



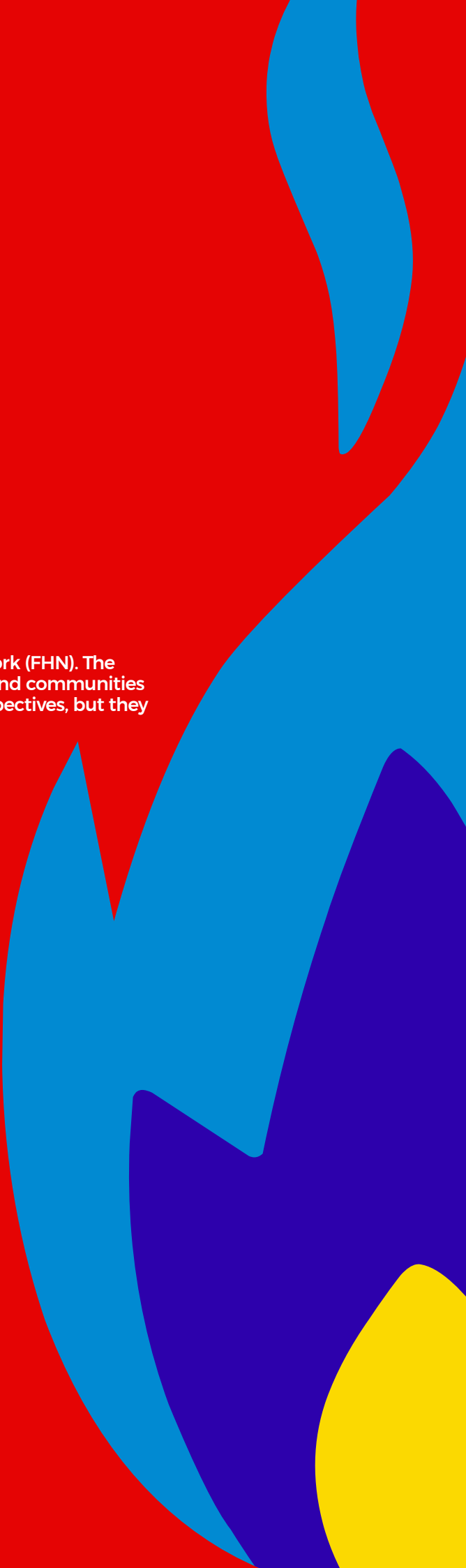
FEMINIST HUMANITARIAN NETWORK

FEMINIST HUMANITARIAN ACTION: STILL HOLDING THE LINE

THE IMPACT OF FUNDING CUTS ON FEMINIST ACTORS IN
CRISIS RESPONSE AROUND THE WORLD



SEPTEMBER 2025



This report was produced by The Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN). The reflections and testimonies within are those of the organisers and communities who shaped it. They do not claim to represent all feminist perspectives, but they do represent truths grounded in lived experience.

Survey & Conversations Facilitation

Survey design, facilitation, and reflection spaces were collectively developed by FHN members. We thank the 59 organisations and 48 organisers who contributed their experiences, insights, and strategies.

Collective Authoring, Writing and Review

This report was authored through a collective process led by the Feminist Humanitarian Network, grounded in the voices of feminist frontline organisers across the Global South and Indigenous movements. Ene Ijato, FHN's Communications Lead, brought these contributions together, supported by FHN members. Shaping, writing, and weaving them into a shared story that reflects our collective strength and vision.

Design

Report design and visual storytelling by Ene Ijato.

Acknowledgements

This report is built on the courage, labour, and knowledge of feminist organisers, especially those working at the frontlines of crisis with little to no recognition or resources. Your truths shape this work, and this report is dedicated to you.

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1. OPENING NOTE

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to read, to witness, and to stand with feminist actors in humanitarian and crisis settings worldwide. This is a document born of deep listening, care, and the urgent need to name what's happening to feminist organising in the face of funding cuts. It is also a reminder that feminist knowledge does not flow from the centres of power. The wisdom carried by feminists in the Global South and Indigenous communities is not just testimony of survival, but also the ground of new visions, methods, and theories. This report honours those knowledges as sustaining and transformative in their own right.

This report does not hide behind neutral language or flatten lived realities into statistics. It is grounded in the voices of feminists who are leading, holding, healing, and resisting on the frontlines - often without the recognition or resources they deserve. Many of them are young women, queer and trans activists, refugee-led groups, Indigenous peoples, and women with disabilities, responding to crises in their own communities. This report is for them, and because of them.

We began this work with a simple but powerful intention: to create space for feminist organisers to speak in their own words about what funding cuts have meant for their work, their wellbeing, and their communities.

In this report, we use the term WRO as an umbrella to include women's rights organisations (WROs), women-led organisations (WLOs), refugee-led organisations (RLOs), and other feminist actors working at the frontlines.

What emerged was a chorus of stories carrying grief, rage, clarity, and strength. We are living through compounding crises: genocide, wars, occupation, state-led mis- and disinformation, unprecedented attacks on gender justice including gender apartheid, alongside displacement, climate breakdown, and systemic violence. Amidst all this, feminist organisers and activists continue to show up. They are often the first responders working with care, trust, and accountability. Yet their work remains too often invisibilised, underfunded, or dismissed as supplementary.



