



Effectiveness of aid interventions to strengthen collective action that facilitate women's political empowerment – Narrative review

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Question

Please provide a selection of rigorous references about the effectiveness of aid interventions to strengthen collective action that facilitate women's political empowerment. In particular, identify references that offer assessments of the evidence base for these interventions (i.e. strength of the evidence for different types of interventions). Where possible, highlight the types of interventions, as well as the effectiveness, challenges, and conditions required. If mentioned, note the role of donors in these interventions.

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1. Overview

Collective action can play an important role in facilitating women's political engagement, and in advancing women's empowerment in formal and informal politics, in low-, middle- and high-income countries, as shown by significant rigorous evidence¹. Yet, there is only **limited and patchy rigorous evidence** about on how aid interventions can strengthen collective action to facilitate women's political empowerment (WPE) in low- and middle-income countries². This narrative review synthesises a selection of key evidence based on a rapid, non-systematic literature review (this makes it subject to limitations)³.

Overall, there have been five **major strands of interventions**: combining multiple types of interventions; providing funding; enabling relationships (e.g. among members of a coalition, or between them and state actors); supporting policy dialogue, advocacy, and campaigning; and leveraging institutions that rely on collective action (e.g. self-help groups). Within all strands, aid actors and their partners have employed many **common types of interventions**, including: building relationships (e.g. convening actors, brokering dialogue, supporting networking); developing individuals' and groups' capacities; providing financial or technical resources, directly or through intermediaries, to groups working for gender equality; and holding policy dialogue, for example with government or civil society partners, to create or defend space for collective action and WPE. The focus of interventions on collective action for WPE has been on women, and to a lesser extent on girls, with some limited attention to involving men or boys.

The effectiveness of each common strand and each type of intervention is uneven and mixed. Effects have ranged from negative to neutral to positive, although they seem positive overall. Sustaining positive effects is often a challenge. At a general level, combining several types of interventions is more effective than carrying out single interventions. Beyond this, evidence offers hardly any comparative rankings on which types of interventions have been more effective. Within types of interventions, few specific interventions emerge consistently as more effective than others. One exception is the finding that classic short-term trainings are less effective than sustained peer-based or experiential learning. In addition, there are variations by region and country in the interventions frequently used, and in which interventions were effective. Consequently, reliable differences in effectiveness do not seem to be between interventions or intervention types, but across them. **The effects of interventions seem to be highly dependent on two aspects: internally, on the quality of programming; externally, on the political savvy of the supported partners involved in collective action, and on the wider political, economic, social, and cultural conditions.**

Indeed, all frequent types of intervention can be effective if designed, implemented, and combined well, and if enabled by favourable external variables. Effective aid depends on deeply **knowing the political, economic, social, and cultural context**, and adapting any lessons from other settings to it. **Better understanding the links between collective action and State response** is also important. For example, in politically closed or socially conservative contexts,

¹ At its most basic, collective action refers to several individuals or groups coming together and collaborating towards a shared goal. Here, it typically refers to joint action undertaken by small or large groups of persons, associations, or social movements working to advance gender equality. For more on the relationship between collective action and women's political empowerment, see the annotated bibliography associated with this report (Combaz, 2018).

² Some successful strengthening of collective action for WPE involved no foreign aid, only domestic dynamics.

³ See the annotated bibliography associated with this report for details (Combaz, 2018).

state policy responds less to public activities by grassroots citizens in formal politics (such as petitions) than to informal efforts that also involve some connections to elites.

When choosing which initiatives and partners to work with, effective aid actors base their work on local empowerment dynamics, **work with locally anchored, representative actors**, and account for their own position in the country's political economy. They work with **diverse partners over the long term, through collaborative relationships**. They support both feminist groups and a variety of other women's groups, especially marginalised women's groups. Simultaneously, they encourage the mainstream groups to advance women's rights and gender equality. In all cases, they **let their local partners own and set agendas, collective strategies, and ways of working** on women's empowerment. They **strengthen their partners' collective capacities, over the long term**, through tailored collaborative techniques, such as peer-based, experiential, or reflective learning.

Effective aid actors **support multi-dimensional interventions** aiming to advance women's empowerment simultaneously in the personal, social, and political spheres, and to do so at different levels (e.g. local and national). The strategies chosen must address specific barriers to WPE in sequences of successive priorities. Interventions need to **also engage with men and boys, with families and communities, and with elites**, as a complement to engaging respectively with women and girls, individuals, and grassroots contacts. They also **identify and plan for security and political risks**, such as backlash in restrictive or closed environments.

In addition, supporting collective action requires a **longer-term, more adaptive approach focused on the process**, compared to typical approaches in aid projects. Work needs to go beyond 3-5 years, to focus on problem-solving and local strengths, and to design for multiplier effects (e.g. between economic and political empowerment). It needs to encourage inclusion, collaboration, democracy, and transparency within partners' collective organisation.

Effective donors use their agency. They improve their own and other donors' practices on gender and accountability, invest in relationships among local actors, and stay committed over the long term. They remain realistic, but are willing to take risks and be creative in supporting collective leadership and agency, for instance by providing space and time for different stakeholders to meet, deliberate, and find common ground.

In 'fragile or conflict-affected States' (FCAS), aid actors can effectively **support women's collective participation in peace processes, political negotiations, and institution-building**. In particular, they can provide logistic support to the participation – formal or informal – of women's organisation and networks. They can also engage men and boys for gender equality.

Outside interventions, a number of factors and conditions affect effectiveness, but evidence is scarce on general lessons. The main barrier lies with entrenched gender norms detrimental to women and girls. Other barriers include a lack of democratic space, and dominant social conservatism and backlash. Conversely, there are a number of positive factors and conditions. In all of these, **women activists' ability to work in politically savvy ways is crucial**. Having domestic actors that are effective at collective action for gender equality, in both formal and informal spaces, also significantly contributes to success. Organisation and collective action by women – especially by marginalised women – are essential, as is women's ability ally strategically, among themselves and with powerful mainstream groups. Other favourable variables include: mutually reinforcing dynamics in empowerment (economic, political, social, and personal); political openings; and support within the State.

2. Methodology

This report is based on rigorous evidence selected through a rapid, non-systematic review of academic, practitioner, and policy literature. Its findings and recommendations should therefore be understood in the context of these limitations. Its given scope was to look at empirical literature about aid interventions to strengthen collective action that facilitate WPE at any level of formal or informal politics (national or local), in low- and middle-income countries, drawing on references published in the past 10 years (2008-2018). The steps involved in the searches and selection of references are summarised in the methodology section of the annotated bibliography associated with the present report (Combaz, 2018).

3. State of knowledge

There is **very limited rigorous evidence** on the effectiveness of aid interventions to strengthen collective action that facilitate women's political empowerment in low- and middle-income countries⁴. However, **most references are based on rigorous methodologies**. In addition, taken as whole, the **knowledge base is diverse** in several ways. It comprises a mix of academic, practitioner, and policy literature, with methodologies and materials using a variety of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches. The study scopes range from single cases to multi-case comparisons to literature reviews. The knowledge base covers multiple countries across all world regions, and multiple levels of action, from local to international. In addition, it covers a variety of causes, manifestations, dynamics, and effects in interventions on WPE and collective action. The types of interventions examined are varied too, though donor funding is distinctly more addressed than others. Among the selected references, **findings are broadly consistent and conclusive**. While a number of findings can only indicate correlations, some findings credibly identify causalities.

On the other hand, the literature found through this rapid review has **several weaknesses**. First, there are **no systematic comparisons to identify and rank which types of interventions, and which individual interventions, are most effective** relative to one another. There is some – uneven – evidence about effectiveness regarding each type of intervention and most identified interventions, and regarding sets of interventions. Second, there are **few general findings about the factors and conditions outside interventions** that affect effectiveness. Third, a significant part of the literature lacks a systematic engagement how **distinct and intersecting structures of inequalities** (such as class, caste, age, ethnicity, culture, disability, and sexualities) shape collective action and WPE, and how they affect the effectiveness of interventions. Fourth, the time frames considered for the effects of interventions are **typically in the short- or medium-term** in practitioner literature (this problem does not appear in academic publications, nor in most policy publications). Fifth, some of the practitioner and policy literature is **skewed towards focusing on positive results**. Sixth, while there is overall a **variety of authors and sources**, some individual ones are frequently represented, especially in practitioner and policy publications.

⁴ For further details on the state of knowledge, see the corresponding section in the annotated bibliography associated with this report (Combaz, 2018). For reviews of the state of research, knowledge, and aid on this topic, see, in addition to the annotated bibliography (Combaz, 2018): .

4. Findings about interventions

General findings, presented in sub-section 4.1, are drawn primarily from references about approaches and programmes that combine multiple types of interventions, and from references that present cross-cutting findings based on a variety of interventions. From that basis, additional points related to the same findings that were found in references about specific types of interventions were aggregated into the section as well. The rest of the sub-sections (4.2 to 4.4) present any further findings that are associated with specific strands of interventions.

Throughout this section, findings about interventions in adverse contexts are presented separately at the end of each sub-section. These are about settings of armed conflict or their aftermath, other settings with high levels of violence, and States with weak institutions or capacities⁵. They are presented separately because a number of interventions are specific to them, and because the evidence does not clearly suggest that findings from other contexts are applicable to adverse contexts.

4.1. General findings about multiple interventions and contexts

4.1.1. General findings about types of interventions, and their effectiveness

The evidence reviewed for this report, taken as a whole, shows that international aid has often combined **a few major types of interventions** to strengthen collective action that facilitate WPE. Frequent interventions include: building relationships (e.g. convening actors, brokering dialogue, supporting networking); developing individuals' and groups' capacities; providing financial or technical resources, directly or through intermediaries, to groups working for gender equality; and holding policy dialogue, for example with government or civil society partners, to create or defend space for collective action and WPE.

The evidence reviewed shows that, **while aid does not by itself empower women, it has often played a critical role, in positive or detrimental ways**⁶. Indeed, it shows that the various types of interventions aid actors have used – alone or in combination – have yielded **mixed results, though the overall balance seems positive** (see e.g. UN Women, 2018, pp. 11–13). The sustainability of some results has been a challenge⁷. Below are examples of aid support to collective action that show a mix of good and bad results:

- The 5-year Raising Her Voice (RHV) programme consisted of 19 projects on gender equality in governance, across four continents (17 national, two regional), funded mainly by the British Department of International Development (DfID), and coordinated by Oxfam Great Britain (OGB). The global portfolio sought “to promote women's rights and capacity to engage effectively in governance at every level: raising women voices, increasing their influence, and making decision-making more accountable to women” (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. 1). The projects chose entry points in the political, social, and/or economic sphere, and used a variety of interventions and activities. The RHV

⁵ In some references, such contexts are referred to as ‘fragile or conflict-affected States’ (FCAS).

