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Donor interventions on women's political empowerment

Rapid Literature Review
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About this report

This report was written by Emilie Combaz, GSDRC Research Associate at the University of Manchester's Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI). It is based on seven and a half days of desk-based research.

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Key websites

- Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) - Resourcing Women's Rights: <http://www.awid.org/priority-areas/resourcing-womens-rights>
- Development and Change – Special issue (January 2007, Vol. 38 Issue 1) - Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dech.2007.38.issue-1/issuetoc>
- Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS): <http://gaps-uk.org/resources/>
- Gender & Development – Special issue (Volume 24, Issue 1, 2016) - Sustainable Development Goals: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cgde20/24/1>
- Gender and Development Network - Women's Participation and Leadership Working Group: <http://gadnetwork.org/participation-and-influence/>
- IDS – BRIDGE: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/topics/social-movements>
- International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) – Learn: <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/learn>
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) – Democracy and gender: <http://www.idea.int/gender/index.cfm>
- Journal of International Development – Special issue: (April 2016, Volume 28, Issue 3, Pages 309-444) - Aid for Gender Equality and Development: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jid.v28.3/issuetoc>
- OECD-DAC - Evaluations - Gender equality and women in development: <https://www.oecd.org/derec/publicationsdocuments/genderequalityandwomenindevelopment/>

- Pathways of Women's Empowerment – Building constituencies: <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/themes/building-constituencies>
- UNDP - Evaluation Resource Centre: <http://erc.undp.org/>
- UN Women – Gender equality evaluation portal: <http://genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en>

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Executive summary

Major multilateral and bilateral aid donors have expressed renewed interest in women's political empowerment (WPE) over the past decade. They have primarily translated this into support for quotas of women in executive and legislative government. However, merely increasing the number of women in such bodies does not automatically increase the power of the women involved, nor empower other women politically (e.g. O'Neil & Domingo 2016). Feminist scholarship and practice have long emphasised that WPE is a multi-faceted and complex process, and that donors can only support it effectively through transformative action that is sustained, nuanced, and politically aware (e.g. Cornwall & Rivas 2015; Eyben 2011).

Yet, there is evidence that most donors have largely failed to do so, and have tended to build their approaches on **over-simplified models of empowerment**, for reasons ranging from their internal institutions and capacities to their political economy and positioning towards recipient governments (Cornwall & Rivas 2015). At the same time, a few donor programmes have supported WPE in a more transformational way (see e.g. Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015; Batliwala 2013). So what does rigorous literature show on donor interventions for WPE in low- and middle-income countries?

This rapid review of academic, practitioner and policy literature published over the past decade finds that the evidence base is rigorous overall. However, it is limited in size and scope, often fails to address the interplay of gender with other inequalities, and has some inconsistency in findings. There is no systematic mapping of which donors have been active on WPE or what interventions major donors have used.¹

Other than quotas, donors have undertaken fairly **little action on WPE**, be it through interventions focused on WPE or as part of larger programmes – especially when compared to intense activity on women's economic empowerment. There are notable exceptions, with some donors conducting more substantial and sustained work on WPE, especially: work by UN Women and UNDP; work about women in post-conflict peacebuilding (especially in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 1325); and work by the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and, to some extent, Australia.

Donors have generally **used only some types of interventions** for WPE, and under-used or ignored others. Donors have typically used the following interventions (individually or in combination) under the label of WPE:

- Support for women in formal politics and the state. For example, in parties, in elected office and the civil service, as voters before and during elections, and in formal policy-making during peace negotiations and reconstruction.
- Direct funding and training to women's NGOs and established organisations, typically geared towards formal politics.
- Support to formal, issue-focused coalitions of women's organisations, often middle- to upper-class.
- Policy dialogue, either internationally or with host governments.
- Gender mainstreaming in their aid programming; micro- to meso-level mobilisation of women for social accountability on public services.

¹ The key websites listed at the start of this report offer good starting points to do such a mapping.

Conversely, critical references note that most donors have **failed to adopt broader approaches** to empowerment, which address power and political economy, adapt to specific contexts and inequalities, and, when done well, have yielded positive effects for WPE. Largely, donors have not provided long-term support for less formal or more disadvantaged grassroots feminist groups and movements, nor have they followed rather than led in interactions with them. They have not taken much action to empower women in the informal dimensions of politics, nor to support girls' and young women's early involvement in women's rights activism. Further, they have not strategically combined levels and types of interventions for empowerment, or involved men and boys systematically to advance WPE.

Overall, **the record on effectiveness is mixed**, and **findings are not consistent**. There is a divide between donor-related literature that tends to report positive, or no, effects, and more critical literature that tends to conclude that the record is even more mixed, with limited positive effects, frequent lack of effect, and some negative effects.

There are two types of factors within donors' control that determine the effectiveness of interventions. First, the **internal functioning** of donors, such as leadership and accountability on women's empowerment, matters. This determines the level and quality of crucial resources and staff capacities within donor agencies. This refers in particular to having politically savvy national and international staff who are highly familiar with the political economy of gender in a specific place.

The second type of essential factor is the ability of donors and their partners to **work adaptively and strategically** within a context. Donors can be effective if they enhance locally-led processes of empowerment, and if they are able to capitalise on political opportunities. This requires reflexivity about the position of donors and of their local partners. In addition, the more successful donors have been skilled at handling the difficulties and risks posed by contexts such as authoritarian regimes, armed conflicts, broad social opposition to women's rights, and backlash against WPE. In such contexts, donors can support local actors' use of cooperative strategies to achieve mobilisation and protection, for example through civic engagement.

The literature strongly suggests that there are few, if any, generalisable specifics on the 'how' of success or failure, because so much about interventions for WPE is particular to context. Overall, authors emphasise the **quality of the relationships** involved, being **politically savvy**, and the **adaptability** of donors as essentials. No modality can offer a technical shortcut or easy fix for donors' success on WPE.

Still, the literature identifies a number of modalities of interventions that are conducive to effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness on WPE.² Some findings are applicable to the entire project cycle:

- **Crafting intervention strategies for transformational empowerment.** To achieve this, donor action needs to fully accept and integrate that women's empowerment is complex, multidimensional, deeply political and contested, non-linear, specific to context, and long-term.
 - *How* donors work and engage with stakeholders is as important as *what* inputs, activities or outputs they are involved in. Successful donors invest time and resources in their relationships with women's organisations, and address power inequalities that they and their local partners generate, such as the marginalisation of less powerful or lesser-resourced women and women's groups.

² Due to length constraints, this overview focuses on modalities conducive to effectiveness; readers can refer to the relevant sub-sections on 'ineffective approaches' throughout section 5 for negative findings.

- Whether and how donors need to use theories of change, project cycles, or neither, continues to be debated. Most references encourage donors to use an adaptable theory of change grounded in a solid analysis of political economy that they update regularly, and to ensure that their approaches are more flexible, more responsive to women’s organisations, more geared towards medium- and long-term goals, and more creative.
- **Constructing and using an informed analysis on gender and context** that explores the political economy of gender inequality, and is integrated throughout the project cycle. Strategies for contingency, risk mitigation, and resilience are essential, especially for contexts with high political or socio-cultural risk.
- **Providing sustained, nuanced, flexible support to locally-led, collective WPE**, through:
 - Direct support to representative women's organisations and collective action, for example through organisation-specific accompaniment, learning-by-doing, or regular reflection and documentation about what works in relation to the theory of change.
 - Support for the institutionalisation of women’s participation in formal and informal politics.
 - Support to women’s collective organising and action. Donors need to dedicate time, resources, and political acumen to the actors and the process, rather than to any project-bound outputs or purpose. They need to be enablers, not creators, of coalitions, and to support practices such as collective leadership, collaborations among partners with complementary expertise, and financial transparency within coalitions.

Further findings are specific to particular aspects of the project cycle:

- **Designing and implementing interventions so they work with and for the complexity of women’s empowerment**, while still referring to clear results as objectives. For example, budgets need to cover adaptive learning and supportive relationships with partners.
- **Ensuring that monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) account for the specificities of women’s empowerment, gender equality, and collective action.**
 - Donors need to at least mainstream good practices such as improving the documentation of results and impact, and ensuring there is better learning from successes and failures within and among programmes, sectors, and countries.
 - A number of authors suggest practical recommendations for more fundamental changes to MEL about women’s empowerment. These include turning monitoring and evaluation into a meaningful learning partnership. MEL tools also need to be able to unpack gender inequalities, to assess collective contributions to change, to be adaptable, and to be realistic about expected achievements within the timeframe and scope of donor interventions. Multiple MEL methods need to be used, so that marginalised voices and approaches to WPE are truly valued.

1. State of knowledge and knowledge gaps

There is **limited rigorous literature** assessing the effectiveness of donor interventions on WPE. Among the abundant literature on women's empowerment in low- and middle-income countries, many references discuss gender equality generally, or focus on economic empowerment – possibly because, as many critical references point out, donors had failed to significantly take action for WPE in the 1990s and 2000s, focusing on market-based approaches to education, health, and livelihoods (Cornwall & Rivas 2015). In literature on women's *political* empowerment, the bulk of references centre on domestic processes of WPE outside of donor interventions, or on the domestic use of international norms for gender equality. Of the remaining evidence, most centre on numerical targets in formal politics. This leaves only a **small knowledge base on donor interventions specifically for WPE**, made up of a few references focused on WPE and of many references where only a few sub-sections deal with WPE.

In that subset, this rapid review found **no systematic mapping** of donor interventions for WPE, nor any systematic or meta-reviews of the effectiveness of such interventions that would cover all major donors active on WPE. Further, there is no readily available systematic mapping of what types of interventions donors have used (be it all donors or the main involved ones). This appears to vary considerably from one donor to the next, in nature and degree.

The relevant information that is available consists of overarching discussions of major donors' aid approaches to WPE, and of donor-commissioned evaluations. These evaluations are either programme-specific or meta-reviews of several programmes. Specifically, it is made up of: several studies of large cases (such as international policies for gender mainstreaming that include WPE or meta-evaluations of gender work by several donors); several comparisons of WPE in two or more countries or donor programmes; and many studies about a single donor or country. Given the time constraints of this rapid review, this report has focused on the most methodologically robust multi-case studies, although readers may want to follow up on single-case studies, as there is a consensus in critical literature that adaptation to specific contexts is essential. Where relevant, it also mentions findings about larger gender interventions, when the reference makes clear that the donor actions assessed include WPE.

Within relevant literature, **findings on the results and impact of donor interventions are scarce**, as this review found and many authors note (e.g. Domingo et al. 2013: 5; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15; M'Cormack 2012: 2; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 12; Risby & Keller 2012). A number of references, or sections within references, only discuss outputs or immediate outcomes, or make claims based on expectations about what works for WPE rather than discussing what has actually been shown to work or fail. As for the 'what', 'why', and 'how' of donor interventions and their effectiveness, a majority (but not all) of the references provide details on this. The overall balance of findings on the 'how' is that there are: many findings applicable to all aspects of the project cycle, regarding strategies and theories of change, analysis of gender and context, and support to locally led WPE; many specifically on monitoring, evaluation, and learning; some which are design specific; and few specifically on implementation.

In light of this overall state of the evidence, and with the limited time of this report, it is therefore impossible to draw conclusions about the relative effectiveness of different interventions for WPE compared to each other (a point also made e.g. in Risby & Keller 2012). This report can only lay out evidence about each intervention as presented in the literature.

Further, most donor-commissioned pieces provide these details in ways that revolve around depoliticised, technical, short- to medium-term issues of aid effectiveness and women, instead of considering transformational political empowerment and gender from the short term to the long term.

As a consequence, many references fail to provide insights into how interventions may have addressed context-specificity in particular countries. This is the case even about broad categories of contexts, where findings about difficult contexts (e.g. post-conflict or authoritarian states) simply reinforce the need for adaptability, political acumen, local knowledge, and risk mitigation. This lack of detail in donor evidence is especially problematic for learning, because the entire feminist scholarship on aid for WPE emphasises the importance of tailoring action to context. All this raises questions about findings of effectiveness in much donor-commissioned literature. The donor findings conveyed in this report should be analysed critically, by asking according to whom, and for whom, effectiveness is found. Several critical authors also make this point (e.g. Cornwall & Rivas 2015).

This being said, those references that were relevant and detailed enough to be selected are typically based on rigorous methodology, which is a clear strength of this evidence base. Taken as a whole, the evidence stems from a variety of academic, practitioner, and policy sources. It is based on a diversity of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. There are the usual issues of attribution and long chains of causality from donor intervention to effects on WPE, but the references typically address this well. Another strength of the evidence base taken as a whole is that it covers a wide range of geographic locations (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Middle East).

Available research also refers to diverse contexts in terms of politics (e.g. authoritarian and democratic regimes; armed conflict, post-conflict, and peace; highly and poorly institutionalised state structures), economy (low- and middle-income), and society (diverse histories and conditions of gender inequality and trajectories of WPE up to the present). The evidence also pertains to a diversity of sectors where donors have worked on WPE. Governance strongly predominates, as might be expected. However, there are a number of findings drawn from other sectors, largely due to women's political mobilisation on issues such as public services for social protection, health, housing, education, WASH, and public safety.

As a result of these various strengths, the findings from individual references and from the whole evidence base typically demonstrate causalities, not just correlations, and they are typically conclusive, not just indicative.

Nonetheless, there are a number of gaps in the literature. Some reflect the dearth of donor action in some areas. This applies for example to the scant evidence on long-term donor support for grassroots feminist movements (distinct from more formalised and professionalised organisations), and for WPE in informal politics. It is also the case on coalitions, on girls' and young women's early involvement in women's rights activism, on support for WPE in higher education (especially non-vocational), and on systematising the strategic involvement of men and boys for WPE (see e.g. Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313-314).

Other gaps result from blind spots in interventions and evaluations, such as problems in approaches to structural inequalities. Firstly, when conducting and evaluating action for WPE, many donors have simplified gender as 'women', a problem noted by many authors (e.g. Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 314; Risby & Keller 2012). Secondly, attention to other structural inequalities that interact with gender is uneven and never systematic in donor-commissioned references. Specifically, while evidence on the relations between gender and socio-economic class in WPE are often considered, this is much less the case with caste, location (urban and rural), migration, refugee status, and hardly ever the case with ethnicity, sexualities, age (girlhood and old age are typically overlooked in interventions for WPE), disabilities, and other context-specific conditions in economy, society or politics. As a result, donor-commissioned literature also typically fails to address the systemic interplay of these various structures of inequality, and their implications for the effectiveness of interventions on WPE for the most

disadvantaged women and girls. In contrast, academic and critical practitioner and policy literature do much better in these regards.

Lastly, despite the methodological rigour of references, findings are divided between two sets of references and are therefore inconsistent: one set tends to have positive assessments of the effectiveness of interventions (these are typically from practitioner sources, especially donors themselves), and another set that comes to more critical conclusions (typically, academic sources and feminist policy and practitioner sources). While there is a general consistency of findings within each of the two blocks, the overall evidence thus has inconsistencies.