This report challenges the invisibilisation of and attacks on feminist work. It is not just a presentation of findings, it is a space where feminist voices too often drowned out or disregarded speak in their own words, on their own terms, about what it means to organise in times of devastation, uncertainty, attacks and neglect. It speaks plainly and urgently about what is happening to feminist organising in humanitarian spaces - in the face of severe funding cuts, growing political hostility, and ongoing violence. As many global actors continue to rely on the labour of women, girls and gender-diverse people without adequately resourcing or protecting them, this report gathers the stories that institutions often overlook.

What you will read here is grounded in care and clarity. It is qualitative because we chose to prioritise depth, context, and voice. Feminist organising cannot be captured through numbers alone - it is deeply felt, political, and driven by values. It is also a commitment to knowledge justice: to recognise that the wisdom of feminists in the Global South and First Nations communities is not only lived experience, but a fundamental source of expertise grounded in in-depth socio-political and gender analysis, strategy and imagination. Feminist ways of knowing guides how we understand crisis, how we act in the midst of it, and how we imagine and work towards different futures. This report resists the old habit and hierarchy where Northern voices are treated as the thinkers and others only as witnesses. The groups represented here - from young feminist collectives, refugee-led and Indigenous groups, to LGBTQI+ organisers - show us what it means to persist, reimagine, and resist under pressure.

To all organisations and individuals committed to advancing gender justice, to those who have funded feminist humanitarian action or seeking to: we thank you for your solidarity and ask you to read this with openness and courage. We don't only seek to describe injustice; we are calling you to join the transformation of the system. Let these truths move you continuously toward justice. Let this report be a reason to rethink, to shift power, to honour commitments with resources. Let this report be a reminder that feminist organising is not only necessary, it is urgent. And it must be resourced like the life-saving, world-building work that it is.

To those doing this work: this is a mirror, a tribute, and a reminder that you are not alone. Your grief, your joy, your rage, your brilliance - they are all held here.

With deep gratitude, we honour the women, gender-diverse, trans, queer, refugee, Indigenous, and young feminist responders who shared their truths with courage and clarity, this report exists because of their voices. We offer this with tenderness and fire.

**In solidarity and defiance,
The Feminist Humanitarian Network**



We offer this report as a refusal. A refusal to be made invisible. A refusal to have our organising flattened into neutral categories like “local actors” or “women’s groups.” A refusal to accept applause without action, recognition without redistribution. Feminist work is not an accessory to humanitarian response - it is, and has always been, its moral compass and life force.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FEMINIST ORGANISING?

In this report, feminist organising refers to the collective, often grassroots, and movement-based efforts led by women, girls, and gender-diverse people to resist injustice, build power, and reimagine systems of care and response. It is political, intersectional, and rooted in lived experience. It often takes place outside formal institutions, and is led by those most affected by crises and structural violence.

Feminist organising is distinct as it is a more specific form of collective action. It prioritises:

- care as a strategy, not just a service
- horizontal leadership and shared decision-making
- challenging problematic dominant power structures
- building alternatives grounded in solidarity, healing, and justice

Indigenous feminist organising often does not follow Western or NGO models. It is grounded in ancestral knowledge, care for the land, and practices passed down across generations. In the Global South, feminist organising also takes shape through collective survival economies – like mutual aid, land and farming collectives, informal care networks, and cooperatives – that stand in contrast to capitalist aid models, and offer an alternative. Resisting the logic of charity and markets, and showing that survival and growth can be organised outside systems of profit and control.

These ways of organising are not side notes, but central, showing different visions of how communities sustain life in the midst of crisis. This report centres feminist organising because it is often the first to respond in moments of crisis, and the last to receive funding or recognition. It includes, but is not limited to, the work of WROs, LGBTQI+ collectives, refugee-led groups, young feminist networks, and Indigenous movements.

We name feminist organising deliberately, not just as a category of actors, but as a practice of resistance, action, and care that must be prioritised, protected, and resourced.



2. SCOPE OF REPORT AND KEY FINDINGS

In June 2025, the FHN launched a survey and convened conversations to map the impact of funding cuts and growing pushbacks on gender justice.

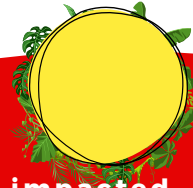
The survey captures the lived realities of 59 WROs responding to the fallout of major defunding by international donors, especially USAID. Responses came from 16 countries and regions: 63% national organisations, 32% community-based, and 3% global. They are small, under-resourced, responding to crises from lived experience, yet doing life-saving work, and led by refugee women, young feminists, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people.

Conversations and reflection spaces brought together 48 organisers from diverse regions to speak, strategise, and build collective clarity, grounded in the strength of FHN's 90 members across 30+ countries.

The findings show that the harms of funding withdrawals are critical and uneven. Where funding is sustained, communities advance safeguarding lives and ecosystems. Where it is withdrawn, this collapses. In Asia, refugee-led organisations describe the collapse of basic survival programmes for food, shelter, and protection, while in Latin America, Indigenous women's groups report losing essential support for land defence and biodiversity protection, disrupting climate and gender justice. These regional disparities expose how donor choices reverberate across contexts, dismantling the ecological foundations of life and undermining the survival strategies of communities.

The absence of alternative funding streams for many WROs is no accident. It is embedded in an aid system that structurally excludes informal, collective, and Indigenous organising models that do not align with donor and donors' intermediaries compliance templates.

As a result, many of the most effective and trusted responders are locked out of the very resources meant to sustain humanitarian work.