⁶ (Eyben, 2011, p. 5; O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 12; Tadros, 2011b, pp. iv, vi)

⁷ (see e.g. Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. iv; UN Women, 2018, p. 13)

portfolio achieved high relevance and effectiveness. Some of the results seemed relatively less sustainable (Beardon & Otero, 2013, pp. iii–vi, 2, 6–7).

- In Jordan, the British Council was a critical, highly effective contributor to the work of the Coalition for the Protection of the Family against Violence, which successfully introduced new legislation on the sensitive issue of protecting women against domestic violence. The British Council, working outside project cycles, created space for the coalition to form, and to choose its issue, members, agenda, and ways of working. It provided funding, coordination, and facilitation at first, and later just facilitated exchanges. Its crucial contribution was building bridges within governmental agencies, and across the divide between governmental and non-governmental actors, including within the coalition (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 21–23). It created “the space for parties that did not conventionally collaborate to [...] dialogue, deliberate and find common ground” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 23).
- Large international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) helped women’s organisations that represented garment workers and fruit pickers to engage successfully with the global corporate sector. They helped women’s voices find openings “in the corridors of corporate power” (Barrientos 2009, cited in Eyben, 2011, pp. 6–7).
- In Egypt, the coalition on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women experienced both positive and negative donor actions. In its early days, UNICEF staff supported the coalition without subjecting it to a project-bound approach, and instead committed to bringing together parties and giving them space to develop common agendas. This approach was essential in helping the coalition build a strong foundation. In contrast, later engagement by the EU ran strictly as a three-year project and took the form of a large grant to one organisation within the coalition, leading the coalition to resist this ‘projectisation’ (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 30–32).
- In Egypt, the Dutch government had negative effects after providing a large three-year grant to Karama-Egypt, so that Karama would lead a coalition to tackle violence against women. However, donor practices strengthened Karama’s accountability to the donor, rather than to its coalition partners. In particular, the donor related “to the coalition as if it was an organisation and to the cause as if it was a project” (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 33–35).
- In Egypt, the practices of the German aid agency, GTZ (now GIZ), had negative effects. The GTZ brought together women’s rights’ organisations, and later development NGOs, to form a network working on personal status law. It funded individual member organisations, and some project activities. This initiative failed to effect change on its core issue, and failed to turn the group into a coalition (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 35–38).

Effectiveness is often uneven within the same donor programme. Effectiveness can vary **by country office, and by target group** – marginalised women are often not supported enough (see e.g. UN Women, 2018, p. 13). The meta-evaluation of UN Women’s multi-donor Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) also points to variations **by region**, regarding which interventions were used by grantees, and which ones were effective (Barnes, Bishop, & Vaca, 2016, p. 34):

- Asia-Pacific and Africa: community-driven approaches were most effective. There was “a strong focus on garnering community and family support for women’s political participation”. Projects in Asia-Pacific also used innovative strategies (including through information and communication technologies, including social media) “to connect women elected leaders with women’s organisations and movements in order to increase their capacity to represent and voice the needs and priorities of women in their communities”.

- Arab States region: the focus was on supporting women leaders' and elected representatives' participation in normative processes, "to secure women's rights, foster coalitions, and leverag[e] international instruments".
- Latin America and the Caribbean: the focus was "on increasing and reinforcing a strong body of women leaders through capacity building, and leveraging this to influence legislative and policies to advance decent work and social protection".

Aid actors have also **under-used some effective interventions and activities**. At UN Women, **programming to change social norms** to support women's political participation is promising, but has remained "under-analysed, under-developed and under-measured" (UN Women, 2018, p. 13). **Using information and communication technologies** (ICTs) for learning or for action and social change is an effective strategy. For example, a number of FGE grantees used mobile devices in advocacy, and for peer-based exchanges of information between elected women, leaders and communities. In India, three organisations "supported rural and socially excluded women to participate effectively in political processes [...]", including through a platform for "telephone information exchange among elected women and women's collectives" (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 47–48). Yet, for example, online fora have been under-used in aid (Eyben, 2011, p. 9). Other under-used approaches are **collaborative arts**, and **supporting women's organising to monitor "the implementation of laws and policies affecting women"** (Eyben, 2011, p. 7).

4.1.2. General factors and conditions of effectiveness within interventions

a) Knowing the nuances of the context, and adapting any lessons to it

Donors that successfully play an enabling role know the context, its actors, and its nuances. In Egypt and Jordan, for example, donors were effective when they had worked in the country over a sustained period. This enabled them to have a nuanced and deep knowledge of the context (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). Characteristics of successful donor support are thus:

- Having an institutional memory of experiences, endeavours, and relationships, and having "an analysis of their successes and failures" (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49).
- Having local and international staff who have developed relationships and networks over a long time, amounting to social and political capital (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). Such donors know and listen to the key players and organisations (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi).
- Knowing the history of the actors and structures of the context very well (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). This requires a "[d]etailed understanding of the local history and politics of gender" (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi). It also requires knowing the local actors very well. This includes the nuances of the positionality of the organisations they support and of the organisations' leaders, as well as "the personal and institutional tensions" (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 49–50).
- Understanding both the political constraints and openings for engaging with actors in government and civil society (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). Donors must thus have key skills in political analysis, to recognise and understand political openings, seize the moment, and define "the realistic limits of the possible" (Tadros, 2011b, p. v). They must also "have a trained workforce, both local and international, with political analytical skills in the gender field that enables them to 'work politically', with understanding and sensitivity, with women and their organizations" (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi).

- Understanding the complexity of policy influencing, and the lack of linear causality between a coalition’s actions and the policy change itself – even though local actors can and do often have an impact (Tadros, 2011b, p. vii).

Consequently, **thorough, regular, contextual analyses of the political economy, including that of gender inequality**, are important⁸. Good analyses look not only at formal institutions, but also at “how informal, less visible, power structures can block or promote change” on women’s empowerment (Eyben, 2011, p. 5). They identify “realistic prospects and mechanisms for change” (IOB, 2015b, p. 26), show where empowerment is in process, and “identify whether, when and how to play a supportive role” (Eyben, 2011, p. 5). Yet, aid actors often underestimate the importance of this, and solid analyses “are often missing or outdated” (IOB, 2015b, p. 26).

Successful aid actors therefore adapt and change with their context. This requires **identifying risks and planning for contingencies**, especially during political transitions, to anticipate and plan for potential backlash and resistance against progress in WPE (UN Women, 2018, p. 34). Adapting to a *constantly* changing context proves particularly difficult (IOB, 2015a, p. 143). In closing democratic spaces, several UN Women programmes adapted effectively. They shifted their support to the regional or sub-national level, or channelled it through links to capacity building in public administration. In such settings, the capacity for ‘smart convening’ was crucial, including: careful leveraging of the UN flag; consistent commitment to neutrality; use of informal spaces; bridging government and CSOs; “linking national groups to international forums”; and coordination of the UN or of the broader diplomatic community (UN Women, 2018, p. 34).

By contrast, **lessons from the evidence are not a checklist, or a one-size-fits-all blueprint, but merely starting points** (IOB, 2015a, p. 21; Tadros, 2011a, p. 2, 2011b, p. 48). Policies and programmes that work in one context for one target group can be counterproductive in another time or place (Eyben, 2011, p. 4; IOB, 2015a, p. 21). Past attempts at copying best practices have had limited success, backfired, or been instrumentalised by authoritarian regimes for their own power⁹. Moreover, while empowerment is a useful concept, donors should use it carefully. In many languages, there is no direct translation, and referring to it in English invites suspicion about foreign agendas¹⁰. Still, it is “useful to learn from what has worked elsewhere,” provided that good ideas are then grounded in local realities (Eyben, 2011, p. 4).

b) Better understanding the links between collective action and State responsiveness

Donors – and some international feminist movements – have often made **three erroneous assumptions about the links between collective action and State responsiveness in politically closed and socially conservative contexts**. With each assumption, there is a disconnection between models, which are based on actors’ agency, and realities, which combine structural constraints, occasional space for agency, and opportunities (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 7–8).

First, many donors have **assumed a direct, linear causality from civil society activism for gender equality to national policy change**, whereby collective mobilisation such as citizen advocacy is assumed to force governments to change policy. In authoritarian States, coalitions may create prerequisites, such as awareness, and may diffuse likely opposition. However, there

⁸ (Eyben, 2011, p. 5; IOB, 2015a, p. 21, 2015b, p. 15)

⁹ (Tadros, 2011a, pp. 10–11; also see Tadros 2011b, p. v)

¹⁰ (Kuttub 2010; Sardenberg 2010; cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 2)

may be very little connection between an actor's agency, and highly complex negotiation and mediation that extend over many years to mobilise support for change. Success is often due to a number of actors, not only women's collective entities. Most importantly, policy is primarily responsive to international pressure to democratise, and to the ruling regime's political will, namely how the very highest decision-makers apply their political will in relation to their entourage in elites (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 7–8, 52).

Second, many donors have **assumed that governments are responsive to citizens' voices and actions**. The idea is: the bigger the mobilised collective, the more pressure on the government. However, in politically closed contexts, citizens rarely take public action, and voice "does not necessarily translate into influence" (Tadros, 2011b, p. 8). While authoritarian governments are not oblivious to their subjects' voices, "their policy processes are not responsive to them either" (Tadros, 2011b, p. 8). They are sensitive to public opinion, but that is not the same as citizen voice (Tadros, 2011b, p. 8). Their incentives to change policy "do not necessarily come from citizens, but from elite circles" (Tadros, 2011b, p. 9)¹¹. Even as coalitions for gender equality may exist and be successful, citizen action can often be completely absent from them. This is a major difference with contexts with a modicum of democracy (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 8–9).

Third, many donors and international feminist groups have **assumed that public activities addressed to formal politics – often through adversarial stances – will lead to the government listening**. Public, formal, adversarial activities such as protests, petitions, and advocacy, may work in countries where citizens can claim some space for contentious politics. However, many authoritarian contexts severely constrain this. In such settings, effective engagement sometimes requires using alternative channels to convey messages, often in the informal sphere and through non-confrontational communication. Negotiations behind the scenes remove the pressures from media exposure or from the organisations that participants represent. This sometimes allows parties to listen to each other, and to compromise. Actors that seek to advance gender equality thus act "through both the formal and informal spheres and through both adversarial and behind the scenes negotiations" (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 9–10).

c) Working from locally led and locally owned processes of empowerment

Donor support "is more likely to be effective when **harnessed to already initiated, locally-owned processes**" of empowerment (Eyben, 2011, p. 5), or at least when it is locally relevant and locally led (O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 21). Conversely, aid agencies must avoid undermining locally generated empowerment (Eyben, 2011, p. 5).