Much of the practitioner and less critical policy literature offers descriptions and narrations of donor interventions, and assessments that tend to conclude that interventions have made a positive impact or, at worst, no impact. This literature typically gives conclusions on the 'why' and 'how' of success or failure that are detailed, but that also seem more technocratic, depoliticised, or not very specific to the history, economy, sociology, and politics of gender in the locations examined.

In contrast, academic references and more critical practitioner and policy references offer more analytical approaches, and tend to conclude that donor interventions have had a much more mixed impact. Some of these references go into detail in the 'how' of the interventions discussions, but not all. However, this literature typically gives conclusions on the 'why' and 'how' of success or failure that are less technocratic, more politicised, and, for most, responsive to the differences in the history, economy, sociology, and politics of gender of the diversity of locations in which donor aid operates.

This divide suggests those findings from practitioner and less critical policy literature need to be read with some caution due to a seeming bias towards reporting positives. More broadly, this may be a reminder that definitions of success and failure involve individual and collective values and interests that shape conclusions.

2. Types and effects of interventions: mapping and highlights

Evaluations show that donors typically combine two or more of the following types of interventions for WPE: funding, policy work, and programmes. This is usually part of their larger action for gender equality, without WPE necessarily a core focus. The next sections, which are structured to reflect the evidence base, provide a brief overview of the types and effects of approaches used, and the corresponding references.

In short, **the impact of donor interventions on WPE taken as a whole is limited and mixed.** In most cases, interventions achieve some limited positive results on some of their goals, while failing to reach others. Other interventions have had no significant effects. In a few cases, interventions are recognised for having met their goals and generated some positive effects. In many cases their impact is limited in depth, scope, and sustainability. Lastly, a handful of interventions are praised for making a more significant impact, such as the Dutch MDG3 Fund (Batliwala, 2013; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a) and UN Women's approach to WPE, whether examined through its overall approach to WPE (e.g. Paulmer, Goodman & Truant 2015) or through specific types of interventions such as the Fund for Gender Equality (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015).

Importantly, while donor-commissioned literature identifies very few negative effects of the interventions, academic and other critical references do point to some. The shortcomings in most donors' approaches to WPE – such as a very instrumentalist approach to empowerment – have generated

structural negative effects such as the lack of sustainability of effects beyond interventions, the disempowerment of grassroots mass-based movements to the benefit of NGOs, the further marginalisation of the more disadvantaged women, and missed opportunities (e.g. Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313).

The following sections map the references available on the types and effects of interventions for WPE that donors have used. This is grouped by the category (or combination of categories) of interventions discussed in each reference: funding, policy and programming. Combinations are the first to be presented, as they are the most widely discussed). Within each major category of interventions, information is grouped by donor type (multilateral donors, then bilateral donors), and then by successive reference.

All relevant references found during this rapid literature review are listed under the relevant section. However, due to the time constraints of helpdesk work, details about interventions could only be extracted from a selection of references (at least one reference per type of intervention):

2.1 Combined interventions

DONOR(S)	TYPE(S) OF INTERVENTION ASSESSED	EFFECT(S) OF INTERVENTION ON WPE	EVIDENCE AND SOURCE OF ASSESSMENT
Multiple bilateral and multilateral donors	Development assistance (funding, policy, and programmes) to countries and to NGOs that aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including WPE. Covers both gender-specific aid and aid that mainstreams gender.	<p>Unclear: impact evaluations on what works are not conclusive.</p> <p>Action on improving women's participation in key governance such as national parliaments has been slow, donor investment in this area is recent.</p> <p>There are missed opportunities for action.</p> <p>Promising approaches for WPE include leadership training for women politicians, media interventions, and civic education to address the views of women who hold office.</p>	<p>Review of macro-level quantitative evidence on all 24 OECD-DAC members, as well as review of Impact evaluations, case studies, and qualitative research (including meta-reviews).</p> <p>Grown, Addison & Tarp (2016).</p>
Multiple bilateral and multilateral donors	Any aid approach for gender mainstreaming and gender equality (including WPE), covering funding, policy, and programming	<p>Mixed, ranging from no effect to limited positive effects.</p> <p>Mainstreaming has not been embedded. Positive results on gender equality have been fragmented and not scaled up. There is a strong perception that the mainstreaming of gender equality is consistently underperforming among most donors.</p>	<p>Comprehensive assessment of gender evaluations conducted by donor agencies between 1990 and 2010, covering over 25 thematic and country evaluations on gender policies and mainstreaming by multilateral and bilateral agencies.</p> <p>Risby & Keller (2012).</p>
UN Women, UNDP	<p>UN Women and UNDP support to women's political participation in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Interventions considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall strategies (global, regional, and sub-regional). - Specific programmes, including: election-related activities focused on women as citizens, party members, candidates, or elected 	<p>Mixed (positive effects and limited effects with missed opportunities).</p> <p>In some cases, UN Women and UNDP have enhanced the enabling environment that makes women more likely to have improved access to political decision-making and a greater ability to set political agendas, including towards gender equality.</p> <p>At the global level, both agencies' strategic thinking has become more nuanced, with the recognition that women's political agency depends on changes at multiple levels and spheres, including social, legal, and political ones.</p>	<p>Joint comparative evaluation of donors' interventions in Burundi, Sudan (focus on South Sudan), Nigeria, and sub-region of southern Africa.</p> <p>Theory-based evaluation on the theory of change of each programme. Looking at political, societal, and legal change relevant to advancing women's political voice and power.</p>

	<p>representatives, to advance gender equality or transformative women's leadership before, during, and after elections and a referendum (Burundi, South Sudan, southern Africa); joint donor basket fund to support women in the electoral cycle, through partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs), media, and political parties (Nigeria); assistance to SADC member States in implementing plans to end gender-based violence (southern Africa - SADC).</p>	<p>However, translating this knowledge into context-relevant programming has remained a challenge. Whereas strategies emphasise the importance of analysing country situations, programming has typically falling back on the usual entry points: electoral support, "uncritical assumptions about political parties, as drivers of change", and increasing the numbers of women in office (p. vi).</p> <p>Interventions have added value in supporting the leadership capabilities of women in society and in political institutions, to enhance women's voices.</p> <p>Country offices that have identified and supported relevant stakeholders in society and state, as well as supported strategic alliances across society and state, have contributed to positive synergies for reform.</p>	<p>Domingo et al. (2012).</p>
<p>UN Women</p>	<p>Action by UN Women and its predecessor entities to increase women's leadership and participation in peace and security, and in humanitarian response, between 2008 and 2012. Interventions assessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Normative and policy influencing, at global and country levels. - Operations. At country levels, this included ensuring that women's voices were heard in legislative processes, giving technical assistance to legislative bodies, and developing State bodies' capacities. It also included direct and indirect support to women's leadership and participation. Direct support included for example facilitating access to 	<p>Mixed (largely positive effects, and sometimes no effect or missed opportunities).</p> <p>Overall, the activities contributed to advancing women's leadership and participation in peace and security, in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing global and national norms, laws, and policies. In addition, knowledge production is recognised as rich and authoritative – particularly information at global level on women, peace, and security. - Member States implementing these norms, laws, and policies. - More women participating and leading on security and peace at country levels. <p>In some countries and some thematic areas, the organisation has enhanced effectively women's leadership and participation in peace and security (for details of impact, see p. 8). In some countries, it has also built meaningful strategic partnerships with a range of National actors, especially women's organisations and, increasingly, state actors.</p>	<p>Thematic evaluation by UN Women's Evaluation Office. Theory-based evaluation.</p> <p>Mixed-method approach, with emphasis on qualitative methods: desk-based quantitative and qualitative review (with in-depth analysis of 12 programs), 217 interviews (with UN women staff and, mostly, with other stakeholders), and six case studies with fieldwork (one study on a global policy at headquarters, and five country studies - Afghanistan, Columbia, Haiti, Kosovo, and Liberia).</p> <p>Domingo et al. (2013).</p>

	<p>political processes, and establishing fora for women to participate in community peacebuilding and security. Indirect support, to generate enabling conditions, included: giving technical input into gender-sensitive laws and policies; developing the capacities, and supporting the institutions, of women's organisations and networks, and of public bodies (e.g. to mainstream gender into security forces); sensitising actors to women's rights; and (co-) producing knowledge for advocacy, policy-making, and implementation (e.g. databases, toolkits).</p> <p>- Internal organisational capacity.</p>	<p>However, while most country and project offices have been adept at translating strategies into country level objectives and programmes, there is variation in country staff's ability to adapt their activities towards state and civil society actors to country conditions, so they would still advance strategic objectives. There were also variations in UN Women's staff ability to read and respond to local political economy and the needs and expectations of stakeholders.</p> <p>Weak strategic planning, and continued <i>ad hoc</i> financing for projects have undermined the coherence of programmes at country level. Further, inadequate knowledge management and communication between headquarters and country offices hinders the improvement of coherence between policy and programmes.</p> <p>While human and financial resources are inadequate to meet the increased expectations towards UN Women, existing resources could be used more strategically and effectively, away from the focus on headquarters and callable policy, and towards country offices.</p>	
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The following meta-review of evidence about several donors is largely about pre-2006 data, but may be of interest: Aasen (2006).

Further evaluations are available about multilateral organisations. Most cover a much broader scope than WPE, such as 'gender equality' or 'women's empowerment' also including economic empowerment, and it is often difficult to isolate findings about WPE specifically. The evaluations are as follows:

- Joint programmes for gender equality in the United Nations system (Betts et al. 2013).
- The UN Peacebuilding Support Office (O'Gorman 2014).
- UNDP's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment (UNDP 2015).
- The Development Effectiveness Review of UN Women (Paulmer, Goodman & Truant 2015).
- The Gender Equality and Political Governance Project by UN Women and AusAID (Qoro, Waiko, Maetala, & Mara 2012).
- EU support to gender equality and women's empowerment (Watkins et al. 2015a).
- The EU's Gender Action Plan (O'Connell, H. 2014).
- FAO (Brewster et al. 2011).

Further evaluations are available about bilateral donors. Most cover a much broader scope than WPE, such as 'gender equality' or 'women's empowerment' also including economic empowerment, and it is often difficult to isolate findings about WPE specifically. The evaluations are as follows:

- Australia's support to women's political and administrative leadership in the Pacific (Haley & Zubrinich 2016).
- Gender equality in Sweden's development cooperation (Byron & Örnemark 2010).
- The Netherlands' policy on gender, peace and security (UN resolution 1325) (Smits & de Nooijer 2015).
- Norway's support to women's rights and gender equality (Jones et al. 2015).
- Switzerland's mainstreaming of gender (Stuart, Rao & Holland 2009).
- Australia's mainstreaming of gender in its programme-led evaluations (Woroniuk 2014).
- Belgium's action on gender (Caubergs et al. 2014).

On the participation of women's rights organisations in the policy and programming of donors (esp. DFID) about the agenda on women, peace, and security, see: Hunt, Bond & Ochieng (2015).

2.2 Funding interventions

DONOR(S)	TYPE(S) OF INTERVENTION ASSESSED	EFFECT(S) OF INTERVENTION ON WPE	SOURCE(S) OF ASSESSMENT
OECD-DAC donors	<p>Funding to non-governmental organisations and governmental institutions for women's equality in 13 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, and Yemen.</p>	<p>Positive: aid to organisations and institutions for women's equality is positively correlated with WPE.</p> <p>Estimate that the independent effect of a US\$200 increase in such aid is associated with a rise of about 3 percentage points in the proportion of women in national parliaments (p. 333).</p> <p>(Aid for family planning or reproductive health was not associated with an increase in women's share of seats).</p> <p>Author notes the large disparities within the region in the amounts of aid given to these organisations and institutions, and no linear relation between the amounts of aid allocated to a country and the state of WPE.</p>	<p>Statistical analysis of the connection between OECD-DAC aid to 13 MENA countries and indicators of WPE (measured through the proportion of women in national parliaments), controlling for other variables such as education, political institutions, and aid to reproductive health and family planning (panel data on 2002-2010).</p> <p>Baliamoune-Lutz (2016).</p>
UN Women	<p>Since 2009, the UN Women multi-donor Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) has provided multi-year grants directly to women-led civil society organisations in low- and middle-income countries to advance women's political and economic empowerment. Grants range from US\$100,000 to US\$3 million.</p> <p>Typical topics of intervention: increasing women's participation in formal and informal decision-making; increasing their capacity to raise issues on their needs and priorities; and addressing structural barriers to their meaningful participation in political and public participation.</p> <p>Approaches varied by world region (Asia-Pacific, Africa, Arab States region, Latin America and Caribbean). Ranged from community-focused approaches to local and national politics (formal and informal).</p> <p>Key beneficiaries and target groups included</p>	<p>Highly positive effects overall.</p> <p>The most important achievements have been in influencing women's empowerment at very local level (typically, communities), although it has also generated some change at regional, national, and other local levels.</p> <p>Implementing organisations are well positioned to contribute to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, which includes contributing to political and public life through political participation and greater self-confidence and leadership.</p> <p>See pp. 2-5 for the overview of findings on effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, and impact, as well as learning about what works for WPE.</p>	<p>Meta-analysis to systematically review 22 evaluations (incl. 17 on WPE) of FGE produced between 2011 and 2015 from 23 countries in five regions (the evaluations, which cover 2009-2015, are in collaboration with grand holders, and those rated as satisfactory or above were selected for review).</p> <p>Bishop, Vaca & Barnes (2015).</p>

	rural women, young women, and groups with social and economic vulnerabilities, such as low income women and indigenous women.		
Netherlands	<p>Dutch MDG3 Fund: EUR77-82 million fund (2008-2011).</p> <p>Competitively awarded grants to women's rights and civil society organisations working on gender equality and women's empowerment (grantees mostly large and established, incl. women's funds, international networks, INGOS)</p> <p>45 projects, with 35 multi-country including 10 in over 20 countries or global; 11 projects in fragile states.</p> <p>Focus: rights to property and inheritance; employment and equal opportunities; women's participation in politics and public administration; violence against women.</p> <p>80% of activities funded were policy influencing and advocacy.</p> <p>Designed to have a project approach, but no overarching theory of change with milestones.</p> <p>Source: de Nooijer & Mastwijk (2015a: 11-12) on all information except budget, where de Nooijer & Mastwijk (2015a) and Batliwala (2013) report different amount.</p>	<p>Highly positive according to Batliwala (2013); mixed though positive overall according to de Nooijer & Mastwijk (2015a).</p> <p>According to the Fund recipients, the major achievements that the Fund enabled them to reach are: extending the outreach and coverage of their work; launching new initiatives and strategies; building, extending, or strengthening there are movements, and influencing the gender approaches of other movements; successes in advocacy, including defending gains and preventing the adoption of policies detrimental to women and other disadvantaged groups (Batliwala 2013: 31).</p> <p>According to the final evaluation, effects on WPE have included among others (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 12-15):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting gender issues on the agenda of actors in government (at several levels) and civil society. - Increased women's knowledge of their rights and of the functioning of (local) government. Enabled women to acquire leadership skills and self-confidence. - Increased the electoral involvement of women voters and candidates, and enhanced women's emerging leadership in local government. Increased public acceptance of women as political actors. <p>However, no increase in women's participation and leadership in national parliaments. Meaningful participation in decision-making still challenged. Few projects challenged dominant social and cultural norms and practices. Limited support to the organisational development of partner and beneficiary groups, and thus risks to the sustainability of gains made. Lack of efficiency due to poor programming in a number of projects.</p>	<p>Source for Batliwala (2013): 2010 light-touch survey; interviews of selection of grantees in 2010; final evaluation from review of all grantees' final reports and any evaluation reports and from survey of all grantees (35 responses).</p> <p>Source for de Nooijer & Mastwijk (2015a): content of grantees' Monitoring & Evaluation [M&E] (mostly monitoring and light evaluation on activities and outputs); interviews and short field visits. No data in impact available to authors.</p> <p>Batliwala (2013); de Nooijer & Mastwijk (2015a).</p>

The following evaluation on a Danish government fund ('Women in Africa' regional support initiative) may also be of interest: N. A. (2011).