- **Of those impacted, many say there is no alternative path to follow in order to resource their organisations - there are no alternative funds available and no donors open to being approached.**
- **Many of those surveyed say that these cuts come at a time when the impacts of crises are greater than ever before - the impacts of climate change are becoming more significant and pronounced, and the gendered impacts are dire.**
- **Many said they were already struggling financially, and the cuts only deepened these challenges.**
- **Respondents worry that the institutional knowledge of their staff will be lost if staff are not retained, which will have flow on effects for women in the communities they work in.**
- **WROs led by women with disabilities worry that without continued investment in their work, the isolation of women living with disabilities will worsen.**
- **Young feminists stress that cuts suppress new voices, innovation, and intergenerational renewal, threatening feminist futures.**
- **WROs demand recognising that defunding feminist response is not neutral, it deepens inequality and erases hard-won gains. They demand support that sees their work as strategy and resistance to injustice. As essential. They demand resources that are flexible, long-term, and rooted in care.**

3. WHERE WE STAND

We are living through a moment of profound unravelling. Across the world, violence and militarisation are deepening, authoritarianism is rising, and humanitarian need is surging - driven by war, climate collapse, displacement, and economic precarity. And yet, just as feminist organisations are stepping up to do more, international funding is being pulled away.

Global aid is shrinking with governments and donors cutting budgets^[1] and support for feminist agendas is collapsing. The consequences are devastating. WROs in crisis zones report being impacted by funding reductions, with many at risk of shutting down^[2]. Gender-based violence services are collapsing: while the need has surged by 40% since 2021, funding has barely budged - rising less than 5% - projected to leave over 36 million women and girls without support by year's end^[3]. The climate emergency is not gender-neutral - it deepens inequalities and imposes distinct harms on women, girls, and gender-diverse people^[4]. Despite their leadership and insights, women - particularly from Indigenous, rural, and Global South communities - continue to be sidelined in climate decision-making and funding. This exclusion frustrates the resilient, caring, context-aware responses needed for true climate justice and effective humanitarian response.^[5]

These cuts do not happen in a vacuum. They are shaped by the long shadow of colonial aid structures, which were built to privilege Northern governments, international organisations (including UN agencies and INGOs), and agendas over the voices of Global South feminists. As a result, when funding contracts, it is southern and Indigenous organisers who are hit first and hardest - their labour extracted, but their leadership left unfunded.

Meanwhile, billions are channelled into militarisation: global military expenditure surged to an estimated \$2.72 trillion in 2024 - the steepest rise since the Cold War.^[6] G7 nations alone spent 62 times more on weapons than on all humanitarian aid responding to wars and disasters.^[7] This geopolitical double standard reveals clearly whose lives and safety are valued, and whose are treated as expendable.

We stand at a crossroads where funding choices are not neutral technical adjustments but political decisions with life and death consequences. WROs on the frontlines are not optional add-ons to humanitarian and development responses. They are the labour and capillary, the strategy and the networks that keep communities alive. Recent years have exposed what we already knew in our bodies and in our budgets: when feminist and women's leadership is starved of resources, the most vulnerable are the first to suffer.

WROs are being asked to carry the burden of care, resistance, and rebuilding in their communities, without the resources to sustain themselves. It is not just unjust - it is political. The cuts are not happening in isolation. They are part of a broader erosion of feminist infrastructure, frontline knowledge, and community-rooted leadership. And they are happening quietly, without accountability, and often without listening to those most affected. They reproduce the racialised hierarchies that have always shaped the aid system - applauding Global South feminist leadership in rhetoric while denying it the means to survive.

[1] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_8c530629-en/full-report.

[2] <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide-en.pdf>

[3] <https://www.developmentaid.org/news-stream/post/195746/gbv-funding-crisis>

[4] <https://apnews.com/article/climate-change-women-rural-farms-fao-6ab3cc6bd9d372dcec4693b366e3b35c>

[5] <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099718102062367591/pdf/IDU08c737dd00f8580412b0aed90fce874ab09b0.pdf>

[6] <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/world-military-spending-hits-27-trillion-record-2024-surge-2025-04-27/>

[7] <https://islamic-relief.org/news/g7-spends-62-times-more-on-weapons-than-aid-as-military-spending-surges-to-record-levels/>

That is why the FHN undertook the survey, deep reflections and conversations that inform this report. We wanted to create a space where feminist organisers, especially those most marginalised in traditional humanitarian structures, could speak about the impact of the funding cuts and pushback on gender justice. Refugee, LGBTQI+, Indigenous, young, and disabled women, girls and gender-diverse persons speak boldly and name what these decisions have meant for their communities, their work, and their survival. This report lays bare the human and political cost of these cuts. We interrogate how burnout is intensifying, how funding decisions depoliticise and marginalise feminist leadership, how promises of safety without resources ring hollow, and how WROs are left to carry the crisis alone.

We ground this analysis in the voices of feminist leaders whose words cut through the policy language and expose the truth.

While the global funding system tries to look away, this report insists on being heard. In the pages that follow, you will hear the voices of feminist humanitarians who are holding the line and calling for more than just restoration. They are calling for a fundamental shift in how power, resources, and solidarity move through our world.

This is both a warning and a demand. A warning that the system as it stands is failing those who sustain it, and a demand for a feminist funding future that treats our organising as strategy, not as charity. Feminist leadership is not a cost. It is the foundation of survival, transformation, and healthy and equitable societies,



“WITHOUT SUSTAINED, FLEXIBLE, AND CARE-ROOTED RESOURCES, OUR MOVEMENTS CANNOT KEEP HOLDING THE LINE.”