Across all support provided, local ownership is very important (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). Donors should not determine local partners' agendas¹². For instance, with coalitions, local actors should be the ones creating local coalitions, selecting the organisations that will work together, and crafting the coalition's vision, mission, and strategy (Tadros, 2011b, pp. v, 49–50). When donors seek to create coalitions, and are seen to do so, the public often will often perceive these coalitions as donors' 'creatures', or view them as driven by financial or professional incentives, rather than by integrity and the cause (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi).

¹¹ This does not mean that citizen participation is not important and not worthy of support (Tadros, 2011b, p. 9).

¹² (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 12; also see p. 33; O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22)

Instead, donors should **'only' be enabling agents to local actors**. One of their important roles is to offer “politically nuanced, highly skilled facilitation between different parties” (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 49–50). They can carefully create an enabling environment, and broker and convene, so that coalition leaders have opportunities to meet, and to “articulate and aggregate their aims and agreements” (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi). Successful donors also **respect that perceptions of local ownership matter** (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50). For example, effective donors do not claim the formation of a coalition, or any policy change, as their success (Tadros, 2011b, p. vii).

All this requires that donors **take into account their own positionality, and the positionality of the actors they support**¹³. Donors particularly need to heed this “in highly conservative, politically volatile contexts” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49). Support is thus more effective when donor staff are reflexive about their own power (Rao n.d., cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 6). In advocacy, donors should be sensitive to how their positionality affects the legitimacy and power of local actors working for gender equality (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50). In particular, donors should avoid criticising gender inequality without carefully considering their wording and timing (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi). In work on gender norms with families and communities, donors should never “lecture, judge or try to dictate” what people should do (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).

d) Working collaboratively with locally anchored partners

Work for women’s voice, influence, and participation is collaborative and long-term.

Essential work on public attitudes is “beyond the scope of any single project or actor” (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. v). Results have “derived from the quality, commitment and competence of the local partnerships”, as noted on the RHV portfolio (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. v).

Good donor practices towards supported organisations are based on “mutual respect, solidarity, responsiveness and helpfulness”, according to a consultation of a number of women’s rights organisations in Bangladesh (Nazeen et al. 2011, cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 10). Conversely, the study identified certain donors’ practices as detrimental to transformative results. First, some donors have adopted a top-down approach towards women’s rights organisations, imposing their decisions, being inflexible, and failing to give partner organisations a ‘decent hearing’. Second, some donors have been bureaucratic (Nazeen et al. 2011, cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 10). Third, a number of donors have provided short-term, fluctuating funding related to projects, rather than core funding. Fourth, donors have increasingly made organisations compete for increasingly scarce funds (Eyben, 2011, p. 6). Fifth, some donors have had no transparency in their decision-making. Sixth, some donors have wanted too much publicity (Nazeen et al. 2011, cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 10). Seventh, some donors have pooled funds while decreasing their direct relationships with women’s organisations (Eyben, 2011, p. 6).

Donors must **“support and work with organic, locally anchored organisations”** that can work with their members and wider society to change gender relations (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 12; also see p. 33). Throughout, aid actors such as UN Women need to **prioritise efforts to better address marginalisation in women’s political participation**. At UN Women, for example, the organisation needs to strengthen and increase its partnerships and its networks with marginalised groups in civil society. It can also use its convening power to ensure that marginalised groups are included in national or local processes. In addition, it could strengthen its attention to marginalised groups within sub-themes. Its programming should have tailored

¹³ (Rao n.d., cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 6; Tadros, 2011b, p. 49)

strategies to fill basic data gaps on marginalised groups, and implement models relevant to these groups' needs, for instance on protection against violence against women in politics, or on constituency engagement (UN Women, 2018, pp. 13, 15).

One cross-cutting problem that has undermined a focus on local processes and actors **is that aid agencies often fund professionalised organisations “that ostensibly share their values or meet pragmatic or bureaucratic requirements** (speaking English and fluent in ‘development speak’, based in the capital city or secure areas, able to handle large grants, with proper accounting procedures)”¹⁴. Donors “tend to equate civil society with CSOs”, and have found it challenging to reach groups that mobilise the population more successfully, such as informal or religious groups (IOB, 2015b, p. 27). In addition, donors tend to fund their own priorities, rather than those of the CSOs they support (IOB, 2015b, p. 27). At best, these donor practices are ineffective, because the funded organisations are not “well placed to change gender relations in their communities” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33). At worst, they undermine “voluntarism and the development of a diverse and mature civil society”¹⁵.

e) **Strengthening *collective* agency for WPE among all types of partners**

Donors must **strengthen local actors’ *collective* agency**, with two main objectives: **helping women organise around common interests and problems; and facilitating connections and solidarity among different organisations – among peers, and between grassroots and elite** (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 49–51).

- **With women’s organisations**, large and small, the focus should be on building their institutional capacities, instead of viewing them e.g. as implementers (IOB, 2015a, p. 22).
- **With women’s movements**, aid actors should strengthen the movements’ ability to link with other networks, to “build alliances with other political forces”, and to “hold both governments and competing political forces accountable for [...] their promises of supporting women in politics” (Tadros, 2011a, p. 2).
- **With mainstream social movements that are not focused on gender justice**, donors need to resource them in ways that promote “the full integration of women’s rights and gender justice in the politics and practices of the movements” (Horn, 2014, p. 1). Aid actors need to assign accountability for gender mainstreaming – in their own organisation and within partners, in their own State and abroad (IOB, 2015a, p. 21).
- **With coalitions**, donors need to introduce “financial and institutional incentives that support collective leadership” in the coalition (Tadros, 2011b, p. 51). Conversely, they should avoid embedding incentives for “the one woman/one man show phenomenon” in leadership (Tadros, 2011b, p. 51). This means programming needs to pay strong attention to the *internal* organisation of partners (Tadros, 2011b, pp. vii, 50). For example, proposals from organisations need to reflect “the vision, internal division of roles and planned activities of the key leaders of the coalition” (Tadros, 2011b, p. vi). More broadly, donors need to invest in, and commit to, helping to build the internal cohesion of coalitions and the organisational and political capacity of coalitions (Tadros, 2011b, p. vii).

¹⁴ (Denney & Domingo, 2014, cited in O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; also see IOB 2015, p. 27)

¹⁵ (Bano, 2012, cited in O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33)

- **With collective action in formal political institutions**, one promising practice is to facilitate dialogue between marginalised groups and MPs (UN Women, 2018, p. 68).

Donors can be more effective by **being willing to focus on the actors and the processes of collective action and empowerment, not just the projects** (Tadros, 2011b, pp. vii, 47–48). This requires a leadership that is willing to think outside the box, and to take risks “in **supporting unconventional forms of collective agency – and nurturing their collective leadership**” (Tadros, 2011b, p. vii; also see p. 50). For instance, effective donors are willing to commit to a process of bringing together parties interested in forming a coalition, and to allow them the space and time to come up with common agendas (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 31–32). Or they are willing “to create the space for parties that did not conventionally collaborate to come together, dialogue, deliberate and find common ground” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 23). This is in contrast to donors that, for example, allocate a large grant to one of the more professionalised organisations in a coalition (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 31–32). In addition, effective donors **invest in relationship-building with and among different local actors** as much as they invest in project outputs. Donor leadership and staff need to be able to bring together different actors “in a space where they can dialogue, open lines of communication and engage” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50).

The example of UN Women brings together some of the above key points. An evaluation found that UN Women achieved its operational results on women’s political participation and leadership “across all sub-themes and countries” due in large part to its **convening credibility, strong partnerships, and advocacy capacity** (UN Women, 2018, p. 12). For the most part, country-level leadership and local staff were politically savvy and took advantage of political opportunities, although this was uneven by country. UN Women’s work generally matched best practices in ‘**thinking and working politically**’. Some country offices were “particularly adept at taking advantage of political opportunities, and could therefore leverage UN Women’s “credibility and effectively advocate for political change,” with limited resources” (UN Women, 2018, p. 34). Such offices tended to share the following traits (UN Women, 2018, p. 34):

- **flexible funding** (e.g. Women in Politics Fund, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency);
- **small-scale programming;**
- **a savvy leadership with “keen political analysis and strong political relationships”.**

f) **Working with a variety of feminist and other women’s groups**

Collaborations with women’s groups are important and effective. For example, an evaluation of Raise Her Voice (RHV) confirmed that some of “the strongest and most sustainable impact has been found where RHV has contributed meaningfully to the strength, collaboration and organization of CSOs working for women’s rights” (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. v).

Donors must **support different kinds of autonomous feminist organisations and movements where these exist, and build relations between them.** These have been the vanguard of gender equality (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22). Donor “country offices should build relations with women’s organisations”, and “help grassroots and elite groups to network” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).

Simultaneously, donors should **work “through intermediaries to invest in long-term partnerships with women’s organisations of all types”,** to nurture political pluralism and broad-based women’s movements (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 33). Intermediaries can

“disburse relatively small amounts to promising organisations, including those supporting marginalised or isolated women” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).

- **Where civil society is mature**, donors should “work through national organisations and networks that have long-term relationships with grassroots women’s groups – including those that may not label themselves as women’s rights organisations” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; also see p. 12).
- **Where civil society is weak**, donors should work through specialist or international women’s organisations “that can invest in building the capacity of emerging women’s organisations” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; also see p. 12). Channelling funding “through ‘briefcase’ NGOs is unlikely to encourage [these NGOs] to establish a clear membership base and agenda” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).