The following mappings of funding on women's and girls' rights may also be of interest:

- The allocation of OECD-DAC donor aid to countries worldwide in 2013 compared to gender gaps and trends in gender gaps in recipient countries (see Dreher, Gehring & Klasen 2015).
- Donor financing (and their gaps and effects) for organising for women's rights and gender equality (Arutyunova & Clark 2013).
- Financing (and their gaps and effects) for women's rights and empowerment from non-traditional donors, such as corporate sector, new corporate or private foundations, private individuals, or crowdfunding (Miller, Arutyunova & Clark 2014). In addition to mapping a number of donors, Miller, Arutyunova & Clark (2014) include four case studies about partnerships involving non-traditional donors: Catapult (a crowdfunding platform) and Gucci; Chevron; Nike Foundation (in a partnership that has included the Global Fund for Women, the Global Fund for Children, Firelight Foundation, Mama Cash, the American Jewish World Service, and Empower); Levi Strauss & Co and Levi Strauss Foundation.
- Dutch financing for international lobbying and advocacy by an alliance for sexual and reproductive health and rights (Arensman et al. 2015).

2.3 Policy interventions

DONOR(S)	TYPE(S) OF INTERVENTION ASSESSED	EFFECT(S) OF INTERVENTION ON WPE	SOURCE(S) OF ASSESSMENT
<p>Multiple multilateral and bilateral donors: DFID and British Council, EU, UNICEF, Dutch aid (under MDG3 Fund), GTZ/GIZ</p>	<p>Support for coalitions for women's rights: in five out of six case studied, donors played a critical role (positive or negative) at some point in the life of the coalition.</p> <p>Donor involvement (with positive or negative effects) took several forms – typically changing roles over the course of the initiative -, including: funding; convening; acting as a coordinator, facilitator, bridge-builder, intermediary, leader within the coalition or between the coalition and other actors (including the government); getting involved in the inception, constitution and functioning of the coalitions; conducting advocacy on the coalitions' causes.</p>	<p>Mixed record. In a number of cases, international actors have contributed to the success of coalitions.</p> <p>But there is room for improvement.</p> <p>Further, in some occasions, donor practices have compromised the organisational development and consolidation of coalitions, and the impact of these coalitions on policy. (details on why and how in later sections of the report)</p>	<p>Comparison of six case studies of collective initiatives for women's rights in Egypt and Jordan between 2000 and 2010.</p> <p>Methods: review of primary and secondary literature, in-depth interviews with coalition members, donors, and local experts.</p> <p>'Thick description' combined with purposive sampling (in each country, sample of one success, one failure, and one emerging or struggling coalition).</p> <p>Tadros (2011).</p>
<p>Dutch aid</p>	<p>Support to Southern civil society organisations (CSOs) to enhance these CSOs' capacity to conduct policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy (PILA) on gender equality at international, regional and national levels.</p> <p>PILA activities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through the Dutch MDG3 Fund for women's rights CSOs and coalitions: activities such as research, conferences, advocacy networks and alliances, and raising awareness on equal rights for women, through engagement towards the general public, target groups, and government. Most grantees focused their interventions on fighting gender-based violence and enhancing women's political 	<p>Mixed – positive to no effects (but no negative effects).</p> <p>CSOs have succeeded, to different degrees, in putting issues higher on the agenda and in influencing policy. They also succeeded at creating and strengthening formal and informal partnerships and networks of like-minded CSOs, and at enhancing Southern CSOs' capacity to conduct advocacy and networking internationally. However, implementation of policies is far more difficult to realise and take longer; national and local impact on the ground is even harder to achieve.</p> <p>For example, most projects under the Dutch MDG3 Fund helped put gender on public and political agendas, and created awareness on specific gender issues among different target groups. In turn, this expanded the enabling environment, for example through legal improvements and through greater</p>	<p>Review of selection of illustrative (not necessarily representative) case studies on countries or themes about the period 2008-2014. Focus on direct support for PILA campaigns, with some consideration of support for engagement with decision-makers.</p> <p>Evaluation of Dutch support to Southern CSOs' PILA on gender (see esp. pp. 60-64, 68-72). Further cases studied:</p>

	<p>participation and leadership, with fewer interventions on women's labour issues and land rights.</p> <p>- On international policy for sexual and reproductive health and rights: brokering, sponsoring Southern CSOs' participation in international fora, joint advocacy and transnational networking between like-minded Northern and Southern actors.</p>	<p>knowledge among traditional leaders, government, and community members.</p> <p>However, these positive changes have not yet been enough to change behaviours. Only a limited number of projects invested in changing social norms that underlie discrimination against women through real dialogues in communities. As a result, norms and practices constraining gender equality remains under addressed – and are very hard to change in the first place.</p>	<p>corporate social responsibility, international lobbying and advocacy, and PILA in Kenya and Mozambique (incl. gender issues).</p> <p>Methods included review of literature and of pre-existing evaluations, and original qualitative evaluation.</p> <p>de Lange & Claessen (2015).</p>
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For critical discussions of gender, power, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), see: Esquivel (2016) and Goetz & Jenkins (2016).

For lessons from the Millennium Development Goals on international policy-making and the SDGs, see: Gabizon (2016) and Sen (2013).

The following evaluations of bilateral donors' policy work may also be of interest:

- Netherlands' policy evaluation on women's rights and gender equality (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015b).
- Sweden's policy dialogue on gender equality in aid (Peebles et al. 2015).
- Nordic countries' influences on gender at the World Bank and the African Development Bank (Magnusson, A. 2012).

Several references also offer critical examinations of donors' policies on gender or gender mainstreaming:

- World Food Program (WFP) (Betts et al. 2014).
- Austria (von Braunmühl, Queiroz de Souza & Amine 2012).
- Switzerland (Stuart, Rao & Holland 2009).

The following critical discussions of the 2005 Arab Human Development Report sponsored by UNDP may also be of interest: Abu-Lughod (2009) and Hasso (2009).

2.4 Programming interventions

DONOR(S)	TYPE(S) OF INTERVENTION ASSESSED IN THE REFERENCE	EFFECT(S) OF INTERVENTION ON WPE	SOURCE(S) OF ASSESSMENT
<p>Multiple UN agencies (including UNHCR), as well as international and national NGOs and community-based organisations of refugees</p>	<p>Implementation of humanitarian programming on gender through the participation of Burmese refugee in refugee camps.</p> <p>Interventions for participation examined in the article:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Bangladesh: establishment of committees with equal gender representation for refugees' participation in camp management; programmes targeting women for participation in planning and implementation, in sectors such as food, water, hygiene, and healthcare; participatory assessments under UNHCR's "Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming" (AGDM). In Bangladesh, humanitarian staff deem 	<p>Negative. Humanitarian organisations keep wanting to govern refugees' behaviours and subjectivities on their own terms, not on refugees' terms, and end up using questionable gender approaches that generate or reinforce gender inequalities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Humanitarian actors construct participatory and community-based mobilisation as tools for the promotion of gender equality (and for efficiency). - Yet, many foreign and local humanitarian staff – especially among donors and international organisations (more than among NGOs) – end up viewing refugees, including women, as problems in both countries. In these humanitarian's perceptions, refugees in Bangladesh do not participate enough whereas those in Thailand participate too much. <p>Specifically, in Bangladesh, many humanitarian staff deem refugees, especially women, to lack a 'community spirit' and participation, which allegedly makes them dependent – in that they do not comply with humanitarian agendas. In Thailand, some staff view the political activism of refugee leaders and women's organisations as illegitimate ('politicised'), lacking capacity, and unruly, in a struggle over the ownership of programming for gender equality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall, the forms of refugee participation favoured in humanitarian policies and institutionalised in humanitarian practices are very limited (p. 57). <p>Humanitarian staffers view different forms of refugee participation as more or less desirable, depending on how they "allocate decision-making power and ownership between different refugee and humanitarian actors, and what subjectivities refugees are invited to embody in processes of participation" (p. 44).</p> <p>'Desirable' participation (typically initiated by humanitarian actors) means: encouraging refugees to perceive themselves as active subjects responsible for their lives and communities; mobilising them to enable the effective implementation of programmes; and asking for their opinions and experiences as resources for planning and evaluation. It is "for therapeutic intervention, not structural reform", i.e. not to change power relations or redistribute decision-making power, but to alter refugees' subjectivities (p. 57). Fundamentally, this construction denies refugees a role as political actors (p. 58).</p> <p>Many humanitarians foster strongly gendered refugee subjectivities when promoting women's agency and participation, and rejecting dependency and politicisation. They represent women as altruistic, family-oriented, and embodying a true community spirit. They position them as crucial to families' and communities' welfare, "and to the quality and accountability of refugee leadership and self-</p>	<p>Comparative study with two country cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - two camps with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. - nine camps with Karen refugees in Thailand. <p>58 interviews, in 2010-2011, with local and foreign humanitarian staff involved in such programming; qualitative analysis.</p> <p>Olivius (2014a).</p>

	<p>refugees to be too passive.</p> <p>- In Thailand: refugees' participation in camp management and in programmes addressing sexual and gender-based violence against women; introduction of UNHCR's "Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming" (AGDM) for refugee participation.</p> <p>In Thailand, refugees have had a long history of self-governance before international aid increased. Humanitarian staff deem refugees too active.</p>	<p>management" (p. 58). Women are held up as "models for the governable, active but compliant refugee subject" (p. 58). On the other hand, they represent men as more politicised, corrupt, and self-interested.</p> <p>While such programmes may strengthen refugee women's role in some cases, they do constrain how refugee women can participate: when women move beyond the role of welfare providers and partners in humanitarian reform, and act politically, they become deemed especially problematic, unruly, and illegitimate.</p> <p>- Where refugees initiate participation, set the agenda, or control implementation, a number of humanitarian workers strongly criticise it. In addition, in Thai camps, increased international humanitarian presence and a reliance on international donors has weakened this community-based model.</p> <p>When refugees do not comply with 'desirable' participation, humanitarian workers often refer to gender equality in order to construct a superiority of international norms, to legitimise humanitarian organisations' ownership and control, and to exclude refugees when these are deemed incapable of proper self-management.</p> <p>In Bangladesh, humanitarians typically present refugees' behaviours as closely linked with the repression of women and the lack of gender equality. In Thailand, they typically present international interventions as a precondition for gender equality, even though there have long been strong advocates for gender equality among refugees, before international aid had any significant role in the camps.</p>	
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See ICAI (2012) for a (highly negative) assessment of the DFID and Nike Foundation initiative, Girl Hub.

3. Factors in interventions that determine effects

3.1. Internal functioning of donors

The internal functioning of donors is widely identified as a key factor in shaping the effects of interventions. Donors can support empowerment more effectively when staff learn to be **reflexive about their own power** and can map how power operates in the international development system (Eyben 2011: 6). This matters particularly as most donors have failed to mainstream gender and to embed gender equality into their policies and institutions (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 312).

Leadership, incentives, and accountability on women's empowerment

Agency and leadership on women's rights within donor organisations are central factors determining the success of WPE interventions. This is confirmed, for example, in a study on six cases of donor support to women's rights coalitions in Egypt and Jordan, where the donors who played a positive enabling role in strengthening the work of such coalitions did so through having excellent leadership and staff within the donor organisation. Such leadership “thinks outside the box and is willing to take risks” (Tadros 2011: 50). It can also invest in building relationships among the different local actors as much as in achieving project outputs. Both leadership and staff can bring together different actors in a space where they can open lines of communication, engage, and hold a dialogue. Of course, this requires the leadership to know the local scene of actors very well, so it knows where the personal and institutional tensions lie (Tadros 2011: 50).

More broadly, the lack of leadership on gender equality has led to “**policy evaporation**”, as leaders in donor organisations have not consistently supported the implementation of gender mainstreaming (Risby & Keller 2012: 12). Senior management has typically failed to move from policy rhetoric to actively committing to gender mainstreaming, and to setting up the organisation-wide systems and resources necessary. The underlying reasons for this are often related to competing leadership priorities, in part due to having too many international policies that have been deemed priorities (e.g. Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], aid effectiveness, governance have crowded out gender mainstreaming). Another reason for this is because senior management are often most responsive to the priorities that receive the greatest international attention and resources, as they offer rewards and career advancement (Risby & Keller 2012: 12; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15).

When funding coalitions for women's rights, the quality of a donor's leadership determines how it handles the structural constraints of balancing funding for such work with the foreign policy objective of maintaining good relations with the host government. Much depends on whether the leadership a donor has can navigate and manoeuvre within limited space, as the comparison of six cases of donor support for women's rights coalitions in politically closed and socially conservative Jordan and Egypt shows. For example, in Egypt, the GTZ agreed to the government's wishes that two organisations be removed from the coalition that GTZ was supporting. In contrast, other donors, in their respective projects, have stood their ground more in defending coalitions in the face of the government (Tadros 2011: 48; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27-28).

Fundamentally, there has been an absence of **accountability and incentives systems** to standardise the integration of gender equality across donor organisations and their interventions. This has limited the achievement of results (Risby & Keller 2012: 12). However, recommendations found in donor literature about such systems are almost entirely hypothetical: these systems are not yet in place coherently, and have therefore not been evaluated properly so far. There should be caution in offering them as a solution to the failure of gender mainstreaming (Risby & Keller 2012: 13).

Further, many **procedures and practices** introduced to support gender policies or strategies have been actively pursued for a short period only, before gradually declining in use. The most common approach to mainstreaming gender has been to develop procedures and practices such as Gender Action Plans (GAPs), gender analysis, toolkits, and staff training. Their use often depends on contexts (country and sector) and on operational staff's choices, and even then "few [...] are used systematically, because of the lack of incentives or rules mandating their use" (Risby & Keller 2012: 13).

Resources and capacities focused on gender and contexts

The multi-dimensionality of gender equality requires specialists who have expertise, skills, and experience in both gender analysis and a country (Domingo et al. 2013: 5; Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313; Tadros 2011: vi), or a sector or context (Domingo et al. 2013: 7; Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313). This local and international trained workforce must have skills in political analysis in the field of gender that enable them to work with women and their organisation in a way that integrates political acumen, understanding and sensitivity (Tadros 2011: vi; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15).