4. HOW THIS REPORT CAME TO BE: LISTENING IS POLITICAL



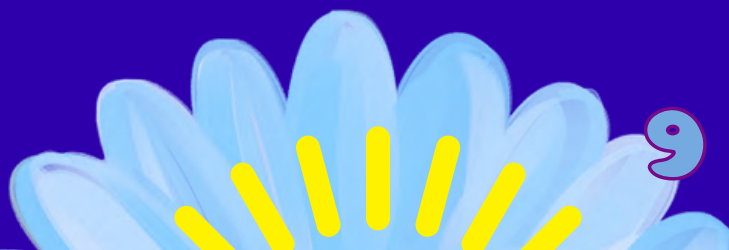
Grounded in the belief that listening is political, we set out to centre the voices of those most marginalised within the humanitarian system. To capture realities that cannot be reflected through surveys alone we combined the survey with deeper conversations and collective reflections across our feminist movement to ensure as many voices as possible were heard and recognized. This approach ensures evidence that is both rigorous and grounded in lived experience, offering a fuller picture of the impact of this funding crises and dynamics.

The survey was designed collectively, by and for national, grassroots, and community-based organisations led by and representing women, young women, gender-diverse persons, LGBTQI+ people, women with disabilities, Indigenous people, and refugee communities. The questions emerged from what we were already hearing in the FHN: stories of funding disappearing overnight, of staff being laid off, of hard-won progress being undone - but also of care, courage, and resistance. Rather than simply collecting data points, this survey sought to create space for truth-telling. We asked open-ended questions, giving respondents room to speak in their own words - to share their losses, their resistance strategies, and what they need from funders and the international system. Sharing not only what had changed in their budgets and operations, but how it felt, what it meant, and what they needed.

We held one-on-one conversations with members and allies. We gathered stories and strategies during our Solidarity Beyond Borders event, where feminists from across regions came together to share what it means to survive these cuts, and to continue fighting for justice in the face of deepening crises.

This process is a practice of feminist listening. It is also a practice of methodological sovereignty. By choosing to draw from Indigenous and Global South feminist research traditions - storytelling, oral histories, ritual, and collective witnessing - we were not only shifting methods, we were decolonising the very terms of knowledge-making. It is a refusal of extractive research logics that treat communities as data sources rather than knowledge holders. It is a claim that our ways of knowing are not supplementary, but sovereign: rooted in context, memory, and relationship, and capable of shaping theory and action.

Mindful of the risks of extractive listening, where testimony is gathered but not resourced, where stories are taken without accountability. This report attempts to resist that harm by returning insights to the communities who shared them, and by insisting that listening must be paired with redistribution, solidarity, and resourcing.



4.1. SURVEY REACH AND RESPONDENTS

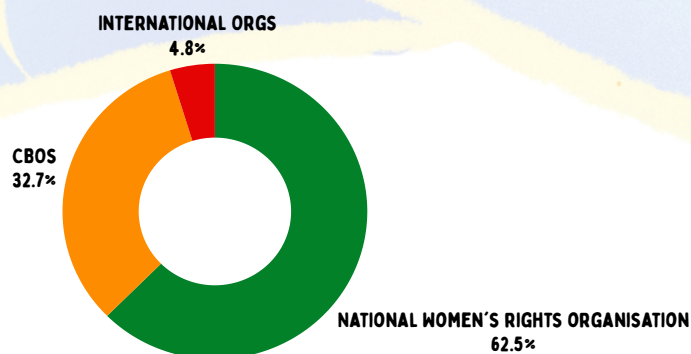
A total of 59 feminist organisations responded to the survey, from across regions including:

- South Asia
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- Southeast Asia
- Southwest Asia and North Africa
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Global and regional networks

Countries of respondents:

Bangladesh, Cameroon, Afghanistan, Uganda, Thailand, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Indonesia, Haiti, Papua New Guinea, Palestine, Vietnam, Nepal, and Global / international.

Responses came from a wide spectrum of feminist humanitarians,



- 47.5% were led by self-identifying women
- 37.3% were led by young women
- 18.6% were led by people with disabilities
- 2% were led by Indigenous women
- 2% were refugee-led
- 2% were LGBTQI+ led
- 2% were Young men

These respondents are not only first responders, they are movement builders, caregivers, healers, educators, and human rights defenders.

Organisations ranged in size, 39% operate with annual budgets under \$50,000, more than 50% have budgets between \$150,000- \$300,000, and just 10% operate above \$500,000. Showing how frontline groups most impacted by cuts are often those with the least financial buffer to weather them.

4.2. CONVERSATIONS HELD ACROSS OUR FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The FHN's Solidarity Beyond Borders event brought together 48 feminist organisers and organisations from across regions and movements for reflecting grieving, strategizing and building collective clarity in the face of intersecting crises. With 90 members from more than 30 countries, the FHN provided the grounding for the intimate conversations that facilitated honest dialogue. From Afghanistan to Samoa, the Philippines, the DRC, Belize to Bulgaria. Our members are based in places where humanitarian need is urgent - including Yemen, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, and Venezuela - as well as in countries shaping global policy like Switzerland, the UK, and Canada. Together, we span contexts of crisis and care - holding the frontline of feminist humanitarian response, and building power across borders.