Throughout their support, aid actors should **“work with a broader and more diverse spectrum of politically engaged women”** (Tadros, 2011a, p. 10). Ways to do so include:

- Working on opportunities for political apprenticeship (see more on this p. 17).
- Building strong partnerships with marginalised women’s groups (UN Women, 2018, p. 13)¹⁶. Engaging “with women and girls who are marginalized politically, socially and culturally” is highly productive. For example, a large number of FGE projects prioritised “CSOs that engage the most excluded and marginalized [...] women such as domestic workers, home-based informal workers, women living in extreme poverty, ethnic and cultural minorities, rural and indigenous women, refugees and IDP women, young women and women affected by HIV/AIDS”. This enabled grantees and CSOs “to make laws and policies more inclusive and responsive” (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 38).

g) Working with mainstream or dominant groups and actors, including men and boys, families and communities, and elites

Work with girls and women – individually or through women’s organisations – can only go so far. First, aid actors should never assume that women leaders will act in women’s interests (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 32). A more productive focus than women leaders is thus to look at “the women and men who have an interest in gender equality, the power to advance it, and how they do this in practice”¹⁷. Aid actors need to provide strategic support to both mainstream and women-centred actors who support WPE (Tadros, 2011a, p. 2). Second, while the focus on women’s political empowerment is essential, sustaining gains “requires addressing and influencing social norms on gender equality” (UN Women, 2018, p. 16).

Aid actors therefore need to **engage with men and boys, with families and communities, and with elites, as a complement to engaging respectively with women and girls, individuals, and grassroots contacts**¹⁸. This requires sensitivity to legal pluralism and customary norms (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33). Translating successful changes in attitudes and behaviours within families into broader social norms that are more gender equitable has proven to be challenging (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 46).

¹⁶ See more on this with the example of funding for Indigenous women, from p. 29.

¹⁷ (Childs & Krook, 2008, 2009, in O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 32)

¹⁸ (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22; IOB, 2015a, p. 21)

Programmes should **factor in men's and boys' critical role** (O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22). Issues are best framed around "the wellbeing of society and the fact that gender equality affects everyone" (Edström, Hassink, Shahrokh, & Stern, 2015, p. 161).

- **Engaging with men and boys** is crucial. It helps in: improving power dynamics within families; increasing women's political participation and leadership; developing gender-responsive legislation and policies; and transforming attitudes and behaviours in communities (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 46–47).
- **Working with (conservative) men**, rather than focusing on women's organisations, is sometimes most effective to address strategic gender concerns (IOB, 2015a, p. 22).
- **Identifying, engaging, and involving men champions** for WPE, especially among men in leadership positions, is effective, and often critical. (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 37–38; Edström et al., 2015, p. 161). Progressive men can be given roles and responsibilities for gender equality. They can also be strategically involved in public campaigning to build men's support, and to "direct discussion and learning with those facing discrimination" (Edström et al., 2015, p. 161). For example, in Kenya, the GROOTS project included male allies. This facilitated women's work for empowerment, demystified gender equality, and allowed messages to enter spaces that were often closed to women (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 37–38). In other cases, men can effectively lobby "for men's buy-in and support, in direct debates [...] with strong opponents" (Edström et al., 2015, p. 161).
- **Involving youth – both young women and young men –** is effective. For example, in Palestine, youth were involved in a gender-sensitive constitution, which led to integrating their needs in legal reform. Thanks to "good capacity building, techniques and advocacy tools", young women, supported by young men, participated in driving change and in influencing opinion-makers and decision-makers (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 48).

In mainstream movements for social justice¹⁹, a few strategies have effectively increased men's active support to women's equal participation, such as (Edström et al., 2015, p. 162):

- **Bringing "men together with women from NGOs that are addressing issues of social justice**, to show how gender justice is intrinsic to social justice". This was done for example by the 'Group of Men against Violence' in Nicaragua.
- **Supporting women within social movements to organise in order to increase gender awareness within the movements**. This was done by CLOC-Via Campesina in Latin America. This can enable women to have a greater voice, and to gain greater acceptance from men members.

In community-based initiatives against sexual and gender-based violence, engaging men can lead to their pro-feminist activism. One effective strategy to achieve this has been pro-feminist work that builds "a consciousness that men can and often do have personal investments in challenging oppressive gender orders, in direct collaboration with women's organisations". This was done for example in South Africa's Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (Edström et al., 2015, p. 162).

¹⁹ Such movements can encompass "a constellation of actors, including individuals, trade unions, religious organisations, community organisations, national and international [NGOs], businesses and donors themselves" (Horn, 2014, p. 3).

h) Using comprehensive approaches and combined interventions, to advance WPE in its multiple dimensions

Comprehensive approaches are most effective at increasing women's voice, influence, and participation, including for the most disadvantaged women (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 35; Beardon & Otero, 2013, pp. iii–vi). They require programmes to:

- **Simultaneously address the personal, social, and political spheres.** For example, building up women's self-confidence, individual awareness of their rights, and individual agency can be critical to empowering them *politically* (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 35; Beardon & Otero, 2013, pp. iii–vi).
- **Adopt comprehensive strategies based on a detailed analysis of the barriers and enabling factors of WPE, and have specific, sequenced strategies that speak to these** (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 35–36; O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22). This was highly effective under the FGE (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 35–36).
- **Address multiple levels** – local, national, regional, and/or global (Beardon & Otero, 2013, pp. iii–vi).
- **Use a mix of diverse intervention strategies and alliances**, tailored to the context (Beardon & Otero, 2013, pp. v, 6). For example, among the most effective FGE projects were those which combined strategies, such as: developing capacities; establishing strong networks and collectives; and tackling structural and attitudinal barriers to women's public and political participation (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 35).
- **Target all sectors, not only gender.** To increase women's substantive power, discrete programmes on gender or governance are insufficient. Sectoral ones are required to build women's capabilities and resources, including women's economic power and their higher education (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 34).
- **Design to take advantage of multiple entry points and multiplier effects between different domains of empowerment.**
 - Supporting empowerment in one domain (economic, social or political) can have wider positive effects for empowerment. Distinguishing between these domains, and working with a theory of change, help to assess the potential for different forms of empowerment to be mutually reinforcing, and to choose the best mix of approaches in context (Eyben, 2011, pp. 2, 8–10).
 - Some interventions focused on self-help groups (SHGs) have successfully used multiplier effects, as noted in a systematic review on SHGs. Some positive effects of SHGs on women's *social* empowerment have enabled women's *political* empowerment. One such effect is networking beyond family and close neighbours²⁰. Women SHG members "reported more confidence speaking in front of others and feeling more comfortable working with various stakeholders to achieve positive changes in their communities"²¹. Another relevant effect was that belonging to a SHG sometimes increased respect from community members²².

²⁰ (Kabeer 2011; Kilby 2011; Knowles 2014; Kumari 2011; Mathrani & Periodi 2006; Pattenden 2011; Sahu & Singh 2012; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 20)

²¹ (Kabeer 2011; Kilby 2011; Knowles 2014; Kumari 2011; Mathrani & Periodi 2006; Pattenden 2011; Sahu & Singh 2012; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 20)

²² (Dahal 2014; Kabeer 2011; Kumari 2011; Sahu & Singh 2012; Ramachandar & Pelto 2009; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 20)

Women described new confidence in walking through their villages, and new courage to approach authorities in a group²³. In addition, where SHGs exposed participants to women's rights through social activities, this sometimes catalysed broader social action by women²⁴.

- Not designing for multiplier effects will, at best, fail to generate wider positive effects (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 34). At worst, poor design can have disempowering effects, even if the aim of the programme was empowerment (Eyben, 2011, p. 8).

In addition, donors need to **make greater use of more imaginative activities like collaborative arts and online fora**. These can help challenge prejudices, change perspectives, and offer invaluable role models that inspire, challenge and strengthen others. While measuring their impact can be challenging, aid agencies should use them (Eyben, 2011, p. 9).

Donors also need to **recognise that sexuality is an important lens on women's empowerment**. Donors should be less reluctant to use this lens "to understand the constraints and opportunities in women's lives", and to orient their programming (Eyben, 2011, p. 9). For instance, fears about security and stability in response to changing ideals about sexuality are projected onto the bodies of citizens, particularly women. This can prompt a backlash which refers to 'tradition' or 'culture' (Eyben, 2011, p. 9). Any programming related to sexuality has to take into account context-specific sensitivities about this (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Lastly, while comprehensive approaches are the most effective, they create a "**tension between contextualised, independent projects and overall conceptual coherence**". Effective responses to this can be to allocate more resources to central coordination, to ensure greater conceptual leadership, and to improve "the underlying theory and approaches" (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. v).

i) Focusing capacity development on collaborative approaches that enhance collective capacities

So far, capacity support has largely focused on less effective 'blueprints' or on pre-election moments, using short trainings to individual women on effective leadership, campaigning, policy influencing, lobbying, or advocacy (IOB, 2015b, p. 27; Tadros, 2011a, p. 9). Project-based support to quickly plug individual women's skills gaps is unlikely to be effective²⁵. Similarly, it is unknown whether CSOs take up the skills and knowledge acquired in trainings and are more effective thanks to them (IOB, 2015b, p. 27). Women's political trajectories are a process, not a moment (Tadros, 2011a, p. 2). Donors should therefore **avoid using classic training workshops**, as they are comparatively less effective (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 36), **and avoid using "project support or capacity development for public organisations"** to support leadership in coalitions (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50).

²³ (Dahal 2014; Kabeer 2011; Kumari 2011; Sahu & Singh 2012; Ramachandar & Pelto 2009; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 20)

²⁴ (Kumari 2011; Dahal 2014; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 20)

²⁵ (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 33; O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22)

Instead, effective interventions to support capacities and learning:

- **Foster long-term capacity-building or mentoring in associational or professional life**, where girls and women have opportunities for political apprenticeship and leadership (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 33; Tadros, 2011a, p. 2)²⁶. Interventions to help women and girls acquire and hone political skills are particularly helpful “when they create networks between women”, and when they “explicitly seek to tackle barriers to their leadership” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).
- **Support girls, especially disadvantaged ones, and their families**. Interventions in and out of school can build “girls’ self-belief, skills and networks” (O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 21).
- **Strengthen the ongoing, context-specific networks of enabling agents surrounding women** which lend them support and influence, such as families (Tadros, 2011a, pp. 2, 9).
- **Focus on groups**, not individuals, and invest in collective, not individual, leadership (IOB, 2015b, p. 27; Tadros, 2011a, p. 9).
- **Involve both women and men, through individual and collective engagement, to create room for change**. Donors could integrate men as partners in programmes for women’s leadership. As part of capacity support, they can also engage with key actors in communities, who would be influential in enabling challenges to gender hierarchies (Tadros, 2011a, p. 9). They can facilitate “strategic dialogue, alliances and networks including with powerful men” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33).
- **Use a peer-based and cascading approach to growing knowledge and skills** is effective (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 36):
 - Interventions to build women’s leadership skills were most effective where they used “peer exchange, mentoring and accompaniment”, enabling women to receive support while applying their knowledge.
 - Capacity development that enables beneficiaries to transfer their knowledge “further through cascading training programmes” was highly effective.
- **Use experiential learning**. An effective intervention towards this is “cross-country networking for knowledge exchange and mutual support, particularly in contexts of closed political systems or gender backlash” (UN Women, 2018, p. 68). Another is to expose coalition leaders to how others engage with the issue they are tackling, through visits to initiatives in other contexts, and exchange programmes (Tadros, 2011b, p. 51).
- **Invite a systematic reflection on which strategies and activities may work and are effective**. This is under-used. Yet, regular reflection based on a theory of change helps to systematise a CSO’s knowledge (especially its “informal knowledge of how and why things work”), and to “make it available for broader application” (IOB, 2015b, p. 27). Further, M&E and learning that are based on reflection and on a theory of change can recognise multiple perspectives and actors while remaining a unified process. Staff, partners, and participants need to offer regular reflections about progress, effective strategies, and opportunities (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. vii).