An evaluation of UN work on women's participation and leadership on peace and security confirmed that results were particularly strong where country office staff combined thematic expertise, contextual understanding, skills in strategic advocacy and analysis, and access to key networks. Results were also particularly strong where country office staff could identify opportunities to engage effectively with national and sub-national stakeholders in civil society and state, based on a good reading of the local political economy and stakeholders' needs and expectations (Domingo et al. 2013: 5, 7). For example, while women's organisations in Afghanistan asked UN Women "to be more vocal publicly about women's rights", those in Colombia only needed UN Women to facilitate their voice rather than to speak up on their behalf (Domingo et al. 2013: 7).

Similarly, an external evaluation of UN Women and UNDP's support for women's political participation in sub-Saharan Africa confirmed that programming was most relevant and effective when it was informed by a deeper understanding of context. Donors need to ensure they produce and use social and political analyses that are better integrated and ongoing. These need to include factors in countries' political economy, such as power relations and incentive structures that would need to change to enable WPE. This would allow donors and their partners to identify context specific constraints, and opportunities, and to design programs so that interventions fit better with existing political realities (Domingo et al. 2012: vi).

Yet, while some country offices of donors have demonstrated a keen understanding of the local history and politics of gender (Tadros 2011), such specialist knowledge is often lacking among donors (Domingo et al. 2012: vi; Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313). Donors should use and conduct higher-quality gender analysis, and do so more systematically, when designing and implementing their policies and programming (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317). However, donor approaches frequently conflate 'women' and 'gender', leaving them without a sophisticated, nuanced approach to gender equality and women's empowerment. This, in turn, leads them to failures in effectively targeting and reducing gender bias, and in engaging both women and girls, and men and boys (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 314).

In addition, donors, Northern NGOs, and some CSOs often underestimate the importance and implications of countries' political economy. **Political economy analysis** is an important tool to achieve a better understanding and to develop more realism on prospects and mechanisms for change. Yet, in practice, solid political economy analyses are often missing or outdated, in part because each actor would have to acknowledge its own positionality, interests, and power, and the inequalities it generates. Where such knowledge is available, it often fails to be integrated into donors' and local actors' theories of change and actions (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26, 103, 107-109).

Further, there is often **limited institutionalisation of the knowledge, skills and capacities that staff and organisations do have**. This is noted in a number of references, for example about UN Women's work on peace and security (Domingo et al. 2013: 10). As a result, in some cases, donors have an over-reliance on key individuals' motivation, skills, and tacit knowledge. This undermines donors' capacity to fulfil their mandate. At UN Women, the good skills and capacities that do exist at all levels have generally not been institutionalised nor embedded in the organisation's processes, which has often relied on individual capacities instead. As a result, teams do not consistently have the required essential skills (Domingo et al. 2013: 10).

Donors can **choose set-ups that help their country offices develop and strengthen the required skills and resources** to successfully take context into account, and to effectively plan and manage theory-driven, best-fit programmes for WPE. An evaluation of UN Women and UNDP in sub-Saharan Africa suggests the following measures to improve the capacity of country offices (Domingo et al. 2012: viii):

- Capitalise on the UN's long-term engagement in countries.
- Move away from using short-term staff contracts, and focus on recruiting locally where possible.
- Provide staff with practical tools for political intelligence and train them in those, so they can move away from descriptive analysis of situations.
- Build up staff capabilities in management, to improve funding flows.

A study of five cases of policy support to women's rights coalitions in Jordan and Egypt comes to very similar conclusions. It finds that donors played an effective enabling role when they had had a presence in the country of work over a sustained period (Tadros 2011: 49). This let them develop nuanced and deep knowledge of institutional factors and factors related to different actors' agency in the specific context. Within the donor organisations, this entailed (Tadros 2011: 49):

- Institutional memory of previous experiences, endeavours, relationships, with an analysis of their successes and failures.
- Previous relationships and networks that local and international staff had developed over a long time, amounting to a breadth and depth of social and political capital. The best donors knew and listened to the key players.
- Excellent knowledge of the historical trajectory of actors, and of structural arrangements of the context, including on gender specifically (Tadros 2011: vi).
- Understanding of both political constraints and openings for engaging with actors in government and civil society.

More broadly, **financial and human resources** have often been insufficient. That has been the case with mainstreaming gender equality in donor organisations and interventions, and is largely a symptom of the leadership's inconsistent or absent focus on gender equality (Risby & Keller 2012: 13). The numbers of in-house gender specialists have been cut or remained low in many donor agencies. Responsibility for gender equality has often been relegated to consultants, or junior or part-time staff. They cannot influence policy dialogue or operational staff at any stage in the project cycle (Risby & Keller 2012: 13). Further, the lack of financial and human resources has even been an organisational feature in women-centred programmes, such as UN programmes for women's participation and leadership on peace and security. This has limited effectiveness across the board (Domingo et al. 2013: 5).

Many donors do not make available, or even do not track, **financial or budgetary allocations for gender mainstreaming**, at headquarters or in interventions. Frequently, there is no budget allocated for

monitoring the gender equality element of interventions, which contributes to a lack of reporting and learning on results (Risby & Keller 2012: 13).

Donor silos and their effect

The multi-dimensionality of gender equality “does not neatly align” with the **categories donors use** for programmes or sectors (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313). The inadequacy of donors’ responsiveness to multi-dimensionality means that they have not mainstreamed gender systematically and comprehensively across sectors. For instance, most bilateral aid for gender equality is channelled to education and health (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313). In education, funding focuses on girls’ enrolment in primary and secondary school (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313), although authors such as O’Neil and Domingo (2016) have noted the importance of higher education for WPE. Similarly, a relatively small share of aid to economic sectors and to governance is dedicated to gender equality. These silos also lead to missed opportunities for multi-dimensional action across sectors (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313).

There are also many challenges to **integrating gender equality into new aid modalities** – such as policy-based lending (PBL), general budget support (GBS), and sector-wide approaches (SWAps) – and gender is not mainstreamed systematically into these outside of education, health, and social safety nets. One difficulty is the inconsistent ownership of gender in partner governments, which gives gender a low priority in country strategies and policy dialogues. Another difficulty is that donors lack harmonisation on gender. This leads to inconsistencies in policy discussions and in the design of PBL, GBS, and SWAps. Lastly, donors’ activities in the new policy dialogue and interventions have lacked senior in-country gender experts, as well as tools to mainstream gender, which has made it difficult to put gender equality firmly on the agenda in relation to these types of aid (Risby & Keller 2012: 14).

Donor silos mean that many donors may not even be able to see that their allocations do not match their policy commitments, contributing to the difficulty in routinely **tracking the resources allocated** to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Over 2002–2013, screened aid attributed to gender equality and women’s empowerment ranged between 8 and 18 percent only. Gender mainstreaming has not been linked to flows of funding (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 313).

Application of general good practices in aid and project management

An evaluation of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality found that projects were aligned well with UN Women’s global priorities. However, at regional and country levels, there was a need for greater **communication, coordination and synergies** between fund management, grantees, and the UN women regional architecture. This would have integrated the Fund’s work and results into country programming, and helped sustain results beyond the completion of projects (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 15-17). Nonetheless, the Fund’s consultation with country offices has ensured that its interventions have been in alignment and synergies with UN Women’s decentralised priorities (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 6).

3.2 Working adaptively and strategically with the context

Building on locally generated empowerment

Donor support is most likely to be effective when it enhances processes that are locally initiated, driven, and owned. This is typically the case when women are motivated to envision and enact change in the face of pressing challenges, and when political opportunities arise (Eyben 2011: 5). In contrast, “[s]trategies based on international blueprints are awkward to implement and sometimes backfire”, as

demonstrated in the case of coalitions for women's rights in Egypt and Jordan (Tadros 2011: v). However, local leaders do borrow from international experiences and ideas, and “learn to adapt them appropriately to local conditions” (Tadros 2011: v).³

In an example of positive causality, UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality has been driven by demand from women-led civil society organisations, and its approach has been led by grantees. An evaluation found that this gave the fund significant comparative advantage and ensured that the supported projects were relevant and sustainable, and responded to the needs of both rights holders and duty bearers (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 2, 23). Further, the Fund drew on local capacities, and built on the expertise and ongoing programmes of additional partners. This enabled the Fund to achieve impressive results in the short timeframe (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 19).

Choosing the right policy and social frameworks and adapting messages to local conditions also matter for success in policy work. This is particularly important because local actors and coalitions for women's rights have to frame issues in ways that different local and foreign audiences will find appropriate. For example, in the politically closed and socially conservative contexts of Jordan and Egypt, coalitions have had to frame their campaigns in different ways, so messages are compatible with international conventions, religious frameworks, or national constitution (Tadros 2011: vi).

In some cases, donor involvement can also be a major reason for the emergence of local action. For example, in coalitions for women's rights in Jordan and Egypt, foreign funding was a major incentive for different leaders and organisations to participate in collective initiatives. Funding also facilitated or drove the formation of some coalitions entirely (Tadros 2011: v). Significantly, donors played a critical role during the inception of each of the most successful coalitions – especially UNICEF in Egypt and DFID in Jordan. Donor interventions in those two cases shared important positive factors (Tadros 2011: 47-48):

- Donor staff knew the context very well and with nuance – they knew the issues, politics, contextual dynamics, and organisations. Donors also had local offices in both countries and close partnerships with government and CSOs there, as opposed to managing the grant from overseas.
- Donors had an institutional history of engagement with the organisations involved: they were already working with an existing network of organisations, out of which the coalition then worked. This formed the basis for further work.
- Donors “took risks, and their leadership thought outside the box” (p. 48).
- Donors approached their support to the coalitions as a process, not a project. In addition to considering outputs, they dedicated equal attention to the process of formation, cohesion, decision-making and consensus-building in the group.
- Donors did not select the organisations comprising the coalition, the coalition did. Further, donors played an initial hosting role, but then the initiative was moved to a local actor. This helped instil a sense of local ownership. The grant given to each organisation to support capacity was relatively small.

³ Policy frameworks on gender most frequently cited in the donor evaluations encountered in this rapid review: the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and on occasion other relevant UN human rights treaties; the Beijing Platform and its follow-up; the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their predecessor the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, as well as its associated resolutions and plans; and each donor's gender policy. The more critical literature typically does call for thinking about women's empowerment from the perspective of women's rights, but does not call for rights to be the automatic framing used locally, as it may be counter-productive or dangerous (see e.g. Tadros 2011: v-vi).

In any case, the donors who play a successful enabling role are the ones that recognise the **importance of positionality**. Donor support for women's political participation needs to be paired with donor staff's reflexivity about power in the international development system, including their own (Eyben 2011: 6). In the example of women's rights coalitions in Jordan and Egypt, the successful donors "recognised the opportunities and limitations of their own positionality", especially "in highly conservative, politically volatile contexts" (Tadros 2011: 49).

Conversely, donors need to understand and address the position of their local partners. For example, in the case of the five coalitions for women's rights in Jordan and Egypt, the successful donors were also "aware of the political nuances associated with the positionality of the leaders of the organisations" they supported (Tadros 2011: 49). In contrast, Dutch support to Southern CSOs' policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy has failed to address the questionable political and social legitimacy of some Southern CSOs, which have weak connections with the communities they claim to work for, i.e. the poor and the marginalised (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15, 26).

Further, the limited capacity of some Southern CSOs to engage in policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy does lead to lower levels of effectiveness (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15). Any organisation's success remains largely determined by its staff and leadership, and their commitment (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 24). However, as the cases of Kenya and Mozambique show, most CSOs end up aligning with donors' agendas, rather than the agendas of the communities they claim to represent. Most also tend to be able to react quickly to issues, but have difficulty remaining on course and keeping their actions coherent under duress. Further, coalitions of CSOs are generally weak and tend to fall apart (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26).

Timing interventions to **capitalise on political opportunities** is widely mentioned as a factor of success in WPE (e.g. Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 5; Tadros 2011: v). Being responsive to the political context and changing dynamics of power has helped gather momentum and increase the impact of interventions at critical times (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 6). Coalitions for gender equality commonly emerge in an opening of political space that some international event or local development - including funding - creates. It is an essential skill of political analysis for donors to understand these openings, seize the moment, and understand what is realistically possible (Tadros 2011: iv-v).

Working successfully in contexts that heighten difficulties and risks

Ultimately, progress towards women's political participation also depends on how much the relations between state and society are inclusive and accountable. A measure of realism is required, including on the role of international actors (Domingo et al. 2012: vi-vii). Similarly, country specific factors have shaped the ability of donors to advance their normative and operational objectives in fostering women's participation and leadership on peace and security. For example, an evaluation of UN work in this area notes the importance of factors such as a government's ownership of UN resolution 1325, the geopolitical significance of the country, and the presence of other international actors in addition to the UN. However, the evaluation notes that staff skills, knowledge, and experience were equally important in determining how much UN action could make the most of opportunities and mitigate organisational and country constraints (Domingo et al. 2013: 5).

The political, social or economic situation, instability, and natural disasters can hamper results (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 18). So-called "fragile contexts", such as Cambodia and Palestine, have carried higher political and socio-cultural risk (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 18). Environments that restrict CSOs' engagement in policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy lead to lower levels of effectiveness. This is the case in Kenya and Mozambique, where political leaders determine how far a civil society can use the democratic political space (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15, 81). Similarly, quantitative data on 13 MENA

countries suggests that autocracy has significantly hampered the effectiveness that aid to non-governmental organisation and governmental institutions for women's equality can exert on WPE. Such autocratic regimes generally do not provide an institutional environment conducive to WPE (Baliamoune-Lutz 2016: 333). This is also confirmed in a study of collective initiatives for women's rights in Egypt and Jordan between 2000 and 2010. There, authoritarian rule and the presence of powerful Islamist movements strongly opposed to structural transformation of gender hierarchies have created environments that constitute a politically inhibiting context and closed policy spaces (Tadros 2011: iii-vii).

In addition, progress towards women's empowerment itself is often met with **backlash and negative developments** that can even roll back advances made in the face of repression. Donor approaches, for example in M&E, significantly fail to give this enough consideration (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 12-13).

Political space also varies within countries depending on an organisation's position in the political economy. For instance, repressive governments may invite into policy discussions those CSOs whose agendas align with their own development agenda, while CSOs trying to engage on governance and democracy may have to fight for space and create their own opportunities for influencing (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26).

CSOs that face opposition and persecution typically continue their activities for policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy, but do so carefully and strategically. **Cooperative strategies** – instead of confrontation – become the only feasible approach. This typically entails: civic engagement, as gaining strong support is essential; national networks; and “international contacts, for example with donors” (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26). Coalitions “pursuing a common goal are paramount” (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15; also see p. 24 sq, 81 sq) because in politically restrictive environments, CSOs are “more vulnerable and less effective unless they participate in strong alliances, which tend to offer protection” and to enforce political space for action (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 81). Still, CSOs often self-censor for fear of bureaucratic or violent reprisals, and often end up having to defend their space, at the expense of actually campaigning and influencing policies (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26; 81). Conversely, in restrictive contexts, limitations in CSO capacities – such as weak connections to communities and difficulties in sustaining coalitions – combine to make them vulnerable and less effective (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 26).