4.3 APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

Each response was read, listened to, coded, and thematically analysed using a feminist lens - seeking not only to document the material impact of the funding cuts, but to highlight the intersecting inequalities they reveal and exacerbate. We looked for patterns, but also honoured the specificity of each story. We paid attention to the silences, the grief, and the recurring calls for justice.

We did not approach this analysis with the goal of objectivity, but with the intention of solidarity. The voices in this report are not abstracted - they are present, alive, and still organising.

These were testimonies of deep sadness, strategies for survival, and visions for a better future. Each response is an act of resistance, a refusal to be made invisible. This process was led by feminist leaders and advocates within the FHN. It is part of our collective effort to document what is happening - not only for the sake of record, but as an act of movement, memory and political reckoning. This report pulls all that has been named together. It does not speak for those who responded, but rather with and alongside them - amplifying our collective voices in a moment when they must be heard.

5. WHAT THE CUTS ARE DOING TO FEMINIST WORK

Funding cuts are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. They are closures. They are despair. They are programmes that no longer exist. They are the unspoken costs of care unpaid and unsupported. They are an end to access to information and resources for marginalized communities.

For feminist organisers, we are not just underfunded. We are being defunded in the midst of cascading crises. These crises do not come in silos, and neither do their impacts.

We hold up the stories and strategies of those holding on, speaking up, and organising through the storm.

5.1 WHO ARE IMPACTED

Women living with Disabilities

WROs led by women with disabilities are raising their voices - not just about the funding cuts, but about what those cuts erase. Their organising is already underfunded, and when cuts hit, accessibility is the first to go. This reproduces exclusion, forcing disabled women out of the very movements they built. These organisations are often the only spaces designed by and for women with disabilities in their communities. Without them, women are left alone to navigate violence, discrimination, and neglect.

“ WE ARE NOT A SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP. WE ARE WOMEN’S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS. WE ARE FIRST RESPONDERS. WE ARE BUILDERS OF BELONGING. ”

One respondent shared how their organisation could no longer afford the transport stipends that enabled disabled women to attend workshops and support groups. Another described having to shut down home visits to isolated women in rural areas - a critical support for survivors of abuse who cannot leave their homes.

These groups are doing the quiet, essential work of making feminist organising accessible. Yet they are rarely prioritised in funding portfolios, and often left out of consultations entirely.

Without sustained investment, the risk is not only increased isolation - it is invisibility.

The loss of these organisations means fewer referrals, fewer assistive tools, fewer safe spaces and more women falling through the cracks of a humanitarian system that was never built for them to begin with.



Refugee-Led Organisations

Many reported that the few opportunities they previously had access to are now entirely out of reach. Without formal registration or local partnerships, they are left out of most funding cycles. These organisations are not only responding to crises - they are navigating legal limbo, xenophobia, and lack of infrastructure. One refugee-led group in Cox's Bazar reported being forced to shut down three camps' worth of programming overnight. There was no plan for what came next.

"WE ARE ALWAYS FIRST TO BE CUT."

LGBTQI+ Feminist Organisers

LGBTQI+ groups spoke of being showcased on donor websites but ignored when it comes to actual resourcing. Several said they were pushed to "mainstream" their work to fit heteronormative or cisnormative agendas.

Funding cuts meant the closure of safe spaces, drop-in centres, and counselling programmes - often the only ones of their kind in their regions. For many queer organisers, the cuts are economic and existential as funding sustains their survival, struggle for recognition, dignity, and rights.

"DONORS WANT OUR VISIBILITY, NOT OUR FULL SURVIVAL."



Young Feminists

“WE ARE SEEN AS ‘TOO NEW’ TO TRUST WITH FUNDS.”

Young women organisers shared the particular precarity of leading organisations that are both grassroots and emerging. They reported being told they lacked “enough experience” or “long-term presence,” even when doing frontline work in conflict-affected communities.

These groups are not under-capacitated - they are under-trusted. Many had to let go of talented staff, relocate offices to homes, and halt the only feminist services in their area. One young feminist wrote:

“WE’VE LOST HOPE, BUT NOT OUR FIRE.”

Unlike larger, established NGOs, young feminist groups rarely have reserves or back-up donors. When funds disappear, the work vanishes overnight. What is dismissed as “inexperience” is in fact structural exclusion, forcing new leaders to choose between burning out or shutting down.

Another young feminist wrote:

“THEY SAY WE ARE NOT READY. BUT IF NOT US, THEN WHO? WE HAVE BUILT TRUST IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND THEY RELY ON US.”

These cuts not only silence emerging voices but rob movements of their future - stifling innovation, creativity, and the intergenerational renewal that keeps feminist struggle alive.

Indigenous WROs

Indigenous women’s organisations spoke of the violence of invisibility. Funding cuts dismantled intergenerational knowledge-sharing, halted advocacy on land, water, and territorial rights, and erased years of trust built with their communities. For Indigenous feminists, these are not just “programmes” but lifelines - cuts threaten cultural survival and the ecological futures of entire peoples. One respondent shared:

“OUR KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS ARE SEEN AS UNSCIENTIFIC. OUR ORGANISING IS SEEN AS ‘INFORMAL.’ BUT THIS IS HOW OUR PEOPLE HAVE SURVIVED – THROUGH CEREMONY, THROUGH COMMUNITY.”