²⁶ Many sites and spaces are relevant, such as political parties, NGOs, clubs and community centres, faith-based organisations, student groups in universities or schools, and the workforce, e.g. trade unions and professional associations (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; Tadros, 2011a, p. 10).

On the contents of learning, donors and Northern NGOs should defer to Southern CSOs' ownership (IOB, 2015b, p. 15). One promising practice is to provide capacity-building that enhances partners' ability to consolidate and fundraise independently (UN Women, 2018, p. 69).

j) Adjusting, and departing from, project-based approaches

Successful donors **understand how supporting collective action differs from supporting projects** in several ways²⁷. For example, coalitions do not work to a project life (with a set period of three or five years) and to a project cycle (with planning, implementation, and evaluation). The “projectivisation of coalitions should be avoided at all costs” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50). This is because (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50):

- It is impossible to support coalitions while complying with all the usual tools of aid project management, such as logical frameworks and results-based management.
- The collective mediation of different interests, which is integral to coalitions, is more complex, whereas the focus of projects is on outputs. Building coalitions involves “creating consensus, identifying appropriate mechanisms of mobilising support, finding mechanisms for work that accommodate differences and adapting internal organisational dynamics to changing political contexts” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50). Coalitions also “need time to discuss and debate the division of roles, appropriate strategies, relationships with stakeholders, government and non-governmental actors” (Tadros, 2011b, p. vii).
- Monitoring and evaluation as used for projects are inappropriate to coalitions.

In practice, there are several ways in which donors can adjust their project frameworks, and depart from them as needed. First, donors need to be willing to **dedicate longer time than 3-5 years of project or funding** to this²⁸. They need to aim for long-term, sustainable, and transformative dividends (Eyben, 2011, p. 9). Conversely, a short-term approach to results hampered the sustainability of UN Women's results on WPE (UN Women, 2018, p. 12).

Second, **flexible programming enables participants to focus on locally determined objectives, and on what works and why**, rather than on problems or deficits (Larson & Tian, 2005, cited in O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 21). **Politically smart programming** uses political analysis, and enables women and the organisations supporting them to work politically²⁹. Timing interventions to seize political opportunities is important (Barnes et al., 2016, pp. 39–40). This being said, donors need to **balance adaptability with a longer-term overall perspective** (UN Women, 2018, p. 13). This can mean: prioritising projects based on potential for scale-up and sustainability; balancing and sequencing efforts; and “gauging and mitigating potential negative reactions”, such as violence, or backlash in public opinion or policy (UN Women, 2018, p. 13).

Third, intervention budgets need to **reflect real costs, including for adaptive learning** (Eyben, 2011, p. 10). In addition, effective support requires detailed **financial transparency about donor funding, both within the coalition and from the donor to all parties**. This helps prevent funding from being a source of internal dispute (Tadros, 2011b, pp. vi, 48, 50).

Fourth, in M&E, “[w]hat gets measured, gets done” (IOB, 2015a, p. 21). Donors need to **use indicators for empowerment** which value empowerment outcomes, their contribution to

²⁷ (Tadros, 2011b, p. 49; also see Eyben 2011, p. 6)

²⁸ (Beardon & Otero, 2013, p. v; Eyben, 2011, p. 6; Tadros, 2011b, pp. vii, 50)

²⁹ (Hodes et al., 2011; Oxfam, 2013b; cited in O'Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 21)

sustainability, “and their multiplier effects beyond the programme”, so that donors can “balance the importance of short- and long-term impacts” (Eyben, 2011, p. 10). **Monitoring signs of regression, and monitoring sub-national implementation** also help (UN Women, 2018, p. 16). Otherwise, limitations in M&E hamper the sustainability of results (UN Women, 2018, p. 12).

Support to coalitions also requires adapting M&E. M&E should cover processes within the coalition, such as how inclusive, representative, consensus-based, and institutionalised leadership is, since internal governance and decision-making affect performance. All members of the coalition leadership need to be consulted, “not only the leader of the organisation that received funds” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 50; also see pp. vi). In addition, measures of a coalition’s success can include not only “victory on policy or legislation, but also opening up debate, consolidating a coalition, and strengthening constituent organisations’ capacities (Tadros, 2011b, p. 52). Lastly, even good M&E has its limitations. Donors need to **invest in longer-term collaborations with academic research**, especially for topics on which little remains “known about what really works for women and men” (IOB, 2015a, p. 21).

k) Leveraging donors’ agency to improve donors’ own practices

Agency is central to success within and among donors too (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 50–51). Donors working on WPE need to **stay realistic, patient, and committed**. Gender equality is long-term and multi-dimensional work. Donors have a limited role in changing the social fabric abroad, and addressing gender discrimination is fraught with tensions. Interventions must have “attainable objectives and indicators” (IOB, 2015a, p. 22).

Donors need to put their own house in order on gender equality, to be credible in their advocacy and assistance (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 34). Beside changing their own gendered practices, they need to adopt rules and systems that “incentivise collaboration, learning and problem-driven approaches within organisations and across programmes”, especially between gender-focused teams and teams in other sectors (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 34–35). In addition, governmental donors need a high quality of agency to tackle their structural constraints and dilemmas in balancing support to collective action and WPE with foreign policy objectives, including that of maintaining positive relations with the host government (IOB, 2015b, p. 28; Tadros, 2011b, p. 48). Donors also need to check that their policies in all areas, including those not directly associated with women’s empowerment, do not introduce negative effects on the enabling environment for women’s empowerment (Eyben, 2011, p. 8).

Donors can also work to change the larger politics around donor support on collective action and WPE. In particular, they can better align their funding with the priorities of social movements, and **improve their own accountability to the movements** they fund³⁰. For instance, they can use participatory grant-making that involves constituents or applicants in funding decisions and strategic advice. Examples of this include: the Nicaragua-based Central American Women’s Fund; UHAI – the East African Sexual Health and Rights Fund; and FRIDA – The Young Feminist Fund (Horn, 2014, p. 5). In addition, **donors can become advocates within their own sectors** on strategies for gender-just social change that are based on movements. For example, they can commission research, convene and collaborate with peers, improve donors’ practices towards social movements, model new approaches (Horn, 2014, p. 5), and educate, e.g. on funding for Indigenous women’s groups (AWID, FIMI, & IFIP, 2016, p. 78).

³⁰ (McGarvey and Mackinnon 2008, cited in Horn, 2014, p. 5)

I) Supporting collective action for WPE in adverse contexts

So far, large-scale programmes in FCAS and in post-conflict States have considered women **too little and too late**. As a result, any benefits “tend to be small and concern only few women” (IOB, 2015a, p. 166). Further, humanitarian and development actors have viewed women’s organisations “primarily as implementers rather than change agents” (O’Connell, 2011, p. 464; also see Eyben, 2011, p. 7).

In addition, external aid actors have largely failed to integrate gender analysis in all interventions in FCAS (O’Connell, 2011, p. 462). As a result, they have not considered or understood inequitable gender power, within households and in wider society, and have consequently missed opportunities to advance gender equality (O’Connell, 2011, p. 455). The factors behind this failure include: feeble will and interest on part of management; competing priorities; ‘policy evaporation’; “weak planning, reporting and accountability systems”; and inappropriate training of staff (O’Connell, 2011, p. 462). Further, the wealth of academic literature on gender power relations during conflict and in its aftermath has not been informing international policy (O’Connell, 2011, p. 457).

Yet, aid actors “can assist in many ways”, although there is no blueprint, as context and history are specific to each FCAS (O’Connell, 2011, p. 464). One cross-cutting strategy is for donors to provide “**logistic support to women’s organisations and networks**” in post-conflict processes and regime transitions, regardless “of whether women are part of the formal negotiations”. This enables the supported groups to lobby decision-makers, and to “act as a link with community-based women’s groups [that have] an ongoing role in sub-national conflict resolution and peacebuilding” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 34).

Results have been mixed in **supporting women’s collective participation in peace processes**. In some contexts, aid actors have successfully supported women’s movements. For example, with the 2006 Juba Peace Talks on the conflict in northern Uganda, “UNIFEM’s funding and advocacy support was critical in ensuring women could participate [...] and have their voices heard”³¹. However, overall, women have remained largely excluded from formal negotiations on peace and political settlement. While the major causes of this are domestic, donors themselves have also not systematically applied their own commitments (Abdullah et al. 2010, cited in Eyben, 2011, p. 7). Donors should use UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related ones to apply pressure and advocate for women’s inclusion (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 12, 34). Greater investment “is needed in **building the capacity of women’s peace coalitions** to better engage in and influence peace processes” (O’Connell, 2011, pp. 457–458).

Results have also been mixed in **supporting women’s collective participation in institution-building and constitution-making**. Support from external actors helped women’s movements, in some situations, “to make the case for enshrining gender equality within new constitutions” (O’Connell, 2011, p. 458). However, overall support failed to integrate gender issues. Here again, external actors were reluctant to act on their own commitments to policy or to international human rights standards³². They also under-used opportunities to discuss gender issues in political dialogue (O’Connell, 2011, p. 458). Aid actors’ fear of “derailing a fragile political settlement by advocating equality and social inclusion” was matched by no evidence that such advocacy would lead to instability (Benard 2008, cited in O’Connell, 2011, p. 458).