Availability and quality of context-specific data

There remain **large gaps in good-quality data** on many topics important to gender inequality, at national and sub-national levels. This is despite considerable improvements over the past decade. The data gaps are a significant impediment to assessing and monitoring the effectiveness of aid for gender equality (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317). It remains particularly difficult to establish clear baselines on the dimensions of change that most WPE projects pursue (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 6).

4. Modalities of interventions that shape effects

Many references do not offer clear or straightforward generalisable specifics on the ‘how’ of success or failure in donor interventions for WPE, once findings that are not specific to WPE are set aside such as cases of generic problems like poor implementation as such.

Overall, the evidence base suggests that it is the **relational** and **political** quality of donor approaches and their **adaptation to context** that matter most. As the more successful donors have taken this into account, this has translated into a variety of theories of change and activities, or very broad approaches, even within one intervention. This makes synthesising findings on ‘how’ very challenging with substantial time needed to map and analyse fine-grained indications from references – something which is not possible within the constraints of this report.

All academic and other critical literature emphasises that there are **no technical shortcuts** or easy fixes that will lead a donor intervention for WPE to succeed. Such success ultimately hinges on non-technical factors, such as donors approaching WPE with a greater understanding of the gender politics at play, locally and within their own donor agencies. Further, few single modalities seem to be consistently associated, as such, with success or failure (monitoring and evaluation that is too technocratic is an exception, as it is widely identified as negative). The following discussion of modalities should be read with all this in mind.

The rest of this section is organised into two sets of sub-sections. The first three sub-sections synthesise findings applicable to all aspects of the project cycle: planning; design; implementation; monitoring and evaluation; and learning). These findings are respectively about the overarching strategies (including theories of change), analysis of gender and context, and support to locally led WPE. The next three sub-sections add further findings specific to design, implementation, and MEL.

4.1. Crafting intervention strategies for transformational empowerment

Effective approaches

Donors alone do not empower women. However, they can enable and support endogenous efforts. Their practices so far in this area have had a number of shortcomings, and, at times, have undermined local processes of empowerment. To improve their interventions, donors need to fully accept that women's empowerment is complex, multidimensional, deeply political and contested, non-linear, specific to context, and long-term and integrate this into their work, as it involves deep changes to political economy, a point made in many academic, policy and practitioner references.⁴

Donors also need to accept that, while local actors can and do have an impact on public policy in many cases, there is no linear causality between the actions of a coalition and a change in policy itself (Tadros 2011: vii; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31). The change sought may not occur at all (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31). Adaptive, complex interventions for WPE thus require donors to truly value outcomes related to empowerment, and to be ready to invest in relationships with women's organisations (Eyben 2011: 10; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31).

How donors work and engage “with country-level stakeholders strongly influences the effectiveness of their activities”, an evaluation of UN work for women's participation and leadership on peace and security confirms (Domingo et al. 2013: 5). For example, country offices use their deep and practical

⁴ See for example: Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4; Domingo et al. 2012 & 2013; Eyben 2011: 10; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 24; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 15; Tadros 2011: vii, 48.

understanding of the contextual political economy to inform their choice of daily interactions and networking with strategic actors in order to build alliances and broker dialogue – for example in Kosovo – and to provide accompaniment to women's organisations in their advocacy and engagement – for example in Colombia (Domingo et al. 2013: 5). The more effective work identified in the evaluation includes three elements. First, it involves strategic engagement with relevant international actors and with women's CSOs at global, regional, national, and grassroots levels. Second, it catalyses change by facilitating space for policy and reform, “and brokering relations between different stakeholders at all levels” (Domingo et al. 2013: 8). Third, it has flexibility to maximise opportunities, especially where the agency faces the volatility of contexts of fragility or armed conflict (Domingo et al. 2013: 8). In so-called fragile settings particularly, programming must incorporate such flexibility. Longer-term planning is not always possible, due to volatility and uncertainty and therefore, *ad hoc* approaches are more likely to be effective. However, programmes do need to carefully monitor supports, so that it seizes opportunities without doing harm in the long term (Domingo et al. 2012: vii).

Donors need to accept balancing short- and long-term results (Eyben 2011: 10; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31). For instance, both donors and their partners need to combine their work on changing international and national policies with long-term efforts to change the deeply embedded social norms and practices in society at large, so that improvements go beyond agenda-setting and the enabling environment, to translate into tangible advances in gender equality (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 61).

To genuinely support locally-led efforts, donors need to ensure they **address several types of power inequalities**. First, a number of projects at UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality showed the positive effects of taking into account the different forms and levels of marginalisation and exclusion, and of effectively engaging the most disadvantaged women, such as women in extreme poverty, domestic workers, home-based informal workers, women from ethnic, indigenous or cultural minorities, women from low castes, rural women, young women, and women affected by HIV/AIDS. These successful projects understood the specificities involved and adapted their strategies to address them. This was essential in advancing WPE (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 25).

Second, inequalities between local organisations on the one hand, and donors and Northern NGOs on the other hand, often mean that donors support actions that lack a strong local constituency. To champion local ownership, donors can, for instance, redesign the requirements on accountability and reporting attached to their funding, to allow for more operating and autonomy for Southern CSOs. For example, contrary to current practices, it would be Southern CSOs that initiate the design of programmes, rather than Northern actors (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 33). In adverse settings, the success of international actors has hinged on their willingness to follow local actors' lead, to take cues from them, to adapt deeply to context, and to accept diverging from the typical project cycle (Tadros 2011: iii-vii).

Third, the Southern CSOs that donors work with are not always seen as legitimate or representative by the population. De Lange and Claessen (2015: 32) argue that donors could encourage CSOs to reflect on their constituencies and to build a firmer support base, be it based on popular support, outstanding expertise, or specialised dedication to sensitive topics. They add that donors could also encourage CSOs to work in strong and sustained alliance towards a common goal, by supporting cooperation, coordination, networking and coalition-building, though not by steering or intruding in cooperative processes (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 32).

How enabling and supporting endogenous change should translate into donor strategies continues to be debated. Most donor-commissioned literature offers suggestions on how to craft strategies and theories of change that take this into account. For example, an evaluation of Dutch aid finds that donors can successfully deal with restrictive environments and defend space for Southern CSOs to conduct policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy. To accomplish this, successful donors and CSOs had an **adaptable theory of change** based on a **solid political economy analysis** that they updated continuously (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15, 26, 29, 107-109; also see Domingo et al. 2012: vii). Customised strategies are required, as are experiments and room for failure (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15, 31).

Similarly, the evaluation of the Dutch MDG3 Fund calls for adopting a realistic theory of change, one that will be credible yet flexible, with clear intermediate milestones that are linked to the ultimate goal of gender equality (de Nooijer and Mastwijk 2015a: 15-16). The authors argue that, in funds for women's rights organisations, it is best to set realistic and measurable targets and milestones, at the level of the fund. These should still acknowledge empowerment as multidimensional, often non-linear, and continuing to develop beyond the life span of such funds. From there, at project level, grantees can be required to formulate realistic and measurable targets and milestones for their projects, within a theory of change that explains the contribution of the projects to the longer term objective (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 121-122).

Within theories of change that aim to empower women and transform gender – including in interventions not focused on women's empowerment –, Kabeer (2010) identifies critical moments for cognitive attention to gender equality, and human agency, in the life cycle of an intervention. They are: the conceptualisation of the intervention (i.e. the formulation of its vision, mission, and goals); the translation of goals and objectives into practical design; the implementation; monitoring and evaluation; feedback mechanisms to allow information from implementation to modify practice based on learning. These are moments when the ideas and values chosen have profound implications for the evolution of the intervention and for its effect on gender. Just as decisive is how gender and empowerment are conceptualised throughout, from mere add-ons about women for programme efficiency to genuinely transformative gender relations for social justice (Kabeer 2010; also see Cornwall 2016; Cornwall & Rivas 2015).

At the same time, a significant part of the more critical literature suggests that some dynamics of WPE are so specific to context that it does not make sense to formalise them as 'how-to' guides. For example, learning from donor support for women's rights coalitions in Egypt and Jordan, Tadros argues that the interface between structural conditions and actors agency is very context specific, so "there is no linear path that can be drawn from these case studies on 'how to' make coalitions successful" (2011: 48). Factors related to agency, such as coalition leadership, were critical in responding to openings in highly complex social, political context, and in strategising to expand the boundaries of what was possible. Yet, while such configurations do reveal patterns of effective engagement, this remains extremely specific to the contexts examined (Tadros 2011: 48).

An evaluation of Dutch support to Southern CSOs comes to the same conclusion and therefore refrains from offering specific lessons: policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy are complex, as they involve a multitude of stakeholders, complex political and social economic contexts, and unexpected changes. As a result, they call for context-specific strategies and solutions. Stakeholders themselves have to learn from any general lessons about improving donor support and translate them into practical measures tailored to their situation (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 24).

The evaluation of UN Women and UNDP interventions in sub-Saharan Africa offers a similar recommendation: while theoretically robust guidance at global and regional levels is important, country offices need to adapt it to their context-specific realities. Practitioners should have the possibility of

“[unpacking] general assumptions about what drives transformation within their particular context, and use this to identify realistic and plausible ways” to support change (Domingo et al. 2012: vii).

Regardless of how donor strategies translate their approaches, this entails **more flexibility, responsiveness, and imagination** in supporting empowerment. This means more creative responses to the realities and aspirations of women and girls (Eyben 2011: 9), and being willing to support unconventional forms of collective agency (Tadros 2011: vii). Interventions need go beyond donors’ traditional comfort zones where relevant, particularly in relation to partner engagement. Supporting diverse and atypical mixes of stakeholders and partners has increased impact and sustainability, in the experience of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality. Identifying, generating and supporting male champions for women’s leadership has also proven to be a successful approach (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4, 7).

Donors also need to be willing to embrace non-traditional interventions to advance WPE, from issues such as young women’s sexuality, to activities (from soap operas to strategic litigation) and measurement, as the impact of creative activities may be difficult to assess technically. Role models that inspire, challenge and strengthen others have been invaluable (Eyben 2011: 9). Evidence suggests that engaging with media is largely positive, but there are risks to address. Creative use of media – press, radio, TV and social media – have put gender issues on the agenda (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 12), and challenged prejudices and changed perspectives (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 5; Eyben 2011: 9). Among grantees of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality, media campaigns were essential to success in a number of countries, including in the context of uprisings and their aftermath in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 19). However, in politically closed and socially conservative countries, effective engagement with the media entails more nuanced positioning: at times, securing positive coverage is required, whereas at other times maintaining anonymity and protecting actors for women’s rights and their activities from media coverage are essential (Tadros 2011: vi).

Tackling structural and systemic barriers to women’s empowerment “**requires a multifaceted and long-term approach**” (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 32; also see e.g. de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 15). For donors, this can make crafting strategies and priorities complex, as they need to support both micro-level interventions and macro-levels linkages. For local partners that focus on micro-scale local interventions, this can be difficult to do due to a lack of time and a lack of mechanisms to scale up or leverage broader transformation (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 6-7, 32).

For example, many grantees of UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality centred their strategies on empowering women and engaging with families and communities. This yielded the greatest results for WPE: the projects had a significant impact in enabling women to exercise their rights and enhancing their agency in relation to their families and communities. However, while “increasing women’s awareness of their rights is a prerequisite for influencing family and societal norms” (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 32), achieving transformational change throughout society is significantly more complex. The transformational potential of such grants cannot be realised in isolation or over the short term. a donor like the Fund for Gender Equality could increase the duration of grants for projects tackling structural barriers in attitudes and behaviours, and planning an exit strategy out of project in order to maximise its contribution to structural change. It could also better nurture links and synergies with national and international efforts towards women’s empowerment (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 32).

For donors individually, the **choice of scope** in aid for women’s empowerment also has implications, for example when considering how to set up a fund, and there are no clear-cut consistent answers in the literature. One question is the geographic scope. If donors maintain a global perspective, project design needs to incorporate commensurate management and overheads, and the spread of activities is likely to be hard to monitor. A narrower focus needs to account for what other bilateral and multilateral donors

are already financing and decide which countries to select. Another open-ended question is the thematic scope, i.e. whether topics should be set centrally by the donor or remain flexible and responsive to the context-specific demands of poor women in low- and middle-income countries (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 16). Given the recent rise in restrictions over civil society in low- and middle-income countries, de Lange and Claessen (2015: 33) argue that donors should not stop funding Northern NGOs altogether. This is despite the centrality of local ownership and local legitimacy, and the risks of encouraging upward rather than downward accountability among the CSOs that Northern NGOs support – which still need to be addressed (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 33).

Ineffective approaches

The literature notes gaps in the interventions that donors have supported.

Over the past two decades, as initiatives for women's empowerment have come under increasing pressure to measure impact, donors have decreased their support for certain kinds of activities partly because they are considered to be “too slow, amorphous, or intangible” (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 7). Most investment in gender equality has shifted to a **handful of ‘magic bullets’** like political representation, in part because the results are far easier to measure. Assessing change in gender relations is more challenging, particularly because work for women's rights is not a smooth progression, but a messy reality made as much of setbacks and minor tactical concessions as of steps forward (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 7).

Several references note the **gap between high-level policy discussions and local realities**, where both donors and women's CSOs have found it more challenging to achieve tangible success (e.g. Domingo et al. 2013: 9; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 25). Findings on Dutch aid in Kenya and Mozambique show that donors primarily fund their own priorities, which do not necessarily match the priorities of the CSOs they support (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27).

Further, donors need to move beyond formal institutions and to **engage better with issues of power and agency**. They can achieve this through better integrating the social, political, and legal spheres of change. For example, an evaluation found that UN Women country offices in sub-Saharan Africa had a *de facto* emphasis on formal change through legal and institutional processes. This risks remaining superficial if these offices fail to enhance women's capabilities for effective political agency as well. For example, focusing on political parties that are likely to remain captured by elites and patriarchal interests is ineffective. Conversely, supporting political agency in civil society remains important to maintain critical voices for social accountability, and for the oversight of men and women in governments and official positions. Legal change also needs to address discrimination that inhibits women's political agency, and to improve their access to services such as health and education. Lastly, another useful line of action for donors is supporting the building-up of networks and alliances at different levels and across different types of actors. This can enhance synergies for reform, through iterative interaction in the social, political, and legal spheres. In turn, this fosters sustainability in the effort for reform (Domingo et al. 2012: vii).

In addition, the evaluation of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality found that its projects had **not supported meso- and macro-levels of change**. More needed to be done to support the capacity of local civil society to envision, design, and demand transformative interventions. Work with men and boys also needed to be continued and built up, to enhance effectiveness and impact (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7). Further, partnerships with media were not built up enough in a number of projects, in Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Kenya, and India. These were missed opportunities to sensitise journalists and

encourage gender sensitive coverage of politics in mass media (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 19).⁵ In UN work for women's participation in peace, security and humanitarian issues, inadequate strategic planning for the medium- to long-term was one organisational factor limiting effectiveness across the board (Domingo et al. 2013: 5).

