following ways:

Global, national or regional funds



National or global feminist funds and organizations: There is a rich ecosystem of women’s funds, feminist intermediary funds or networks that redistribute resources, and feminist donor collaboratives that operate nationally or globally. One example—among many—is [Global Fund for Women](#), which provides core, flexible funding to feminist activists around the world. Global Fund for Women has moved almost \$185 million in support of gender justice work in 176 countries. Another, in the US, is the [Ms. Foundation for Women](#), founded in 1972, which invests in and strengthens the capacity of women-led movements to advance meaningful social, cultural, and economic change.

Regional funds: Such funds are sought by donors who want to invest in their own communities or in other specific geographies where they seek to make a difference. In the US, for example, there are women’s funds and foundations in many states and some cities—sometimes seeded by national funders, but now largely funded by local donors. Such local and regional funds exist across the globe, and partner with grassroots organizations and movements to provide them with access to resources, expertise, and structural support. More information on some of these funds can be found at [Prospera](#) and the [Women’s Funding Network](#). Additionally, an illustrative list of gender-focused funds is included in the Appendix—not every regional fund is listed, but if you are eager to find one, a local community foundation likely can connect you.

Issue- or population-specific funds that take a gender lens



Donors who focus on specific issues can explore opportunities that operate at the intersection of a particular issue or population and gender. Examples include:

Humanitarian response and human rights: Women’s and feminist funds have often demonstrated tremendous collaboration and creativity in responding to humanitarian and human rights crises. For example, after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in 2021, at a time when many other donors were unable to get money out the door, a group of these funds, including [MADRE](#), managed to collect donations from US funders and pull together the legal information required to send funds from the United States to women-led, informal networks in Afghanistan.⁹ Many of these funds “read” the political landscape in which they operate and respond to feminist movements’ priorities rather than create their own.

One example is the [Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights](#), which supports activists to seize unanticipated opportunities to make change and to protect themselves when in immediate danger. Activists may apply in any language, on any day of the year, and are guaranteed a response within 72 hours. Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022, for example, the Fund has awarded over \$1 million to feminist activists in Ukraine.

Climate change: While climate events exacerbate existing gender inequalities, the women, girls, and nonbinary people who endure them are precisely the people who can help solve our climate crisis. They know from experience what changes are needed, and they have the drive to realize those changes. Indeed, their survival depends on it. Feminist movements represent a largely untapped opportunity for climate philanthropists to unlock sustainable climate solutions that will benefit us all.

Examples of their effectiveness abound. Consider the [Global Greengrants Fund](#), which incorporates a gender lens into its support for grassroots-led efforts to protect the planet and the rights of people. For example, it has supported community members and activists facing off against a mining company in South Africa whose operations are polluting the environment. It also supported a grassroots marine resources group which is traveling across Papua New Guinea helping educate communities about ways to sustain the mangroves, sea grasses, and coral reefs that protect fish and provide food for islanders.

Racial justice: Efforts to advance racial justice and gender justice are inseparable and must be tackled together. In the United States, voter-suppression efforts that make it significantly more difficult for Black and other people of color to vote have gendered consequences, as well. Today, 17 states require photo IDs to vote.¹⁰ Such a law disadvantages those who may change their name due to marriage, divorce, or gender transition.

To be effective, gender equality-focused funds must work on racial justice issues. One exciting new example is the [Black Feminist Fund](#), the first fund explicitly focused on supporting Black feminist movements. It provides long-term and flexible grants to Black feminist-led and -serving organizations in Africa, the Americas, the Middle East, and Europe. It is designed with low barriers around applying and reporting to allow broader access to funding.

Focus on Global South issues and systems: Some efforts are focused on supporting women-led and gender equality-focused organizations across a range of issues. For example, the [Co-Impact Gender Fund](#) aims to raise \$1 billion over the next decade to support predominantly women-led Global South organizations with large, long-term, and flexible funding. Its goal is to provide funding to transform systems to be more just and inclusive, advance women's power, agency, and leadership at all levels, and shift harmful gender norms that prevent progress. Another example is the [Equality Fund](#), which contributes resources to feminist movements and makes trust-based connections between donors and movement leaders. Other funds within the Global South are organized around region, such as the [African Women's Development Fund](#), a Pan-African grant making organization that supports women's rights through funding of autonomous organizations.

Focus on Indigenous populations: Given the history of colonialization, Indigenous peoples worldwide have experienced broad discrimination. Indigenous peoples comprise 5% of the world's population but are 15% of those in poverty. Indigenous peoples are often living at the forefront of climate change, with Indigenous territories comprising 24% of the world's land surface yet 80% of remaining healthy ecosystems.¹¹ There are many Indigenous-led funds that emphasize or prioritize gender, including the [Fondo Internacional de Mujeres Indigenas \(AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund\)](#), which is a global network that unites Indigenous women from the seven sociocultural regions. The [Arctic Indigenous Fund](#) is building emerging Indigenous leaders across the Arctic. The [Pawakna Fund](#), which also focuses on Indigenous communities around the globe, emphasizes gender relations in its founding principles.