³¹ (International Alert 2010, cited in O’Connell, 2011, p. 457)

³² (see, for example, Castillejo 2011, cited in O’Connell, 2011, p. 458)

Lastly, on **engaging men and boys in support of gender equality**, a literature review concluded that peace-building processes should meaningfully include women “whilst building men’s support for, collaboration and engagement with this” (Edström et al., 2015, p. 149). Further, policies on wartime atrocities should “hold perpetrators accountable [...], while engaging both men and women in the prevention of further abuses” (Edström et al., 2015, p. 149). In programming, engaging “men and boys in initiatives for women and girls should [...] not inadvertently exacerbate trauma or harmful norms”. Moreover, these initiatives “should provide safe spaces for men to heal,” but also to educate, and to change social norms” (Kaufman 2012, cited in Edström et al., 2015, p. 147). During the post-conflict phase, men’s needs must not be “juxtaposed against the needs of women and girls, who are generally in the most vulnerable positions”. There must be spaces “where women and girls feel safe” and have their own support needs met (United Nations 2014, cited in Edström et al., 2015, p. 147).

4.1.3. General factors and conditions of effectiveness outside interventions

The political success or failure of a coalition for gender equality “is not attributable to any single variable, such as the worthiness, urgency or significance of the cause, an opportune political moment, an enabling environment or the presence of seasoned women activists” (Tadros, 2011b, p. 52). A frequently cited combination of key external determinants of success is: **politically smart, effective collective action for gender equality by women; political opportunities; and support within the State**³³.

a) Women’s organising and savvy in formal and informal politics as crucial variables

Organising, collective action, and alliances by women are essential, distinct from other grassroots organising and popular participation – which are also very important³⁴. Many seemingly progressive social movements have not yet made gender justice a consistent priority (Horn, 2014, p. 1). Having individual women/girl leaders do not automatically lead to women/girls’ collective leadership and action (O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22). The links between both are shaped by: “networks and sharing of expertise, linkages between movements and formal leadership, movements standing in for political parties, and the socialisation impact of women in leadership” (O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 2). Consequently, women’s collective strength remains critical to amplify their power (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11). However, successful organising can take a long time (Eyben, 2011, p. 6).

What matters is also which women (and men) “hold power in their communities and the state and whether they are able to take advantage of political opportunities” to improve outcomes for poor and marginalised women (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, pp. 11, 32). Collective action is especially important for women who face additional discrimination, e.g. in relation to “their poverty, sexual orientation, disability, religion or race” (Eyben, 2011, p. 6).

Of all the variables determining the success or failure of collective action for WPE, **success or failure rests on the women activists’ ability “to work politically**, in often shifting institutional and political circumstances, **rather than on their commitment or expertise on gender issues”** (Tadros, 2011b, p. 52). It is the case with CSOs, as their capacity to engage with the political economy and context determines their effectiveness. Their theory of change, and their choice of

³³ (see e.g. Barnes, Bishop, & Vaca, 2016, pp. 38–39; Eyben, 2011, p. 5; Tadros, 2011b)

³⁴ (Eyben, 2011, p. 6; O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11; Tadros, 2011a, p. 2)

strategies are particularly important (IOB, 2015b, pp. 15, 26). In restrictive environments, CSOs can continue to try and mobilise, but they have to do so carefully and strategically (IOB, 2015b, p. 26). Conversely, CSOs are vulnerable and less effective when they are primarily reactive to government action, depend on donor agendas, have weak connections with the marginalised communities they claim to work for, and have difficulty working in coalitions (IOB, 2015b, p. 26).

In coalitions, the leadership can play “a critical role in responding to openings in highly complex socio-political contexts as well as [in] strategising to push the boundaries of the possible” (Tadros, 2011b, pp. v, 48). Coalitions that can outmanoeuvre the opposition are more effective. Such coalitions successfully appropriate the opposition’s framing of an issue, such as framings on family or religion, and secure support from politically powerful actors (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Achieving internal consensus within coalitions for gender equality is another positive factor. Coalitions are most effective when they have institutionalised internal mechanisms for building consensus and mediating conflict, helping them to withstand fragmentation and to “ensure a sense of ownership among their leading members” (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Women’s political influence partly depends on their **ability to make strategic alliances in relation to powerful “mainstream organisations**, such as political parties, government departments, judiciaries, universities, unions, armies and the UN Security Council” (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11). Within these organisations, women need to make alliances “with the men who are often the leaders and gatekeepers”, and/or amongst women themselves (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11). Further, while “women’s organisations can foster women’s critical consciousness and solidarity, changes in gender norms and practices do not come from changes in individual attitudes but from changes in shared expectations”³⁵.

Strengths and capacities in informal dimensions of collective action are also frequent positive factors and conditions (O’Neil & Plank, 2015, p. 22; see e.g. Tadros, 2011b). For instance, in politically closed and socially conservative contexts, influential coalitions combine several key factors: they build “formal as well as informal links with the appropriate actors”, establish the right image locally, and secure the right support from international actors in official and civil society circles (Tadros, 2011b, p. iv). In such contexts (Tadros, 2011b, pp. iv–v):

- **Informal networks and, often, prior relationships** are crucial for coalitions. Internally, they are essential for cohesion, and often for the formation of coalitions. Externally, they help coalitions withstand unpredictable political threats. They also give coalitions influence, through “the social and political networks that are often based on their common class, professional and educational backgrounds” (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).
- **Informal “backstage’ politics** is equally, if not more, important” than formal engagement such as petitions and media work. Backdoor “negotiation and mediation between coalition leaders and key players” often facilitate change (Tadros, 2011b, p. iv).
- **Having both official, open support to the coalition’s cause, and unofficial support** from other key figures in the regime or wider society helps. The latter is about support “which - if publicly announced - would be counter-productive” (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Public perceptions that mobilised groups have cultural and national authenticity can significantly enhance the prospects for success of a coalition, for example in countries that have politically and culturally complex relationships with the West. Positionality “is as important as the

³⁵ (Alexander-Scott et al., 2016; Marcus & Harper, 2015; cited in O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33)

cause, framing and [...] timing” (Tadros, 2011b, p. v). Positive perceptions help a coalition “withstand fierce opposition from those who label [coalition members] as agents of the West” (Tadros, 2011b, p. v). They also help it mobilise wider support (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Finding the right framing on an issue is important. In coalitions, this involves not only finding an appropriate representation to the outside world, but also ensuring that the chosen ‘packaging’ “is acceptable to the collective leadership” of the coalition (Tadros, 2011b, pp. v–vi). In fact, coalitions often have to deploy multiple framings (legal, constitutional, religious) for multiple audiences. Where dominant culture is conservative and where there are sensitivities around sexual politics, **framing or avoiding sexuality** can help (Tadros, 2011b, pp. v–vi).

Smart use of media (press, radio, TV, and social media) is another effective strategy (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 40). This includes choosing when to secure positive coverage, and when to maintain anonymity and protect a coalition and its activities from coverage (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

b) Discriminatory social and cultural norms on gender as major obstacles

Social and cultural norms and patterns on gender that assign roles to men and women “are the principal barrier to women’s empowerment and to gender equality”³⁶. The social environment shapes women’s opportunities to advance issues, and it shapes which issues they can advance (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11). This needs to be addressed for progress, but is very hard to achieve (IOB, 2015b, p. 61). In interventions by the Dutch MDG3 Fund where grantees had obtained good results, the risks that socio-cultural factors posed to sustainability could be lower in projects that involved professionals, “such as teachers, public officers, lawyers, journalists and religious leaders, besides community volunteers”. In those projects, professionals discussed social and cultural norms on gender, and gender equality was embedded in their work, enabling dialogue about gender inequality to continue (IOB, 2015b, p. 63).

c) Inequalities and discrimination among women that disadvantage marginalised women

Pre-existing economic, social, cultural, and political inequalities can prevent marginalised women from accessing and benefitting from interventions. For example, disadvantaged women face barriers to participation in women’s self-help groups (SHGs), based e.g. on class, caste, or religion. This prevents the poorest of the poor from experiencing the positive effects of belonging to a SHG (Brody et al., 2017, p. 21). Symmetrically, the positive effects of SHGs on economic, social, and political empowerment may primarily accrue to women who are already in relatively better positions. Positive effects may run through the channels of familiarity with handling money, independent decision-making on finances, solidarity, improved social networks, and respect from the household and community (Brody et al., 2017, p. 14).

More broadly, **economic empowerment “is a prerequisite for marginalised women to participate in public and political life”** (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 36). WEE can be leveraged to support women’s political participation (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 36).

³⁶ (O’Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 33; also see IOB, 2015b, p. 61; O’Neil & Plank 2015, p. 22)

In collective action too, inequalities pose problems. For example, there are tensions and discriminations between Indigenous movements and women's rights movements – especially for Indigenous women working with men in their communities (AWID et al., 2016, p. 78).

d) The political environment as a source of constraints and opportunities

The political environment shapes women's opportunities to advance issues, which issues they can advance (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016, p. 11), what success they have in policy influencing, lobbying, and advocacy (IOB, 2015b, p. 26), and how (in)effective interventions are, especially in restrictive political environments (IOB, 2015b, p. 15). For example, an evaluation of UN Women concluded that several factors contributed to hampering the sustainability of results achieved on women's political participation: political volatility; the entrenched nature of social norms around women entering and staying in politics; the long-term nature of the changes sought; and the reversible nature of these changes (UN Women, 2018, pp. 12–13).

Politically closed and socially conservative contexts create distinct constraints on collective action, especially on citizens' public engagement with the State (Tadros, 2011b, p. 9). These contexts shape the emergence, forms, dynamics, and outcomes of coalitions. Restrictive and professionalised political cultures discourage collective agency (Tadros, 2011b, p. iv).

In politically closed and socially conservative contexts, **having a legal umbrella** can facilitate relative success. Where States have restricted citizens' freedom to associate and to lead collective action, having a legal status is crucial for organisations to be viable and active (Tadros, 2011b, p. v). Legislation ensuring that women and organisations that represent them "have a seat at the table" may be required to facilitate their participation (Eyben, 2011, p. 6).