Many donors and CSOs **fail to use strong theories of change and political economy analyses** – this is noted in many references. Often, pathways to change and underlying assumptions are not described explicitly, and rarely documented. In particular, implicit or flawed assumptions underlying theories of change pose serious risks for effectiveness, especially in many restrictive environments. Frequent flawed assumptions in theories of change about policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy include: notions that governments will “recognise civil society as a legitimate representation of the population”; that the general population will recognise CSOs as legitimate representatives of their local realities; that civil society is necessarily a positive force in society; that change can be primarily top-down with little grassroots support; and that grassroots CSOs won't face constrained capacity in their policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31, 37, 111-116; also see Domingo et al. 2013: 9).

Results chains rarely include clear causal relationships between activities and expected results. For example, in UN Women's activities on peace and security, theories of change have lacked realistic objectives, appropriate activities, and plausible linkages. There has also been weak strategic prioritisation in design, which has constrained the agency's ability to contribute significantly to larger objectives and to focus its resources where it has a comparative advantage (Domingo et al. 2013: 9). Strikingly, across programmes, the management of political and security risks, especially for groups who are vulnerable in contexts of fragility or armed conflict, had been “negligible” (Domingo et al. 2013: 5, also see p. 11). This organisational feature has limited effectiveness across the board (Domingo et al. 2013: 5).

In the Dutch MDG3 Fund, the Dutch government deliberately did not set a clear strategy with milestones for the overall programme towards its broad objective, which was described as improving rights and opportunities for women and girls. It set no clear restrictions or preferences for strategies, and kept approaches and eligibility for activities and target groups broad. This was meant to let grantees themselves propose issues and approaches, instead of imposing a donor agenda, and to increase the likelihood that innovative approaches would be presented. This also worked with the expectation that the Fund would attract well-established organisations. However, this approach led to problems for effectiveness and impact, as it was not always evident or well explained how the results grantees achieved in individual projects contributed to the Fund's overall objective (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 11, 121-122).

4.2. Informed analysis on gender and context for interventions

Effective approaches

To best facilitate local change in the long run, donors need to use a thorough and regular high-quality **analysis of the political economy of gender inequality**, grounded in the specific context. In that analysis, donors need to respect local people's knowledge, experience, and perspectives. This can identify empowerment already in process and locally generated. It can also identify whether, when, and how donors could play a role. Good analysis is not only about formal governance, but also about how less visible or informal power structures can block or promote change (Eyben 2011: 5, 10). This is not always easy to decide. For example, an evaluation on UN Women's work on women's participation and

⁵ See references in section 3 for more indication on gaps in specific donors' action; e.g. see Domingo et al. (2013: 3).

leadership on peace and security found different views among both stakeholders and staff on whether UN Women should push states to step up the pace of implementation of international norms in this area. While progress had until recently benefitted from UN Women's leadership, sustainable efforts are likely to require the buy-in of state actors (Domingo et al. 2013: 7-8).

For example, an external evaluation found that, in sub-Saharan Africa, UN Women and UNDP would need to more systematically use a structured social and political analysis that would examine the context-specific political economy of barriers to gender equality, in order to be integrated into programming. This would require developing a diagnostic tool that country offices could use to identify strategic and realistic entry points, and the most effective engagement (Domingo et al. 2012: vii). The evaluation emphasises that country offices need to be well equipped to differentiate between national and sub-national contexts. Analysing differences within countries is particularly important in settings "where state institutions are weak and political power often operates through non-state channels" (Domingo et al. 2012: vii).

Gender Action Plans and gender analyses are effective when they are integrated throughout design, implementation, and monitoring. However, there are problems with their present use, stemming from the lack of supporting systems in donor agencies, particularly around accountability and incentive mechanisms. They tend to be confined to sectors such as education and health, as operational staff and partner governments see the opportunities for gender sensitivity more readily there. Further, there has been limited learning across sectors. In addition, the adoption of these tools has been limited in donor organisations (Risby & Keller 2012: 13).

Even when gender equality and analysis are integrated at the design stage of interventions, the focus on gender is often not carried into implementation and monitoring, because of a lack of budget or qualified staff. Gender is often included in design to get bureaucratic approval, but then dropped in the next phases, as operational staff focus on the priorities of the intervention. This often creates a vicious cycle: the lack of monitoring leads to an invisibility of gender results, "which feeds back into a lack of awareness and interest in promoting gender equality in future interventions" (Risby & Keller 2012: 14).

At the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, an evaluation confirmed that **strategies for contingency, risk mitigation, and resilience** were essential, although the Fund needed to embed them better in its programming, notably in design. This is especially required for contexts with high political or socio-cultural risk. Strategies could for example consist of: contingency measures built into program design; greater in-depth analysis of assumptions about risk; or the inclusion of men to facilitate their buy-in and support (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 6, 18).

Ineffective approaches

Social and political analyses of gender in the context-specific political economy of a country tend to be descriptive and static, are not used throughout the life of programmes, and thus are not used to help operations adapt to changing conditions –as their use by UN Women and UNDP exemplify (Domingo et al. 2012: vii).

Training on gender in donor agencies has largely been ineffective in raising awareness and in improving the knowledge necessary for gender-sensitive approaches. This is because training has been delivered as "one-size-one-shot fits all", with little tailoring to country or sector (Risby & Keller 2012: 13). Further, resources have not been consistently directed to the provision of training. The few gender specialists available are overburdened with responsibilities. Senior management and operational staff who are not gender specialists "often avoid gender training, citing heavy workloads and other priorities" (Risby &

Keller 2012: 13). These issues with gender training have been documented since the 1980s (Risby & Keller 2012: 13).

4.3. Sustained, nuanced support to locally-led WPE

Effective approaches

Donors can usefully support change coming from grassroots organisations and women's popular participation, in three realms: direct support; institutionalisation; and organising and collective action.

Direct support to organisations working for WPE

Donor financing can be an effective tool if done well. A stand-alone facility for organisations fighting for women's and girls' rights remains necessary (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 15). There is a strong association between availability of funds and activism through coalitions, cases in Jordan and Egypt show (Tadros 2011: 47). However, improved financing would be medium- to long-term, and would also include institutional support (Mukhopadhyay & Eyben 2011; de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 15-16). More fundamentally, donors need to understand the political context of women's rights organisations' work, and to let these organisations own the agenda. Donors need to be sufficiently engaged with the organisations, for two purposes: i) they need to invest time in managing the relationship with these organisations because this matters most and ii) they need to ensure that the organisations they are supporting are locally well grounded and representative. Donors could use women's rights organisations as a source of knowledge for their policy dialogues, and they would become "better at articulating women's rights as a theory of change" (Mukhopadhyay & Eyben 2011: 9-10).

Expanding on this, findings from women's rights organisations in Bangladesh defined a good donor as one that built a relationship with them through mutual respect, solidarity, responsiveness, and helpfulness (Eyben 2011: 10). UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality seems to have adopted a number of these positive approaches. Among others, one evaluation found that the Fund's flexibility "enabled grantees to achieve important results and [to] respond to changing needs and realities on the ground" (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 3). Similarly, Dutch-funded CSOs in Kenya and Mozambique appreciated the funding they received because it was flexible, financed what other donors did not, was willing to take on sensitive issues, and went to institutional support rather than specific campaigns (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27).

Another form of direct support is to **equip the members of these organisations** with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to learn how to engage step-by-step with politics (Eyben 2011: 6). Two cross-cutting good practices for improving capacity development emerge from an evaluation of Dutch support to policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy: i) donors and Northern NGOs need to give precedence to ownership by Southern CSOs; and ii) Southern CSOs need sound monitoring and evaluation for learning (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 15).

Developing capacity "is an evolutionary process", rooted in a particular organisation's work and experiences, as noted by an evaluation of Dutch support to policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27). An essential part of this evolution is the informal knowledge of how and why things work (tacit knowledge). Regular reflection based on a theory of change helps to systematise this knowledge and to make it available for broader application. Yet, donors have generally just used trainings, instead of seeking ways to strengthen CSOs' capacity by encouraging them to reflect systematically on which approaches are effective – for which the evidence on effectiveness is scant (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27).

Further, training and capacity development are most effective and sustainable when they are highly targeted towards increasing participants' understandings of the rights, responsibilities, and functions of different actors in fulfilling national and international obligations for women's rights. This applies whether participants are rights holders or duty bearers. Training and capacity development also need to include ongoing accompaniment and monitoring to be truly useful. For example, some of the most successful grantees at UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality included mentoring, on-the-job training, and study visits (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 31).

In addition, the Fund and its grantees took a cascading and peer-based approach to training and capacity-building, whereby many grantees engaged a large number of CSOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) in projects interventions. This cascading approach has amplified and sustained results; an increased number of organisations in each country now have greater knowledge and practical experience in gender equality and women's empowerment. These organisations became likely to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment effectively into their organisations' priorities (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4, 29).

Skills support also means building on local capacities and partnerships that bring in expertise and build on ongoing programmes. At the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, a number of projects were particularly effective at pairing up specialised non-feminist associations that had won a Fund grant with feminist organisations. This secured complementary expertise and networks necessary for their project, and increased national ownership for WPE (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 19, 29).

Facilitation and support to institutionalisation of women's political participation

Donors can help facilitate and institutionalise women's political participation. To institutionalise and sustain gender equality and women's empowerment at national and local levels, donors need to **support more than small-scale activities by women's groups**. Some interventions by grantees of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality have successfully institutionalised women's political participation. They have supported the development of structures and processes that integrate gender-responsive policy-making and budgeting within government, and generated increased political will and capacity. All these are required to systematically ensure ownership, connect to larger efforts, and sustain commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 5, 30).

Supporting women's involvement in formal politics has also worked well for WPE, including: facilitating marginalised women's access to electoral processes; building up women candidates capacity; supporting women who are elected representatives to be effective leaders; and engendering local governance structures (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4). Further, creating and using spaces where rights-holders and duty-bearers hold dialogues has advanced women's political participation. So too has creating interactive spaces where decision-makers and elected women representatives connect with their constituencies (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4). Supporting spaces and capacity for women leaders' engagements with communities is needed, so they can better understand, represents, and address other women's everyday needs (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7).

Fostering inclusive law-making and policy-making has proven to successfully advance women's empowerment, as has support for political inclusion during transitions. Another useful approach has been to maximise the potential for networks and coalitions to advocate for national reforms in constitutions and laws (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4-5). Donors can also support changes in legislation in host countries, among others, to ensure that women's organisations have a seat at the table (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 5; Eyben 2011: 6), and adopt a rights-based approach that holds duty bearers accountable for international commitments (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 5).

Support to women's collective organising and action

Improved donor action can support women's organising and collective action, which are particularly important for women experiencing discrimination additional to gender, for example due to poverty, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or race (Eyben 2011: 6). In doing this, donors need to be willing to **focus on the actors**, rather than strictly the project, and to nurture collective leadership (Tadros 2011: vii).

For example, in order for coalitions to work, donors should enable, not create, them (Tadros 2011: 49). When donors seek to create an enabling environment and momentum for the emergence of coalitions, they can promote and support activities and events at international and, especially, regional levels, which often creates a local ripple effect on an issue. The framing and positioning of such initiatives need to avoid provoking local opposition or antagonising possible allies (Tadros 2011: vi). Donors can also broker and convene opportunities for women leaders to meet, and to articulate and aggregate their aims and areas of agreement (Tadros 2011: vi).

Further, donors need to **commit to, and continuously invest in, process** as much as purpose or outputs (Tadros 2011: vi, 48). An evaluation of Dutch aid summarises the capabilities which donors and Northern NGOs could help networks and coalitions gain to be successful and lasting: sharing leadership; advancing all members' interests; ensuring transparency and sharing data and knowledge; dealing with diversity and power asymmetries within their networks; and constantly reflecting on the value added of the network or coalition (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 32-33). Case studies on donor support for coalitions in Egypt and Jordan offer further details. The findings show that support for process can help coalition members reconcile differences in perspectives, expectations, and visions without alienating important actors. It is also helpful so they can develop mechanisms for consensual decision-making and foster a common purpose and will (Tadros 2011: vi, 48). Specifically, building coalitions involves creating consensus, identifying appropriate mechanisms to mobilise support, finding ways of working that accommodates differences, and adapting internal dynamics of organisation to changing political contexts (Tadros 2011: 50).

Donors seeking to enable coalitions thus need to support the building of internal cohesion, and organisational and political capacity. They have a very important role to play through facilitation between different parties, and this facilitation needs to be politically nuanced and highly skilled (Tadros 2011: vii, 49-50). To be effective, donors also need to ensure that any proposal that an organisation presents actually reflects the vision, division of roles, and planned activities that key leaders in the coalition agreed on, as they likely come from more than one organisation (Tadros 2011: vi). More broadly, donors should be aware of the position of each of the organisations they support, and of the importance that these organisations be perceived as indigenous and national. Given the importance of local ownership, this is critically important for strengthening leadership in a coalition. In addition, if donors wish to advocate for a cause promoted by a coalition, they should be sensitive to how their own positionality will affect the legitimacy and power of the coalition (Tadros 2011: 50).

Many references emphasise that donors need to accept **investing time** in supporting women's organising and collective action. An evaluation of the UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality confirms the importance of this in developing comprehensive partnerships and networks with diverse stakeholders: it increased the impact of projects, addressed beneficiaries' needs more effectively, and fostered sustainability. Grantees led and facilitated partnerships and networks that had great breadth and depth, at community, local, and national levels. This included: women's organisations; community-based organisations; elected representatives; government officials; unions; and opinion leaders and makers, such as social leaders and journalists (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 18-19). Similarly, findings about cases

in Jordan and Egypt confirms that donor support for coalitions requires time and a focus on strengthening internal organisation as well as achieving goals (Tadros 2011: 50).

Financial transparency is a key issue in relations between a donor and a coalition, and in relations within the coalition. It requires disclosing not only the overall figure, but also the details of the budget. Where a donor gives funding to one organisation on behalf of the coalition (e.g. for legal and financial accountability), it needs to ensure that the coalition maintains high internal transparency on finances, so that funding “does not become a source of internal dispute” (Tadros 2011: 50). For example, a coalition for CEDAW in Egypt was at its strongest when all the members of the steering committee knew exactly how every Egyptian piastre in the budget was dispensed. This was written out and put up on a flipchart for everyone to see. In contrast, internal cohesion was undermined when an Egyptian NGO took over the coalition and failed to share the details of the budget with the group (Tadros 2011: 48).

In addition, **pairing up grantees to secure the expertise necessary** for their project is useful, and a number of projects at UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality were particularly effective at doing so. Letting projects align with partners' ongoing activities was cost-effective, as it used local capacities and resources. It also increased national ownership and the sustainability of results. In addition, grantees' partnerships with further groups advanced the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into an increased number of organisations, which started addressing women's and girls' needs and priorities more. The Fund now recommends that its grantees enhance their impact through partnerships (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 19).

Actors' agency within coalitions is critical to building an effective process for leadership within these coalitions – more so than project support or capacity-building. A number of donor policy interventions can strengthen agency within coalitions. This includes introducing financial and institutional incentives to support collective leadership within a coalition, to avoid “the one woman/one man show phenomenon” (Tadros 2011: 51). Donors can also focus more on experiential learning, to provide coalition leaders with opportunities “to broaden their horizons and their exposure to other actors' engagements with the issue” their coalition tackles (Tadros 2011: 51). This can take the form of visits to other initiatives in other contexts, or exchange programmes, for example. This can be highly effective in encouraging creative thinking on local strategies of engagement, provided that donors introduce it “at the right time and to the right people” (Tadros 2011: 51).