“OUR WAYS OF ORGANISING DON’T FIT DONOR AND INGO TEMPLATES.”

Several were forced to cancel cultural gatherings or delay vital work protecting biodiversity - a move that risks losing not only projects, but language, memory, and ancestral practice. Indigenous feminist organising is not only resisting underfunding, but resisting epistemicide - the erasure of whole knowledge systems. To cut resources here is not a technical adjustment; it is an attack on ways of being and knowing that have safeguarded life, land, and water for generations.

National and Community-Based Women's Rights Organisations

"WHO IS TRULY RESPONDING TO OUR SUFFERING?"

This question reverberates across feminist networks. It captures the disconnection between donor rhetoric and the lived struggles of national and grassroots feminist organisations who are holding communities through crisis.

The withdrawal of major donor funding has made aid far more transactional than it already was. A WRO noted:

"FUNDING SPACES ARE BECOMING MORE COMPETITIVE AND TRANSACTIONAL."

The language of justice and care which has shown progress is being replaced by many with demands for measurable returns. Feminist groups are increasingly excluded from spaces where decisions are made - and yet are asked to do more, with less, and with no say. Behind the paperwork, the consequences are deeply human. Community defenders are overworked, underpaid, and burnt out. Feminist organising is being held together by exhausted networks and unpaid labour.

"ONLY 12 TO 17 PERCENT OF WORKING WOMEN ARE IN THE FORMAL ECONOMY,"

One member pointed out unpaid care work continues to multiply as services collapse. This is economic violence disguised as budget cuts and efficiency.

Some pointed to another gap:

"OUR GOVERNMENTS ARE SILENT."



As international funding shrinks, many national governments have failed to step up - choosing passivity over protection. For feminist organisers often in contexts where civil society and women's rights are under attack, this means being left alone to carry the consequences of global austerity and political failure.

These reflections make one thing clear: the system is under strain, and it is not neutral. Defunding feminist organising is not just about resources - it's about eroding solidarity, breaking continuity, and hollowing out the political soul of our work. In some countries, cuts simply help to accelerate authorities', formal or de facto, pressure and oppression of CSOs and WROs. Still, feminist organisers are holding on - but they should not have to do it alone.



5.2. HOW WE ARE IMPACTED

Organisational impact

- **Staff layoffs:** Many organisations report having to lay off staff, many of whom were women, LGBTQI+, or people with disabilities.
- **Programme closures:** Vital services were halted - including GBV support, sexual and reproductive health outreach, and education services in IDP and refugee camps.
- **Office shutdowns:** Several groups lost their only physical spaces - which often doubled as safety hubs and community care centres.
- **Burnout:** With fewer hands and heavier burdens, those who remained spoke of deep exhaustion and grief. As one organiser said:

“WE ARE BURNING OUT TRYING TO KEEP THE LIGHTS ON FOR EVERYONE ELSE.”

Community impact

“WE WEREN'T JUST OFFERING SERVICES. THOSE SERVICES WERE KEEPING OUR PEOPLE TOGETHER IN PEACE.”

Behind closed programmes are women and girls who can't access post-rape care. Girls who lose their education. Communities that lose their only line of protection.

Cuts to feminist organisations don't just reduce services - they erase trust, break continuity, and deepen existing inequalities. In many contexts, there is no other provider.

Emotional and political impact

The words that surfaced most often in responses:

loss **Rage** **grief**
urgency **exhaustion**

For many, these cuts are not surprising - they are a pattern. A reminder that feminist work is still treated as optional, and expendable. A respondent wrote:

“WE WERE TOLD TO SCALE DOWN - BUT OUR COMMUNITIES' NEEDS ARE GOING UP.”

Transnational feminist solidarity is often blocked by borders. Visa denials, humiliating embassy interviews, surveillance, and the high cost of travel limit who can gather and strategise. For Indigenous and Global South feminists, mobility is not guaranteed. The same systems that underfund them also restrict their movement, excluding them long before they reach the rooms where decisions are made. As one activist unable to attend CSW69 put it:

“OUR SOLIDARITY IS STOPPED AT THE AIRPORT GATE. BORDERS DECIDE WHO GETS TO BE HEARD.”

These barriers are not incidental - they are political, shaping whose voices can define the global human rights agenda and whose knowledge is kept out.

5.3. HOW WE'RE SURVIVING, HOLDING ON, REIMAGINING

The funding cuts have hit hard - shuttering programmes, forcing staff out, deepening grief. But through the cracks, something else rises: resistance.

Not always loud or easy to see. But steady. Creative. Rooted in care. This is how feminist organisers are holding the line.

We find each other, we survive, because we must

Even as doors closed, organisers found ways to keep showing up - for each other, and for their communities.

“WE LOST ALL FUNDING, BUT WE KEPT GATHERING IN SOMEONE’S LIVING ROOM. THAT SPACE BECAME OUR SHELTER, OUR STRATEGY ROOM, OUR CARE CENTRE.”

These weren't just coping mechanisms. They were acts of survival - and of imagination.

Some groups turned to mutual aid and informal support networks. Others shifted to digital organising, sharing information and resources through WhatsApp and Signal when travel or funding became impossible.

A young organiser from Thailand shared:

“WE HELD HEALING CIRCLES ONLINE, IN SECRET. NO BUDGET. JUST US. WE NEEDED A PLACE TO CRY AND TO DREAM.”

We hold each other up

Feminist organisers did what they have always done in moments of scarcity: they leaned into solidarity.