Interventions sometimes lead to **some adverse outcomes or backlash**, which in turn hindered women's political and/or social empowerment. For example, one adverse outcome of women's participation in self-help groups (SHGs) related to stigma. Some SHG members reported facing public shame or discrimination (Brody et al., 2017, p. 21). Women "reported hearing stories of other SHG members being stoned for their membership"³⁷. Others felt that "SHG women were seen as troublemakers accused of trying to take over the local council"³⁸.

e) General external factors and conditions in adverse contexts

Evidence about **FCAS** emphasises that women's and girls' rights are a "political, controversial and long-term project", which is ultimately driven by local factors (O'Connell, 2011, p. 464). "Vibrant women's organisations, and a gender-aware media, have crucial roles to play" (O'Connell, 2011, p. 464). Context-specific progress "can be made through **systematic action in a number of areas and at several levels**", which includes: enshrining gender equality and equity in the constitution and the laws; making political institutions inclusive and equitable; ensuring that economic and social policy-making is gender-responsive; and having clear accountability mechanisms (O'Connell, 2011, p. 464). **Progress is mutually reinforcing** between political empowerment, economic empowerment, and access to services that are of good quality (O'Connell, 2011, p. 464). However, **men in elites**, who command the formal and informal negotiations on peace and political settlement, **have often succeeded at resisting**

³⁷ (Pattenden 2011, cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

³⁸ (Mathrani & Periodi 2006, cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

women's demands for inclusion, even where women had been prominent peace activists (Castillejo 2011, cited in O'Connell, 2011, p. 457).

4.2. Funding interventions

4.2.1. Types of funding interventions, and their effectiveness

Public and private donors “have always played a part in **progressive social movements**” (Horn, 2014, p. 3). In particular, donors have funded: **organisations created by movements; organisations that provide services to movement members or to the public; or organisation engaged in building movements** (Horn, 2014, p. 3). Foreign funding has also been a major incentive (as a facilitator or driver) for different leaders and organisations to form, or participate in, collective initiatives for gender equality (Tadros, 2011b, p. v).

Projects funded by **UN Women's FGE** used a variety of interventions, and were mostly effective. One strand focused on developing women's capacities to participate in, and influence, formal and informal decision-making, primarily at the local level. Such interventions “included supporting women in learning about their rights and political systems and building their self-confidence, communication and leadership skills” (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 35). Another strand focused on formal legislation and policy. Interventions there focused on national and regional advocacy for gender-responsive laws, and on increasing women's capacity “to demand accountable leadership and equitable service delivery” so as to make law- and policy-making inclusive (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 38).

With the **Dutch MDG3 Fund for gender equality**, which ran in 2008-2011, around 80% of the funded projects used advocacy and lobbying as their main strategy. Within this, the main activities “included conducting research, organizing conferences, strengthening advocacy-oriented networks and alliances”, and raising awareness on equal rights for women among the general public, specific groups, and government institutions (IOB, 2015b, p. 62). Most grantees were larger, established organisations like women funds, international networks, and international NGOs. They often “sub-granted to smaller local and grassroots organizations” (IOB, 2015b, p. 62). Most grantees focused on fighting gender-based violence, and on women's political participation, often through women's leadership at local level, to enhance women's capacity for voice and claim-making (IOB, 2015b, p. 62).

An evaluation found that most MDG3 projects contributed to putting gender issues on the public and political agenda. In turn, this contributed to changes in the enabling environment, e.g. through improvements in laws, or enhanced knowledge among traditional leaders, government, and communities (IOB, 2015b, p. 61). However, impact for women remains to be seen. In almost all projects, there are risks to the sustainability of the socio-cultural changes in discourses and attitudes (IOB, 2015b, p. 63). Grantees insufficiently challenged social and cultural norms and patterns on gender through real dialogues with communities or with individuals (IOB, 2015b, p. 63). Sustainability also remained an issue in that many of the smaller women's organisations are unlikely to be able to sustain their activities without external support (IOB, 2015a, p. 20)³⁹.

In 2011-2014, **the Netherlands provided funding “to a range of civil society and women's organisations” in Egypt**, on activities such as: lobbying; advocacy on the new Constitution;

³⁹ On the MDG3 Fund, also see: (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department [IOB], 2015a, pp. 144–145)

campaigns on women's political participation and rights, and on specific legislation; training women candidates and youth in campaigning and communication skills; creating a Women's Parliament with some 1,000 representatives from youth organisations; reports on gender equality and women's empowerment. At the time of the 2015 evaluation reviewed for the present report, it was too early to identify what the results had been (IOB, 2015a, p. 143).

Funding for indigenous women's groups has used three main approaches, according to the first global review on this topic: programme development, or direct service provision; re-granting through intermediaries; and emergency or rapid-response grants (AWID et al., 2016, p. 14). The top three strategies that funded groups use to promote change are: building capacity and training; advocacy, campaigning and lobbying; and developing leadership (AWID et al., 2016, p. 59). Other strategies include: building a base; raising awareness, educating; communicating, informing; and convening. However, when asked about the strategies they support, funders did not name strategies for movement-building and mobilisation, such as convening. This potentially signals that such strategies "are less supported or difficult to fundraise for" (AWID et al., 2016, p. 59). Indigenous women's groups work with smaller groups and populations compared to other women's rights groups (AWID et al., 2016, p. 13).

4.2.2. Factors and conditions of effectiveness within funding interventions

a) General donor practices

Donors can adopt **helpful practices in their own programming** in funding interventions⁴⁰:

- **Invest time in managing the relationship with funded partners.** With women's rights organisations, investing time in the relationship "is what matters most".
- **Be sufficiently in touch with funded partners** (e.g. women's rights organisations) **to ensure that these partners are "well anchored and representative"**.
- **Become "better at articulating women's rights as a theory of change"**.
- **Let funded partners**, such as women's rights organisations, **own the agenda**.
- In choosing projects, **combine policy change with social changes** in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. Changes in policy are not enough (IOB, 2015b, p. 61).
- **Understand the political context of the work** done by the funded organisations, such as women's rights organisations.
- Offer **core, multi-year funding**, to provide medium-to-long term financing, including institutional support (Mukhopadhyay et al. 2011, cited Eyben, 2011, p. 6; Horn, 2014, p. 4). This gives resources to the heart of an agenda for development and social justice. It also allows organisations affiliated with, or building, movements to develop their thinking, and to dedicate the time needed towards work on deep structures⁴¹ which shifts gendered power (Horn, 2014, p. 4). Conversely, short-lived funding, such as the

⁴⁰ (Mukhopadhyay et al. 2011, cited Eyben, 2011, p. 6, unless otherwise indicated)

⁴¹ 'Deep structure' refers to the "hidden layers within organisations and movements where unconscious or even conscious but hidden processes occur", including assumptions that are taken for granted about gender roles and women's place (Rao & Kelleher 2005, cited in Horn, 2014, p. 3). In turn, these layers "affect how people think and act, and can explain discordance between 'official' positions on gender equality and actions that [re-entrench] sexism and related prejudices such as racism, classism and able-ism" (Horn, 2014, p. 3).

three-year Dutch MDG3 Fund, fails to enable grantees to change the social norms and traditions that underpin discrimination against women (IOB, 2015b, p. 63).

- **Keep building appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E)** that capture the complexity of shifts on gender. M&E need measures about formal, institutional change in laws, policies, and access to resources and services. M&E also need measures about informal change (in social norms, attitudes, and beliefs), and about the impact of backlash on achieving outcomes⁴².
- **Use women’s rights organisations** that receive the donor’s funding as a source of knowledge for the donor’s policy dialogue.

The relationships between donors and social movements can be complex, even difficult. Donors’ **legal and policy frameworks on funding for civil society** can affect the relationships within movements, and the strategies used by movements. For example, in receiving funding, “the actions of movement-linked organisations come under the jurisdiction of laws that regulate philanthropy, which may prohibit strategies such as civil disobedience or certain forms of advocacy”⁴³. In addition, donor policies can curtail “the ability of movements to voice their full political positions” (Horn, 2014, p. 3).

b) Funding to mainstream collective action

Donors can advance WPE in mainstream progressive movements. In particular, they can support “women’s rights and gender justice as movement priorities”, when funding any movements or their affiliated organisations (Horn, 2014, p. 4). To do so, donors should (Horn, 2014, p. 4):

- **Ask supported partners for a clear articulation of their approach to women’s rights and gender justice**, “within the movement (its leadership, resource management and decision-making structures)”, in its strategies (including goals and constituency), and in its analyses of the situation.
- **Include women’s rights and gender justice in indicators** on progress and results.
- **Fund programming and accountability mechanisms for women’s rights**, such as women’s caucuses.

c) Funding to collective action focused on women’s rights and gender justice

Donors should also support movements focused on women’s rights and gender justice (Horn, 2014, p. 4). To do so, they should (Horn, 2014, p. 4):

- **Prioritise support to organisations that advance gender-just movements**, i.e. organisations that have links to this or that are actively building this (Horn, 2014, p. 4). To ensure that funds reach the right actors, in particular for larger grants, viable strategies include:
 - “Resourcing women’s funds or independent public funds” that were established to support initiatives aligned with the goals of gender-just social movements.
 - Funding organisations with links to grassroots movements that focus on gender equality. The Dutch government’s MDG3 Fund was an example of this approach.

⁴² (McGarvey and Mackinnon 2008; Batliwala 2011; AWID Monitoring and Evaluation Wiki; cited in Horn, 2014, p. 5)

⁴³ (International Centre for Non-Profit Law 2010, cited in Horn, 2014, p. 3)

- **Directly fund movements and organisations for women’s rights.** Donors should continue supporting “women’s movements, including through women’s rights organisations”. These movements remain central “in sustaining a focus on women’s rights and gender equality in policy and law,” in activism by civil society, and in public debate and thinking.

However, in the Dutch MDG3 Fund, the institutional and financial sustainability of many of the smaller women’s organisations remained weak in part because of the absence of clear **strategies for capacity development**, and of the short timeframe for this (IOB, 2015a, p. 20).

d) Funding to collective action focused on *marginalised* women – the case of Indigenous women

Donors must **check that their funding serves marginalised women, quantitatively and qualitatively**. For example, Indigenous women “received 0.7% of all recorded human rights funding between 2010 and 2013,” i.e. less than one third “of their proportion in the population”, with groups in Asia and Africa possibly even more under-represented (AWID et al., 2016, p. 13).

Indigenous women’s groups face significant barriers to accessing resources, many of which can be minimised by changing donor practices. **A structural barrier is the prominence of ‘traditional philanthropy’**, i.e. an approach rooted in “providing charity and aid, instead of funding social change” (AWID et al., 2016, p. 13). Such models remain rooted in old discriminatory attitudes, with a long and ongoing “history of paternalism, maternalism, and ‘saviour models’” towards Indigenous communities (AWID et al., 2016, p. 64). Indigenous women and organisations are thus sceptical about new partnerships, as they fear that their expertise and value will be belittled (AWID et al., 2016, p. 64).