Further, **positioning grantees and civil society organisations (CSOs) as an effective bridge** to national and local levels of government proved useful, in projects supported by UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality. Grantees had a convening role “in bringing together women leaders, community-based organisations and decision-makers” (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 26). In addition, some CSOs collaborated effectively with government by providing technical support, which also fostered partnerships. In a number of cases, interactions were increased through convening and partnership, and these relationships are likely to endure beyond the Fund projects (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 26). One risk in this is the frequent changes of national and local government staff, which could weaken the established dialogues and partnerships (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 27).

Ineffective approaches

Direct support to organisations working for WPE

As the cases of Kenya and Mozambique show, donors **tend to equate civil society with CSOs**, and to focus their support on professionalised organisations. This excludes all other organisations that may mobilise the population more successfully, such as informal groups, religious organisations, and informal, mobilisations through mobile communications or social media. Donors also tend to neglect Parliament as

an interlocutor in the state, and favour engaging with the executive branch (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27, 81).

Negative donor behaviours towards women's groups, as the case of Bangladeshi women's rights organisations highlight, include: being top-down and imposing their decisions; being bureaucratic and inflexible; having no transparency in decision-making; not giving the organisation a 'decent hearing'; wanting too much publicity; and thinking too much of themselves (Nazeen et al. cited in Eyben 2011: 10). Similarly, Northern NGOs have an ambiguous role: they pursue their own campaigns, aim for their own results, and can generate financial dependency in Southern CSOs. As a result, it has been difficult to achieve equality, genuine involvement, or local ownership from Southern partners in activities such as capacity development led by Northern NGOs (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27).

The **typical modalities of donor financing** for women's collective action have been detrimental to achieving transformational outcomes. These harmful modalities are: short-term and fluctuating funding related to projects, instead of core funding; donor pooling of funds, which is associated with a decrease in direct relationships; and growing emphasis on competition among women's organisations for increasingly scarce funds (Eyben 2011: 6). Financing also tends to favour large international or transnational organisations with an already wide donor base. Donors need to ensure that smaller, local women's CSOs and CBOs can benefit from resources (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 16).

Shorter timeframes for implementation and a **lack of clear exit strategy** limited the sustainability of the changes achieved in a number of projects at UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality. This was particularly the case with advocacy and capacity development. The two-year time span of some fund interventions was not enough for projects to be effective in these areas. An evaluation recommended that, when seeking transformational change, the timeframe of at least four years be used. Similarly, the Fund needed to better enable the sustainability of successful results through replication and scaling up (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 27). UN Women also needed to provide more support to grantees in developing follow-on projects and securing funding to sustain the results (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 28). Bishop, Vaca and Barnes (2015) suggested that better use of ICT could strengthen support for networks and self-help groups (p.7).

If donors expect grantees to support the organisational development of other organisations (such as partner or beneficiary organisations), they need to recognise that short timeframes of projects and limited funding typically make this difficult, as made obvious in the Dutch MDG3 Fund. Grantees also typically consider such organisations as channels to achieving results, focusing their support on technical capacity to achieve results or provide services, and lacking in strategies for capacity development. As a result, partner and beneficiary organisations involved in the Dutch MDG Fund remained weak institutionally and in terms of financial sustainability. These organisations are unlikely to keep implementing the interventions once funding stops. This puts at risk the gains in changed discourses and attitudes on gender, especially where projects relied on community volunteers only. Projects that also trained 'professionals' such as public officials, civil servants, journalists, religious leaders etc. are more likely to have sustained interventions and gains. Similar programming problems have led to grantees' lack of strategic approach to international networks (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 14).

Much capacity development by donors centres on **training**, even though little is known about whether skills and knowledge are transferred into CSOs' operations and improve their effectiveness (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 27). One-off training or capacity development are typically insufficient to sustain the knowledge and skills necessary to women's empowerment (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 31). Similarly, one-off training for individual duty-bearers is inadequate to institutionalise and sustain gender equality and women's empowerment at national and local levels (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 30). While a number of projects under UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality have done better than this, there is still

a need to enhance training and capacity development with stronger targeting, medium-term accompaniment, and longer-term monitoring (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7).

Facilitation and support to institutionalisation of women's political participation

While donors need to pay greater attention to supporting an enabling environment for policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy, merely advancing legal provisions for participation does not necessarily work: donors need to empower those women and men directly affected by a policy so that these persons can assume their own agency and claim the opened-up space (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 125).

Donors need to **avoid criticising gender inequality without careful consideration**, a study on donor support for coalitions in Jordan and Egypt showed. They “need to be sensitive to the wording and timing of criticism about gender inequalities”, to avoid undermining local efforts (Tadros 2011: vi).

Support to women's collective organising and action

Having multiple layers of partnerships working at different levels within interventions is useful, but adds to the complexity (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 16). This reinforces the need for donors to support effective collaborations, including co-management and sound coordination and management by the aid recipient (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7; de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 16). Indeed, UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality has recently stopped funding joint projects where more than one organisation is the grant recipient, due to the difficulties such projects pose. This change has led to the increased effectiveness of projects. Where joint projects had been pursued, the grantees involved needed more shared leadership, a common understanding of roles and responsibilities, and effective communication and planning. Having clearer governance structures - such as steering or supervisory boards - where roles and responsibilities are defined based on grantees' capacities would help coordination, joint planning and oversight, and ownership (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 17-18).

At UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, the guidance and requirements on coordination and management was too weak, even where a single grantee took the lead. Guidance and requirement therefore needed strengthening, on coordination mechanisms and contingency plans in case of conflicts. The Fund has also started systematically assessing grantees' capacities and checking applicants, which has increased effectiveness (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7, 18). Continuous investment in networks and partnerships promises to enhance sustainability and boost grantees' capabilities in management (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 7).

When doing policy work to support coalitions for women's rights, there are several approaches that donors should avoid, as shown by a study on Jordan and Egypt. First, they need to **avoid creating or directing local coalitions themselves – or being perceived to do so**. Local ownership is crucial. Donors can support and enable local actors to form coalitions, but should not establish them nor select the organisations that will collaborate. Similarly, it is the organisations of the coalition, not the external actor, which should develop the vision, mission, and strategy (Tadros 2011: 50). In contexts of highly sensitive politics, donors need to make a conscientious effort to remain low-key. They should neither claim the formation of the coalition nor any policy change the coalition has contributed to as results of their own intervention (Tadros 2011: vii). Donors “should not publicly attribute positive change to their support” (Tadros 2011: 50). Otherwise, if donors engage in any of these negative practices, they undermine the sense that the initiative is locally led and owned. The public then often perceives these coalitions as being donors' ‘creatures’ or “as being driven by financial or professional incentives rather than commitment to the cause” (Tadros 2011: vi, 49-50). Such questioning of the integrity and commitment of coalitions severely undermines their work and legitimacy (Tadros 2011: vi).

Second, donors need to **avoid “at all costs” treating coalitions as projects with a three- or five-year life-span** – instead of as processes – and **applying the tools of project cycle to them** (Tadros 2011: 50). Doing so creates major problems, including undermining collective ownership (Tadros 2011: 48, 50).

This is because (Tadros 2011: vii, 50):

- It is impossible to support coalitions while complying with the dominant principles of project management, such as logical frameworks and results-based management.
- The collective mediation of different interests in coalitions is much more complex than in projects, where the focus is on outputs. For example, coalitions need time to discuss the division of roles, strategies, and relationships with stakeholders, government, and other non-governmental actors. They also need to create consensus. Consequently, coalitions do not function well with funding cycles of three to five years.
- Project mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are inappropriate (see later section on MEL).

Further, to build effective leadership, donor action about the agency of actors involved in coalitions is more critical than project support or capacity development for public organisations, which donors have shown a strong interest in (Tadros 2011: 50-51).

4.4 Further findings on the design of interventions for WPE

Effective approaches

Budgeting for effective women's political empowerment needs to reflect the real cost of an intervention, including the implementation of adaptive learning and supportive relationships with partners that work with “mutual respect, solidarity, responsiveness and helpfulness” (Eyben 2011: 10). Such partnerships make possible integrated monitoring, evaluation, and learning on finances and the overall programme. This allows all involved to review progress and value for money together.

Donors can design all programmes and services that benefit poor people “to **facilitate women's empowerment and encourage multiplier effects**” (Eyben 2011: 8; see also Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4). Careful design can use the possibility of multiple entry points and areas of empowerment - economic, social, or political –, so that supporting one area has wider positive effects. In this regard, donors need to improve their understanding of the relations between different kinds of empowerment (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4; Eyben 2011: 8). At UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, the design of projects that successfully supported the more disadvantaged groups of women identified the specific obstacles that marginalised women face in having their rights respected, and developed strategies specific to overcoming these barriers (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 25).

To secure **value for money** in support for transformative women's empowerment, interventions need to be designed so that they reap long-term and sustainable benefits for development (Eyben 2011: 9). Donors need to use more systematically, and improve upon, a variety of tools to estimate the costs of gender inequality and to estimate the financing needs of interventions that promote gender equality within and across sectors (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317). All donors' aid instruments can advance empowerment, from budget support to micro-level projects. Even where objectives do not seem directly related to empowerment, such as constructing infrastructure, design can support women's empowerment in planning, management, and delivery. Where objectives do include empowerment, projects need to design for multiplier effects between economic, social, and political empowerment (Eyben 2011: 9).

This is easier to achieve by: having a theory of change; costing appropriate approaches in relation to the theory; monitoring progress; assessing what is working and not working; and learning and adapting accordingly (Eyben 2011: 9-10). On that basis, donors need to consider which combination of approaches maximises multiplier effects in a specific context - recognising that what works in one place and at one time may not work in another context. Donors can then identify the combination that offers the best value in quality and sustainability of impact (Eyben 2011: 10).

One evaluation of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality found that good design included a **well-defined theory of change, with clearly formulated outcomes, outputs, results, and indicators**. It argued that strong results-based design in grantees' projects contributed to better management and evaluation of results. While this was in place in a number of projects, the evaluation recommended that staff from the Fund and UN Women continue investing in building up grantees' capacity to apply a results-based approach. Such support needs to be provided during project approval, inception, and the development of documents and measurement for the project (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 21).

Ineffective approaches

When design **fails to pay attention to the multiple dimensions of empowerment and to multiplier effects**, this can have disempowering effects, even when the intervention aims to be empowering. Further, donors themselves may introduce negative multiplier effects through policy changes in areas that are not directly associated with women's empowerment (Eyben 2011: 8). For example, donors pressured low- and middle-income countries such as Ghana to downsize their civil service in the 1990s, which hampered state capacity, just when donor-sponsored international frameworks for women's rights arising from the UN Beijing conference were picking up (Manuh et al. cited in Eyben 2011: 8). Donors should therefore check their national and international policy changes for potential negative impact on the enabling environment for empowerment (Eyben 2011: 8).

Characterising gender as a cross-cutting issue makes it "less likely to be addressed systematically across all the domains where gaps exist between men and women", including governance, peace and stability (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317). Conversely, directing country strategies, programmes and projects to concrete results in closing specific gaps between men and women is likely to be more successful (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317).

Similarly, strategies, programmes and projects are frequently **vague about what results they want to achieve** on outcomes for men and women, and on addressing gendered biases and inequalities (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317). UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality grantees' theories of change were not very clear in demonstrating how strategies would achieve change and in assessing which strategies would be most effective. Linkages were not clear between the interventions of the Fund and the theories of change used by UN Women. Clarifying these theories of change and the linkages between them and interventions would ensure that the Fund and grantees use tried and tested theories and assumptions on achieving WPE (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 22). Across all UN work on women in peace and security, weak programme design was one organisational feature that limited effectiveness across the board (Domingo et al. 2013: 5).

Grown, Addison and Tarp (2016: 317) recommend that objectives reflect the commitments countries have made under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UN goals, which should be reflected in national or sectoral plans.

4.5 Further findings on the implementation of interventions for WPE

This rapid review found few findings about implementation only that were specific to WPE, rather than general 'good practice' for aid interventions.

Effective approaches

There are several ways in which donors, in collaboration with local actors that support women's rights and gender equality, could better enable the implementation of policies conducive to political empowerment. This would include: supporting frontline workers in public services, who play a crucial role in determining whether social services enable or hamper women; fostering public debate on laws and policies affecting women; and facilitating women's organisations' monitoring of how laws and policies affecting women are implemented, to hold the state accountable (Eyben 2011: 7).

Increasing the visibility of women activists in community activities has also worked well to advance women's political participation, as concluded in the meta-review of evaluations on UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 4).

Ineffective approaches

In post-conflict peacebuilding, as exemplified in Sierra Leone, international organisations have not systematically applied their commitment to women's empowerment, as expressed in resolution 1325. They also need to do more to support women's organisations in monitoring and holding to account those tasked with implementing women's empowerment in post-conflict peacebuilding (Abdullah et al. cited in Eyben 2011: 7).

An evaluation of Dutch aid also found that knowledge on and experience in support to policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy varied considerably within the donor institutions, with serious implications for implementation. The department most engaged in policymaking in the Ministry concerned had built up substantial knowledge. However, this was hardly the case in thematic departments and Dutch embassies, both of which are responsible for implementation, such as shaping and implementing partnerships, and funding to CSOs (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 28).

4.6 Further findings on monitoring, evaluation, and learning for WPE

Effective approaches

Mainstream good practices: better documentation and learning

Donors need to **place more value on empowerment outcomes**. This requires valuing the contribution these outcomes make to the sustainability of any impact, and the multiplier effects of enhanced empowerment beyond a given programme. This will enable donors to properly balance the importance of short and long-term impacts when designing and managing programmes. The practical way of doing this is to develop indicators for outcomes in empowerment and for their effects, and to include them in frameworks on M&E or on results (Eyben 2011: 10). Donors should also adjust the reporting requirements so they focus on outputs, outcomes, and impact, rather than inputs (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 34).

For example, UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality increased its investment in building up grantees' capacities in results-based management, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. To do so, Fund staff devoted significant time and effort to give grantees continuous coaching. This resulted in greater visibility

of the effectiveness and impact of the Fund, as well as in good overall capacity among grantees (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 20).

The literature widely recommends **better learning from successes and failures in interventions** by donors and their in-country partners on what works and what doesn't work in advancing WPE, to inform strategies. **Documentation** is one step in that direction. Some of this is already available. For example, the meta-review of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality lists what has worked for women's political participation based on 17 evaluations of grantees' work (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015).⁶ However, Grown, Addison and Tarp call for donors to invest more resources in collecting sex-disaggregated data and conducting impact evaluation, to better understand what works and what does not across various contexts (2016: 317).

Importantly, **internal learning** to strengthen donors' capacities for analysis and responsiveness are needed for such investments to bear fruit. Further, because sex-disaggregated data on gender issues is an underfinanced public good, development agencies could help countries and the international system fill key data gaps (Grown, Addison & Tarp 2016: 317).