“ANOTHER GROUP GAVE US OFFICE SPACE AFTER WE WERE EVICTED. WE NOW SHARE EVERYTHING. INTERNET, PRINTERS, COFFEE...”

Some WROs shared staff, supplies, and transportation to stretch what they had. Others formed local coalitions to collectively negotiate with donors or governments.

Across languages and geographies, feminists are weaving new safety nets with each other - outside of systems that have abandoned them.

We refuse to disappear

There is grief. But there is also defiance.

“WE ARE NOT JUST IMPLEMENTERS. WE ARE ARCHITECTS OF JUSTICE. IF THEY STOP FUNDING US, IT DOESN'T MAKE OUR WORK LESS REAL. JUST LESS RESOURCED.”

Feminist organisers are documenting their struggles, speaking out, and naming the politics of this moment.

“WE ARE TIRED OF ASKING FOR SCRAPS. WE WANT FUNDING THAT HONOURS OUR POWER - NOT JUST OUR PAIN.”

Many have started developing their own frameworks for accountability, shifting language, pushing donors to move beyond 'emergency' logics and into long-term solidarity. Some are imagining new forms of feminist infrastructure, regional funds, care-based funding models, and community-governed grantmaking processes.

For example, a feminist fund in West Africa is experimenting with participatory budgeting, a network is piloting feminist infrastructure that holds space for collective organising, agenda-setting, and advocacy at the national level, while a collective in Latin America are initiating care stipends that support organisers with childcare and health costs. In doing so, feminists are reshaping resourcing into a tool that serves movements rather than constrains them.

“WE ARE DREAMING BEYOND THE COLLAPSE. WE ARE BUILDING SOMETHING WE'VE NEVER BEEN GIVEN.”



Global South feminists are showing that another way is possible. From solidarity economies - mutual aid, barter, cooperatives - to Indigenous healing practices and eco-feminist defence of land and water, they are not just filling gaps but redefining what aid means.

These practices carry visions of care and survival outside colonial and capitalist models. They remind us that feminist responses are not supplementary - they are alternatives, rooted in histories of resistance.

This is feminist resistance. It is tender. It is tactical. It is alive. And it is calling all of us, to donors, governments, institutions, to do more than witness. To listen. To shift. To follow.



6.0. WHAT THIS MOMENT REVEALS

From Resistance to Exhaustion

Women's rights organisations have long carried the weight of resistance in the face of systemic violence and crisis. Yet this moment exposes how relentless struggle without adequate support breeds exhaustion. Feminists on the ground are pushing back against inequality, injustice, and the shrinking spaces for dissent, but the deepening burnout threatens the very movement sustaining change.

"WE ARE THE FRONTLINE AND THE FIRST TO BURN OUT WHEN THE WORLD IGNORES OUR CRIES."

This exhaustion is not a personal failure but a reflection of a system designed to demand survival without sustaining those who resist.

Erased in the Name of Efficiency

The aid system talks about being "efficient," but often that means cutting out the people who are already leading with care and courage. Duplication, gaps between who has money and who can access it, and slow uptake of things like cash support show the system has room to improve. Real efficiency isn't about sidelining local knowledge. It means investing in those closest to the crisis, WROs who already know what their communities need. Efficiency should lift up their leadership, not erase it, ensuring it is sustained rather than sacrificed.

By framing cuts as efficiency, the system invisibilises feminist leadership and the rights, needs and people it stands for.

"OUR POLITICS ARE TOO RADICAL FOR BUDGETS SHAPED BY THOSE WHO FEAR REAL CHANGE."

Coloniality of Power in Aid

Women's rights organisations have long carried the weight of resistance in the face of systemic violence and crisis. Yet this moment exposes how relentless struggle without adequate support breeds exhaustion. Feminists on the ground are pushing back against inequality, injustice, and the shrinking spaces for dissent, but the deepening burnout threatens the very movement sustaining change.

"A BUDGET DECISION IN EUROPE CAN DECIDE WHETHER WOMEN IN MY COMMUNITY EAT, WHETHER OUR CLINIC STAYS OPEN, WHETHER OUR DAUGHTERS ARE SAFE. THAT IS COLONIAL POWER DRESSED UP AS AID. THIS IS HOW COLONIAL POWER STILL MOVES - QUIETLY, BUT WITH LIFE AND DEATH CONSEQUENCES."

Cuts are not random technical adjustments. They are part of a global aid system still shaped by colonial hierarchies, where donors in the Global North control survival in the South. When Northern governments slash funding, feminist organisers in crisis zones lose salaries, shelters, and safety nets overnight. This is not efficiency - it is dependency by design. The very structure of aid keeps decision-making, resources, and legitimacy concentrated in northern capitals while extracting unpaid or underpaid labour from Global South feminists.

Safety Without Resources is a Lie

Protection cannot exist in a vacuum of diminishing support. When funding shrinks, the promise of safety for women and marginalized groups crumbles, leaving communities exposed to escalating violence without adequate intervention. Feminist organisations know that true safety demands sustained investment in care, advocacy, and structural change - not empty assurances.