Instead, donors can work from the principles of Intercultural Philanthropy, where Indigenous women’s knowledge, experience, and efforts are valued. Indigenous women’s human rights demands are distinct, so funding needs to be done entirely differently (AWID et al., 2016, p. 15). Meaningful, culturally sensitive collaboration requires that funders gain a foundational understanding “of Indigenous peoples’ worldviews or cosmovision” (AWID et al., 2016, p. 15). From there, donors should acknowledge and respect Indigenous peoples’ resources and contributions, their governance, and their other organisations “including time, spiritual ancestral knowledge and movement building” (AWID et al., 2016, p. 75).

In practice, to build strong partnerships with more, and more diverse, groups of Indigenous women, donors can adopt several practices – though adaptation will be needed, as no two Indigenous women’s groups are alike (AWID et al., 2016, pp. 13–14):

- **Ensure Indigenous Women’s full and effective participation across the globe in programming about funding.** Indigenous women should participate in “designing funding priorities, projects, and initiatives”, in early strategising, grant making, and technical assistance, and throughout the programmes (AWID et al., 2016, p. 75).
- **Support programmes “carried out directly by Indigenous women** across the globe, especially in rural and remote areas” (AWID et al., 2016, p. 75).
- **Encourage the building of networks and alliances** (AWID et al., 2016, p. 75).
- **Develop broader and more flexible criteria in funding applications.** Funders that have done so report receiving “high-quality proposals from Indigenous women’s groups who framed their work *their way*” (AWID et al., 2016, p. 15).

- To overcome practical impediments in channelling funds to Indigenous women’s groups, **help build groups’ administrative and financial capacities**. This entails better identifying groups in need of longer-term technical and organisational support. It can also mean funding organisational growth and capacity (AWID et al., 2016, pp. 14–15, 53, 75).
- **Collaboratively build M&E tools and systems that meet the needs of Indigenous women’s groups**. Donors could develop culturally appropriate indicators, or launch separate calls for proposals for these groups (AWID et al., 2016, p. 15).
- **On the contents** of funded programmes (AWID et al., 2016, pp. 14, 53):
 - **Fund political participation** as part of Indigenous women’s leadership.
 - **Fund the intergenerational transmission of knowledge**.
 - **Respect collective rights**.
- **To specifically reach women at the grassroots:**
 - **Consider re-granting as a key strategy** (AWID et al., 2016, p. 14).
 - Adopt new practices too. For example (AWID et al., 2016, p. 66):
 - **Set up “an advisory network to help grantees** with receiving the funds and overcoming any technical hurdles, such as getting bank accounts set up”. This has been done by the Global Greengrants Fund.
 - **Explore “alternative application and reporting formats”** to make these be more voice-led, be more visual, and respect Indigenous groups’ oral traditions of storytelling. The Global Fund for Women is exploring this.

4.2.3. Factors and conditions of effectiveness outside funding interventions

a) Lack of sustained funding for gender equality issues

The institutional and financial sustainability of many smaller women’s organisations remains weak, partly due to funding shortfalls. For example, in many countries, governments are unable or unwilling to combat violence against women. Many “women’s organisations and NGOs have filled the gap”, but remain dependent on external funding (IOB, 2015a, p. 20).

b) Impediments to donors channelling funds to marginalised women

For Indigenous women’s groups, several barriers relate to practical impediments for donors to channel funds to them. Few of these groups have a **legal status** as registered NGOs, by constraint or by political choice. A number of groups also **lack administrative systems and capacity**, which is one of the biggest obstacles for small Indigenous women’s groups. They lack systems or capacities e.g. in budgeting, grant-writing, knowledge about funding opportunities. Many function without paid staff. Some groups have problems registering or accessing bank accounts, or lack computers and internet. Donors and groups may also face fiscal and tax requirements that make payments challenging. A final set of barriers relates to **accessibility**, due to language differences or to groups’ geographic remoteness (AWID et al., 2016, pp. 13, 65–66).

4.3. Interventions focused on policy dialogue, advocacy, and campaigning

4.3.1. Types of interventions focused on policy dialogue, advocacy, and campaigning, and their effectiveness

The Dutch government provided support, directly or through NGOs, to build up the capacity of Southern civil society organisations (CSOs) on **policy influencing, lobbying, and advocacy**. The supported CSOs “succeed to varying degrees in placing issues higher on the agenda and in influencing policy” (IOB, 2015b, p. 15). However, it proved far more difficult to obtain the implementation of these policies, let alone their impact on the ground (IOB, 2015b, pp. 15, 25).

Support to advocacy has been very popular among donors, and among international feminist movements. From 2000, in such approaches, policy influence has come to require advocacy, a specialised, expert form of activism which demands planning, organising, and training (Tadros, 2011b, p. 7). The main instrument of such advocacy has been campaigning, often by raising awareness of an issue through media, building a supportive constituency, and seeking to influence decision-makers through various legal and political avenues. While advocacy is not defined as a substitute for other interventions, it is implicitly presented as a graduation to a higher, more influential engagement (Tadros, 2011b, p. 7). However, **in politically closed or socially conservative contexts, the effectiveness of both advocacy and support to advocacy is highly limited** (Tadros, 2011b, pp. 7–10).

4.3.2. Factors and conditions of effectiveness within interventions focused on policy dialogue, advocacy, and campaigning

a) Dealing with political environments, including when they are restrictive

In theories of change, donors “need to **allow room for failure**”, **for customised approaches, and for experiments** (IOB, 2015b, p. 15). In restrictive environments, donors can also **help defend the operating space** for policy influencing, lobbying, and advocacy (IOB, 2015b, p. 15).

b) Encouraging networks and coalitions

To achieve legislative and policy change, **enhancing “the potential of networks and coalitions to advocate”** for national reforms of Constitutions or laws is effective. For example, in a number of FGE projects, collectives and networks gave women “space and strength to negotiate and advance advocacy efforts” (Barnes et al., 2016, p. 38). Donors must recognise that coalitions are essential to success, especially in restrictive environments (IOB, 2015b, p. 15).

4.4. Interventions focused on institutions that rely on collective action

4.4.1. Types of interventions focused on institutions that rely on collective action, and their effectiveness

A systematic review about the impact of **women’s self-help groups** (SHGs) concluded that both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests that women’s SHGs have a **largely positive**

effect on WPE (Brody et al., 2017, p. 9). The quantitative studies show an estimated average effect of 0.19 standard deviations, with a 95% confidence interval (Brody et al., 2017, p. 9). The meta-ethnographic analysis of the qualitative studies identified largely positive effects of women's participation in SHGs on their political empowerment, though with some adverse outcomes on women's political and/or social empowerment (Brody et al., 2017, pp. 20–21). Overall, women's economic SHGs "have positive effects on economic and political empowerment, women's mobility, and women's control over family planning", with estimated effect sizes ranging from 0.06 to 0.41 standardised mean differences (Brody et al., 2017, p. 1). SHGs "do not have adverse consequences for domestic violence" (Brody et al., 2017, p. 1). On the other hand, there was no evidence for positive effects on psychological empowerment (Brody et al., 2017, p. 11).

There were **some adverse outcomes** on women's political or social empowerment, such as disappointment, stigma, public shame, or discrimination (Brody et al., 2017, p. 21). In addition, positive effects on various dimensions of women's empowerment "**do not necessarily translate to positive effects on the poorest of the poor**" (Brody et al., 2017, p. 3).

It "**remains unclear which of the various SHG models are most effective**", because the evaluations reviewed often did not include sufficient specifics (Brody et al., 2017, p. 1).

4.4.2. Factors and conditions of effectiveness within interventions focused on institutions that rely on collective action

Some women felt **disappointed** "when their groups did not deliver on perceived promises such as solving social problems in their villages such as alcoholism (Mercer 2002) and challenging cultural norms (Dahal 2014; Kabeer 2011)". Others were disappointed when they became aware of rights but could not enact them (Kumari 2011), or when their group took on new responsibilities but eventually lacked the authority or budget to make changes (Maclean 2012)⁴⁴.

4.4.3. Factors and conditions of effectiveness outside interventions focused on institutions that rely on collective action

a) Neutral responses from stakeholders

In one case studied, SHGs generated **no** pathway for positive effects on WPE. The women concerned remained focused on reducing their poverty, and did not directly challenge gender norms or women's status⁴⁵.

b) Political and social improvements developed by women in projects⁴⁶

One pathway for positive effects on WPE was that **SHGs catalysed broader social action at the initiative of women in SHGs**. In seven studies, women described participating in a SHG "as a 'stepping stone' (Mathrani and Periodi 2006) towards wider social participation but not necessarily a political act in itself" (Brody et al., 2017, p. 20). Participating in the SHGs gave

⁴⁴ (Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

⁴⁵ (Mathrani & Periodi 2006, cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

⁴⁶ The reference does not identify the following as resulting from deliberate design in interventions. To stay with a cautious interpretation, these factors and conditions are presented as being outside the interventions.

these women political capital through networking⁴⁷. It also encouraged women “to speak out on political issues such as transparency and accountability”⁴⁸. And it enabled women who also participated in local village government to take leadership positions in such government”⁴⁹.

Another pathway for positive effects was that **SHGs enabled women to understand and act on their political context**. In three settings, women came to understand “what they could change in their communities” and what was preventing change in their community “through even small political acts”⁵⁰. In two other settings, gradual acceptance by husbands and community members “gave way to broader acceptance and respect, which lent strength to their political efforts”⁵¹.

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⁴⁸ (Knowles 2014; Sahu & Singh 2012; cited in Brody et al., 2017, pp. 20–21)

⁴⁹ (Kilby 2011, cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

⁵⁰ (Mathrani & Periodi 2006; Pattenden 2011; Ramachandar & Pelto 2009; cited in Brody et al., 2017, p. 21)

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- BRIDGE – Gender and social movements: <http://socialmovements.bridge.ids.ac.uk/>
- BRIDGE – Global resources: <https://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/global-resources>
- *Development* – Power, Movements, Change (special issue, Volume 52, Issue 2): <http://test-www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v52/n2/index.html>
- *Development* – Gender and Empowerment (special issue, Volume 53, Issue 2): <https://link.springer.com/journal/41301/53/2/page/1>
- Developmental Leadership Programme (DLP) – Gender and Politics in Practice – Publications: <http://www.dlprog.org/gender-and-politics-in-practice/publications.php>
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- OECD – Gender equality and development: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/aidinsupportofgenderequalityandwomensempowerment.htm>
- Pathways of Women's Empowerment (IDS): <http://archive.ids.ac.uk/pathwaysofempowerment/www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/index.html>
- UN Women - Women's leadership and political participation: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>
- UNDP – Research and publications – Gender equality: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/library.html?start=0&sort=date&view=cards&tag=topics:gender-equality>

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