Notes

- ¹ Defining the goal of gender equality as accelerating progress toward a more gender-equal world by addressing the barriers that keep women and girls from being fully active in their homes, economies, and societies, [Gates Foundation](#).
- ² "Figures at a Glance," United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, June 18, 2021.
- ³ Mary Halton, "Climate Change 'Impacts Women More Than Men,'" BBC News, March 8, 2018.
- ⁴ "Disaster and Gender Statistics" fact sheet, International Union for Conservation of Nature, n.d.; "Reaching Out to Women When Disaster Strikes," Soroptimist International, May 2011.
- ⁵ Women Moving Millions, [Realizing Generation Equality](#).
- ⁶ *Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement*, Global Philanthropy Project, 2020.
- ⁷ Information in this section is from [Lighting the Way, A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements](#) by Shake the Table and the Bridgespan Group (2022).
- ⁸ Forthcoming data from survey conducted in 2022.
- ⁹ Shake the Table and Bridgespan 2022.
- ¹⁰ Shake the The Bridgespan Group, [Lighting the Way](#), 2022.
- ¹¹ "Poverty and exclusion among Indigenous Peoples: The global evidence," Gillette Hall & Ariel Gandolfo, August 9, 2016.

Appendix: Illustrative list of gender equality-focused funds

This list is not complete nor have the funds been independently vetted by the authors; if you know of a fund that should be added, please contact Jennifer Stout (jennifer.stout@gatesfoundation.org).

Africa and Middle East

Middle East & North Africa

- Doria Feminist Fund
- Karama
- Women's Fund Armenia

Sub-Saharan Africa

- African Women's Development Fund
- Fonds pour les Femmes Congolaises
- GBVF (Gender-Based Violence and Femicide) Response Fund
- ISDAO: Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest
- Jumuiya Women's Fund
- The Other Foundation
- UHAI Eashri (UHAI-the East Africa Sexual Health and Rights Initiative)
- Urgent Action Fund Africa
- Women Fund Tanzania Trust

Americas

Latin America

- Fondo de Mujeres del Sur
- Hispanics in Philanthropy
- Fondo de Accion Urgente de América Latina y el Caribe
- VidaAfroLatina

North America

- The Ascend Fund
- Black Trans Fund
- CARE (Care for All with Respect and Equity) Fund
- Collaborative for Reproductive and Gender Equity (CGRE)
- Disability Inclusion Fund
- Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM)
- El Fondo Centroamericano y Mexicano para Juventud / Central American Youth Fund (CAMY)
- Fondo Semillas
- Forward Together
- Grantmakers for Girls of Color (G4GC)
- Groundswell Fund
- Hive Fund for Climate and Gender Justice
- Ms. Foundation for Women

- NDN Collective: Dedicated to Building Indigenous Power
- POP Culture Collaborative
- Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
- Southern Vision Alliance
- Third Wave Fund: Youth Vision and Activism for Gender Justice
- Trans Justice Funding Project
- The Women Effect Fund
- Women's Foundation of the South

South America

- Elas
- Fondo Alquimia
- Fondo Lunaria Mujer
- Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia

Asia

Asia-Pacific

- Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia & Pacific
- Women's Fund Asia

East Asia

- Her Fund
- Korea Foundation for Women

Oceania

- Women's Fund FIJI

South Asia

- Dasra
- Dignity Alliance International
- GROW (Grassroots Resilience Ownership and Wellness) Fund
- South Asia Women Foundation (SAWF) India
- Tewa: Philanthropy for Equitable Justice and Peace

Europe

- Bulgarian Fund for Women
- Ecumenical Women's Initiative
- FemFund (Poland)
- Heart & Hand Fund
- Project Tallawah

- Reconstruction Women's Fund
- Taso Foundation (Georgia)
- Stronger Together (run by Trag)
- Slovak-Czech Women's Fund
- Ukrainian Women's Fund
- Women's Fund in Georgia

- Women First International Fund
- Women Win
- Women's Funding Network
- XOESE: The Francophone Women's Fund

Global / Multi-Region

- Arctic Indigenous Fund
- Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
- Black Feminist Fund
- Black Latina Girls and Women Fund
- Calala: Fondo de Mujeres
- Collective Future Fund
- Children's Rights Innovation Fund
- Co-Impact
- Disability Rights Fund
- Embark
- EMpower
- Equality Fund
- Fenomenal Funds: Feminist Funder Collaborative
- Filia die Frauenstiftung
- Fondo Internacional de Mujeres Indigenas (AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund)
- Frida: The Young Feminist Fund
- Gender Funders Co-Lab
- Girls First Fund
- Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA)
- Global Fund for Children
- Global Fund for Women
- Global Greengrants
- Grassroots International
- Human Rights Funders Network (HRFN)
- International Trans Fund (ITF)
- Innovative Peace Fund, hosted within ICAN — International Civil Society Action Network
- MADRE
- Mama Cash
- Maverick Collective
- Mediterranean Women's Fund
- Mongolian Women's Fund (MONES)
- Numun Fund
- Pawanka Fund
- Prospera: International Network of Women's Funds
- Rockflower
- Thousand Currents
- Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
- Purposeful: With and For Girls Fund



To learn more

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. The foundation's Philanthropic Partnerships team seeds and supports collaborative giving platforms that make it easier for donors to channel large philanthropic investments to advance equity.

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GATES *foundation*

Shake the Table bridges movements for racial, gender, and economic justice and philanthropy. They share knowledge, move resources, convene dialogue, expand networks, and create practical tools. They believe in the power of feminist movements to create more justice and joy and share insights and unlock resources to multiply their impact.

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shake the table

The Bridgespan Group is a leading social impact consultant and advisor to nonprofits and NGOs, philanthropists, collaborative giving platforms, and investors.

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The Bridgespan Group

The mission of **Women Moving Millions** is to catalyze unprecedented resources to achieve gender equality. They are the largest global community of women philanthropists who have collectively committed nearly one billion dollars to resource women and girls since its founding. Through community, collaboration, and bold philanthropy, they believe we can accelerate progress towards a gender equal world.

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