**“YOU CANNOT PROTECT US
WITH EMPTY WORDS AND
EMPTY POCKETS.”**

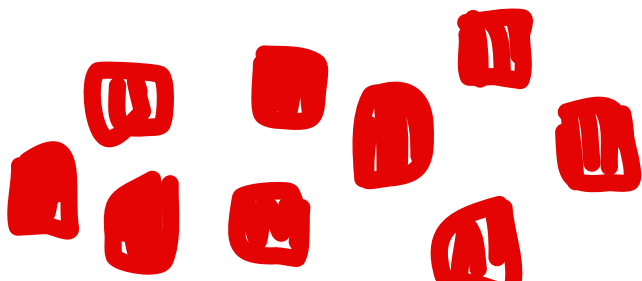
Safety without resources is no safety at all, it is a betrayal dressed in the language of commitment.

Carrying the Crisis Alone

Feminists do the labour of sustaining communities, navigating crises, and building futures - often without the backing they urgently need. This unpaid, unseen labour perpetuates a crisis of care, where the emotional and political burdens fall disproportionately on those least resourced. The global aid system's failure to fund feminist leadership effectively leaves WROs isolated in the storm.

**“WE CARRY THE WORK,
BUT THE SYSTEM REFUSES
TO CARRY US.”**

This moment demands recognition that feminist organising is not charity work but essential political resistance that requires real investment.



7.0. OUR DEMANDS

From the ground we stand on, from the truths we carry in our bones, from the frontline where we have always been.

Recognise Defunding as a Choice

Donors and their international intermediaries, UN agencies and INGOs must acknowledge that cutting funds for feminist response is never neutral. Every withdrawn grant deepens inequality, erases lives saved and wipes away hard-won gains. We demand you own this choice, name it for what it is - an active dismantling of women's power - and reverse it.

Value Feminist Work as Strategy, Not Charity

Stop treating feminist organising as an optional add-on or a public relations line. Our resistance to injustice is the very strategy that keeps our communities together, ensuring no one is left behind in crisis. We demand funding(both volume and quality) that sees our work as central to survival, resilience and change not as a cost to be trimmed.

Respect Indigenous Sovereignty and Collective Governance

Funding models must honour Indigenous and community ways of organising. Stop forcing us into NGO or legal frameworks that do not reflect who we are. Directly resource collectives, councils, and traditional structures that are accountable to their people - not to donor paperwork.

If you need to pass through intermediaries, prefer national intermediaries, feminist pool funds or mechanisms with proven commitments to feminist values. Systematically ask yourselves "why not local" when tempted to channel funding through international intermediaries.

Guarantee Visa and Mobility Justice

Feminist solidarity cannot thrive if borders decide who can speak. We demand visa justice and mobility justice so Global South and Indigenous feminists can access global policy spaces without harassment, denial, or exclusion. Our voices cannot be locked out by geography.

Decolonise Donor Accountability Frameworks

Stop measuring our survival with global North donor-centric reporting metrics. We demand accountability defined by our communities - through collective witnessing, storytelling, and practices of care - not compliance templates. Accountability must flow downward to the people most affected, not upward to donor capitals.

Provide Flexible, Long-Term Support Rooted in Care

Short-term, rigid grants force us into constant fundraising and prevent us from building trust, capacity and community leadership. We demand resources that are adaptable to shifting realities, that give us time to listen, to care, to heal, to build transformative solutions from the ground up.

Invest in Feminist Futures

Do more than parachute in when crisis hits. We demand sustained investment in feminist leadership, organising spaces, and safety networks - because the people who lead with love, radical care and justice today are the architects of a better tomorrow.

Honour Accountability to Affected Communities

True partnership means feminist organisers set the agenda, not you. We demand participatory decision-making in every stage of programme design, monitoring and evaluation. We will not accept selective consultation that ignores our voices or our analysis of power.

These demands do not arise from theory but from the voices of those who carry the work every day. They are grounded in our pain, hope and unwavering conviction that feminist organising is not a cost to be cut. It is the foundation of response, survival and lasting change.

8.0 CONCLUSION: THIS IS AN EMERGENCY

In the burnout. In the doors that close when funding runs dry. This is an emergency because feminist humanitarian work is being failed. But it is not only a funding crisis. It is an epistemic and political crisis of humanitarianism itself - where Global South and Indigenous feminist models of survival are invisibilised, dismissed as “informal,” and erased from the centre of response. The very practices that sustain life - mutual aid, land defence, ancestral knowledge, community healing - are devalued, while militarism, saviourism, and charity logics continue to dominate.

“WE ARE NOT SHORT OF SOLUTIONS. WE ARE SHORT OF SOLIDARITY THAT TRANSLATES INTO ACTION. SHORT OF JUSTICE THAT REDISTRIBUTES RESOURCES, NOT REINFORCES INEQUALITY. SHORT OF SYSTEMS THAT CENTRE CARE.”

Transforming this system means dismantling its colonial foundations. It means rejecting humanitarian logics built on charity, saviourism, and militarisation, and replacing them with relational, community-led, care-rooted systems that honour those who hold communities together in times of crisis.

The path forward is clear: fund feminist organising not as an afterthought but with intention. Redistribute power and resources. Shift from token gestures to structural commitments. Stand not above, but with those who have always shown up - in the face of crisis, collapse, and violence.

This is not about inclusion in a broken system. This is about transforming it together. Let this be the moment we choose solidarity over silence. Justice over convenience. Feminist futures over failing institutions.



**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN FUNDING – ON
FEMINIST TERMS – THE ORGANISATIONS WHO
CONTRIBUTED TO THIS RESEARCH, PLEASE GET
IN TOUCH WITH US AND WE WILL CONNECT
YOU.**



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