In addition, **creating links across donors to share experiences** is needed. Tadros (2011: 51) notes that there is a need for a donor forum specifically about how donors can be enabling agents for coalitions, because strengthening developmental coalitions is different from supporting an organisation in project implementation. Such a forum would be useful in sharing experiences and best practices on working with coalitions. It could also help harmonise policies towards coalitions – donors' policies on harmonisation so far are mostly about engagement with government rather than with non-state actors and with agencies that combine governmental and non-governmental dimensions. Such a forum could also be useful in creating specific guidelines and frameworks for engaging with developmental coalitions (Tadros 2011: 51).

More fundamental changes to MEL about women's political empowerment

The Association for Women's Rights in Development, an international feminist membership organisation, crafted a set of recommendations on developing more effective M&E in work for women's empowerment and rights (Batliwala 2011).⁷ It is based on critical findings from its in-depth qualitative and quantitative research on M&E as currently used by aid donors and similar actors (Batliwala & Pittman 2010). The recommendations, applicable from grassroots to international levels (including by donors), are as follows (Batliwala 2011: 2, unless otherwise noted):⁸

- "Make M&E a learning partnership, not a performance test" (p. 1). Having active partnerships where donors engage with women's organisations in the search for more relevant and sensitive approaches would work better than current practices (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 15). Make M&E a priority in interventions for the learning and accountability of women's organisations (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 20; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 34).
- Choose and use tools designed to unpack gender inequalities and the associated social inequalities, treating them as systemic, and embedded in social structures. Track changes at both individual and systemic levels, and in both the formal realm of law, policy, and resources, and in

⁶ There are a number of further overviews on what has worked for WPE in donor interventions. Due to length constraints and to avoiding duplication with other GSDRC work DFID is already familiar with, these other references are not synthesised here. Readers can refer among others to: Cornwall (2016); Cornwall & Rivas (2015); Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead (2007); Domingo et al. (2015); O'Neil & Domingo (2016); O'Neil, Domingo & Valters (2014); O'Neil & Plank (2015); Pathways (2011).

⁷ See: <http://www.awid.org/>

⁸ For further in-depth discussion of what feminist M&E would be, see: Batliwala & Pittman (2010: 16-21).

the informal realm of culture and practices. Inform and transform M&E, including indicators, based on women's voices and experiences (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 20). M&E is a political activity, rather than value-free, and can be deployed as part of working for change (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 21).

- Assess contribution to change (who and what contributed to change) rather than seeking to attribute change to particular interventions or actors (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 20).
- Include multiple frameworks, tools, and methods into M&E, as this is more effective. Transcend the traditional hierarchies within assessment techniques, such as between evaluator and 'is valued', or quantitative and qualitative. Instead, combine the best from all approaches to generate better knowledge for all (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 20). Among others, balance quantitative and qualitative techniques of assessment, and legitimise and value participatory approaches such as stories of change (see p. 3).
- Make design and M&E systems flexible and adaptable. Be willing to revise approaches, measures, and indicators if external conditions shift significantly (see p. 4). Track and assess reversals and even success in just "holding the line" (p. 1). Some women's rights activists have proposed to develop a theory of constraints to accompany a theory of change in context (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 12).
- Tailor indicators and results realistically to the timeframe of the project. Have an honest dialogue between donor and grantee at the outset. Don't expect macro-level change from projects that last three-five years; instead, report for example on interim changes within specific groups of stakeholders. "It is better to under-promise and over-deliver" (see p. 6; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 31).
- Invest time, money, and people resources in to the creation of periodic baselines. They constitute a powerful tool to assess achievements accurately, adapt, and identify what has worked and what has not. They also help to decide on directions for the next phase and, where relevant, for both grantees and donors to make the case for continued investment (see p. 6).
- Design M&E so they suit the architecture of the particular organisation using it (e.g. networks, federations, membership-based organisations, coalitions – see p. 5). Also factor in grantees' organisational capacity, and invest resources in developing grantees' capacity for M&E. Try to create approaches that can embrace the complexity of women's empowerment while offering simplicity, accessibility and cultural meaningfulness to users (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 20).

Donors need to orient their requirements for monitoring and evaluation towards **learning by doing, supported by a regular reflection on the theory of change**. This will enable organisations to systematise tacit knowledge on how and why things work, and to make it available more broadly, while also ensuring that they engage seriously with MEL and with downward and upward accountability (de Lange & Claessen 2015: 34).

Monitoring and evaluation applied to women's rights coalitions need to examine not only activities, but also how much decision-making is based on consensus in initiatives, and how inclusive and representative the institutionalised processes of leadership are (Tadros 2011: 50). It is not only outputs or outcomes, but also processes of internal governance and decision-making that can affect performance on the ground (Tadros 2011: vi). In addition, M&E needs to integrate engagement with all the members in the leadership of the coalition, not only the leader of the organisation that received funding (Tadros 2011: 50).

Ineffective approaches

Women's rights organisations “have long struggled with the **inadequacy and inappropriateness**” of **typical donor tools for assessing the impact** of work for women's rights (Batliwala 2013: 48; also see de Lange & Claessen 2015: 34).⁹ Most donors' M&E focuses on evaluating performance instead of aiding learning, which would be the goal of a feminist approach to M&E (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 8). Most donor methods are too simplistic and focused on the short-term, failing to capture systemic impact and embedded structures of gender power. Few tools can capture the complexity of work for women's rights, which can often entail ‘one step forward, two steps back’ (Batliwala 2013: 48). Tools are also poor at capturing some successes. For example, at UN Women, achievements stemming from high-quality processes – such as when a donor office understands that how it works is as important as any inputs to achieve transformative and sustainable changes, and that it successfully has positive impact based on this – remain implicit and are not reported in theories of change or monitoring and evaluation (Domingo et al. 2013: 5). The above points apply among others to M&E on women's rights coalitions, where project mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are inappropriate (Tadros 2011: 50).

Specifically, AWID's in-depth study found that current M&E approaches and practices are not working for women's rights organisations, for several reasons (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 8-16). First, very few approaches help to understand “how change happens or how gender relations have been altered” (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 9). Many frameworks **confuse or conflate short-term change** (such as tactical accommodation by power structures) **with sustainable change**. The linearity of many tools, including logical frameworks, is also problematic, because their simple conceptualisation of cause and effect cannot capture complex social change. Currently, many tools are designed to gauge change primarily in the formal domain, rather than in the harder-to-measure realms of cultural norms and practices (Batliwala & Pittman 2010).

Many approaches embed false binary oppositions and problematic hierarchies about assessment and data into M&E, such as ‘success-failure’, ‘quantitative-qualitative’, or ‘subjective-objective’. These reveal reductionist and positivist biases that are not helpful to learning. For example, donors tend to dismiss the anecdotal or the subjective as too micro. This can negate powerful lines of enquiry about change processes, such as subjective information about change in women's lives. Conversely, some women activists dismiss quantification as impossible about gender equality work, which is demonstrated leaf falls. To go beyond such binaries, some women's organisations have helped produce notable innovations in measuring impact. However, currently, many M&E methods “are neither gendered nor feminist in their principles or methodology” (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 16). They also do not take into account “the particularities of the power shifts and challenges” that women's rights interventions generate (Batliwala & Pittman 2010: 16).

Even gender analysis frameworks are not necessarily feminist. Batliwala and Pittman (2010: 18) highlight that those women working for women's empowerment “are a great, untapped resource for building more effective indicators for assessing change and impact”. There is a similar finding from an examination of donor requirements for evidence-based results in three projects of NGO Helvetas Swiss Cooperation, in Bangladesh, Kosovo, and Nepal. The study examined the M&E systems from the perspective of four dimensions of empowerment: power over, power to, power within, and power with. It found that quantitative methods stressed ‘power to’, while qualitative methods had the potential to explore a broader range of outcomes and impacts (Carter et al. 2014).

⁹ See Woroniuk (2014) for a critical assessment of the lack of gender mainstreaming in evaluations by the Australian aid agency.

Second, there are issues with **what to measure**, particularly in relation to assumptions or theories of change. There is a disjuncture between the changes sought, which are typically medium to long term, and the short timeframes of M&E. In addition, most tools do not allow for the tracking of negative or unexpected change, reversals, backlash, and other factors that hamper improvements. At the same time, current instruments are poor at tracking the impact of less tangible but vital interventions such as challenging dominant discourses or playing support roles to other movements. Most tools are also not designed for tracking the successes of social movements, such as movement building or the impact these movements generated; instead, they are geared towards individual organisations and, often, single projects. Existing systems are too narrow and inappropriate for multilayered formations to, such as transnational networks, coalitions, membership-based organisations, and women's funds (Batliwala & Pittman 2010).

Third, many frameworks are based on **problematic political assumptions** about socio-political contexts where the default is that contexts are stable and equitable, which is hardly ever the case for women's rights work. Activists from low and middle-income countries particularly flagged this as an important problem. Many approaches do not actually genuinely integrate the massive adverse factors that mobilisations for women's empowerment (Batliwala & Pittman 2010).

Fourth, most methods make **problematic assumptions about their usability**. Most tools require high levels of training and competence to be used effectively - even those supposedly developed through bottom-up approaches. Importantly, most tools assume that their logic is universal rather than specific to a culture or a region. As a result, there is a lack of tools that would be simple, user-friendly, culturally sensitive, and nuanced about capturing change, and that a wide array of actors could be use without requiring intensive training (Batliwala & Pittman 2010).

Fifth, **relations between women's organisations and donors about M&E have been problematic**. Both donors and women's organisations tend to treat M&E as an add-on and lack of strong culture of assessment. Donors frequently short-change M&E, with too few resources and too little emphasis. In addition, M&E approaches and their indicators often become dissociated from the theory of change, take on a life of their own, and become an end for punitive enforcement and accountability to donors, rather than a means of understanding and learning. In many cases, women's organisations have been frustrated by a lack of genuine and ongoing negotiation with some donors for discussing their assessment systems, even if the users discover after starting that those systems need adapting to work usefully on the processes involved in women's empowerment. Yet, inflexible bureaucracy may trap even supportive donors, although they recognise that their use of M&E on women's empowerment is too top-down and rigid, and fails to adapt enough to the complexity and sensitivity of such work (Batliwala & Pittman 2010).

More broadly, **donors' approaches to M&E on gender have been inconsistent**. This has made it a challenge to report on, and learn from, results. Donors commonly lack appropriate M&E and supervision systems to track progress, to allow for adaptive management, to record results on gender equality, and to document good practices (Risby & Keller 2012: 14; also see Domingo et al. 2013: 5, 9).

Even in the otherwise successful UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, an evaluation confirms there is an increased need for processes, tools, and staffing to "capture, analyse and share successful and scalable practices and models" that emerge from implementation (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 23). The Fund also needs to develop tools and training linked to these models for use and testing in different contexts and sectors. Further, the function of the Fund in knowledge management is not always reflected in the design and resource allocation for individual projects. Opportunities for sharing knowledge and networking among grantees from different regions are needed (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 23).

An evaluation of UN Women’s work on women’s participation and leadership on peace and security comes to similar conclusions: as of 2013, the agency had yet to institutionalise a culture of evaluation, and its M&E systems remained underdeveloped. These systems focused on compliance and accountability, especially to donors, rather than learning within and between programmes and themes. Knowledge management was also underdeveloped. As a result of all this, it has limited the evidence base and learning on what works and what doesn't, under what conditions, and why (Domingo et al. 2013: 9). Lessons from country-level programming, and from national and regional policy engagement, do not sufficiently inform policy work at the global level. Opportunities for cross fertilisation are limited, which constrains the agency's capacity to harness creative and innovative practices, and also limits its capacity to give timely support to domestic and regional processes on policy. Further, it limits its capacity to adapt programmes as conditions change - which is necessary in contexts of fragility and armed conflict – so that it pursues strategic objectives rather than defunct outputs (Domingo et al. 2013: 8, 9).

More broadly, outside the thematic gender evaluations, donor evaluations have often have failed to systematically incorporate gender into their evidence. Evaluation offices have tended to see gender as a topic for occasional coverage rather than as an issue that requires systematic integration throughout their work (Risby & Keller 2012: 14).

Where donors **report results on gender**, they tend to focus on women and not on gender (Risby & Keller 2012: 14). They also tend to focus on education and health, where it is easier to monitor and evaluate effects on women and gender. However, these operational experiences are then generally not transferred to other sectors. Instead of being mainstreamed, gender equality becomes pigeonholed into certain sectors (Risby & Keller 2012: 14).

Donors have mostly conducted evaluations of their gender work as **one-off exercises**, which does not allow for opportunities to assess trends in findings and in management’s responsiveness (Risby & Keller 2012: 11). Exceptions to this include: multiple evaluations conducted at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation (Norad), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the World Food Program (WFP), and the World Bank (WB) (Risby & Keller 2012: 11).

Further, the AfDB meta-review found that many evaluations have **failed to assess findings comparatively across aid agencies**, with the exception of a Norad synthesis of eight organisational evaluations (see Aasen 2006). The lack of a comprehensive synthesis on evidence about donor impact on gender equality is an obstacle to establishing the root causes of the underperformance in this area, and thus an obstacle to influencing policy or operational strategies. This evaluative gap needs to be filled (Risby & Keller 2012: 11-12).

Some donors, as the Dutch MDG3 Fund did, **outsource the management of a fund for gender equality**. This has some benefits. However, it prevents the donor from enhancing its knowledge base on women’s empowerment, and from “developing its relationships and networks in this field” (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 17). The pros and cons of different models of management require careful consideration (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 17).

Weaknesses in MEL can also stem from organisations receiving the aid. In the Dutch MDG3 Fund, grantees turned out to be unable to provide reliable data on outputs and outcomes, creating difficulties for the donor, which had chosen light monitoring on the assumption that grantees would provide good data (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a). To resolve this, balancing greater accountability and learning from established approaches, and alignment with existing capacities for M&E can be helpful. For example, strengthening M&E capacity could be a component in all projects (de Nooijer & Mastwijk 2015a: 16).

A number of grantees of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality, while effective at tracking outputs and activities, were weaker in capturing baseline evidence on higher-level results, and their evaluations had poorly formulated results and indicators (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 21). In addition, some evaluations took place too early to effectively capture impact. One option to address that could be planning to assess the impact of key strategies and approaches after completion (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 22). Projects supported by the Fund also often lacked a learning component with a plan for sharing information and learning locally and nationally among stakeholders. The project budget needs to include sufficient resources for this (Bishop, Vaca & Barnes 2015: 23).

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Further reading

The following references were not used on the body of this report for various reasons, including: the fact that the study is about a single country or small-sized case; availability of a more recent and similar reference by the same author; a lesser focus on donor interventions or on WPE; a lack of time to access a reference, or to use a particularly complex reference, within the short helpdesk turnaround time; and, in two reports, a seeming bias towards reporting positives on donor effectiveness (Hughes, Ashman & Pournik 2016; Krook, Ashman, Moughari & Pournik 2014). All these references are relevant to the report topic however, and are therefore listed below.

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