

A BLUEPRINT FOR
Feminist Crisis
RESPONSE

by Feminist Alchemy



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ACRONYMS

CoP- Community of Practice

FA- Feminist Alchemy

GBV- Gender Based Violence

INGO- International Non-Governmental Organization

OCHA-UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN- United Nations

WRO- Women's Rights Organization

WLO- Women-led Organization



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Feminist Alchemy: who we are

Feminist Alchemy¹ is a diverse community of practice that includes fifteen global, regional and national feminist funds who respond to crises. Feminist Alchemy emerged in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in response to the need for a coordinated response among feminist funds to the urgent needs of marginalized communities. In our response, we seek to gain a better understanding of what it means and what it takes to respond to crises from a feminist perspective. Some of us deliver rapid crisis response, providing funding within 72 hours, while others invest in medium and longer term funding to fuel gender justice movements before and after a crisis occurs. The purpose of Feminist Alchemy is to collectively strengthen our responses and contextual understanding of crises, and to leverage our expertise and networks to influence and transform the global crisis ecosystem. Feminist Alchemy envisions a feminist crisis response led by women, girls and gender non-conforming people in which their organizations are fully resourced and equipped to prepare, respond, and rebuild.

1 Feminist Alchemy includes: [Fondo Alquimia](#), [Fondo Semillas](#), [ELAS+: Giving For Change](#), [Global Fund for Women](#), [Mediterranean Women's Fund](#), [Numun Fund](#), [HER Fund](#), [Reconstruction Women's Fund](#), [TEWA](#), [Urgent Action Fund-Africa](#), [Urgent Action Fund-Latin America & the Caribbean](#), [Urgent Action Fund-Asia & the Pacific](#), [UHAI EASHRI](#), [Ukrainian Women's Fund](#), [Women's Fund Asia](#).



Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the word crisis into our collective, global consciousness. For the first time in history, everyone - regardless of nationality- lived in the reality of collective struggle and solidarity amidst the virus. Limited resources, fragile infrastructure and health systems, prolonged systemic neglect, and unresponsive governments meant that some individuals and communities experienced a greater degree of devastation and hardship than others. As with most crises, women, girls and gender non-conforming people and marginalized communities were hit the hardest.²

Feminist organizations are often best placed to respond to crises, because they provide responsive on-the-ground support to the most marginalized and disenfranchised communities. Feminist organizations are often born out of crises and are already on the frontlines, ensuring that the basic needs of the most marginalized groups are met, weaving back social safety nets, and addressing the root causes of injustice.

And yet, feminist organizations often receive the least support in crisis settings. Despite their critical work, feminist organizations receive a small fraction of humanitarian aid in times of crisis.³ In 2015, UN Women found that just 1% of funding allocated to fragile states (those most impacted by disasters) were distributed to women's groups or ministries.⁴ Unfortunately this trend still remains. A 2021 report from Oxfam surveyed 222 women's rights organizations and found that 60% experienced "a lack of funding or staff to maintain operations or respond to community needs."⁵ One third of women's

2 <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/covid19/en/index.html>

3 A 2021 report from CARE found that "Donors and UN agencies have fallen short, with notable exceptions, of significantly funding women's groups in fragile and conflict-affected states; seven of 11 top donors allocated less than 1% of aid to fragile states and directly to women's organizations." https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/She-Leads-in-Crisis-Report_4.7.21_updated.pdf

4 <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/humanitarianaction/en/index.html>

5 <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/omi6dwhrcl6wkcqfapfqhyti1975djb2/file/872298579246>



rights organizations reported being left out of conversations and policy-making decisions related to their country's Covid-19 response and recovery efforts.⁶ Additionally, only a small percentage of humanitarian funding allocated for local organizations addresses gender.⁷

A feminist crisis response offers a radical alternative: it seeks to address not just immediate needs of communities but to shift structural and systemic inequalities driven by patriarchy, racism, misogyny and other forms of discrimination. A crisis response is explicitly feminist when efforts are locally-led, and the approaches resonate with feminist values of equity and equality. A feminist crisis response doesn't just rebuild; it strengthens resilience amongst diverse communities to respond collectively to future challenges.

6 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/impact-covid-19-women-rights-organisations-call-global-alliance-support-women-rights>

7 "Development Initiatives' research found that direct funding for local organizations remains a minuscule proportion of total reported gender funding, with the vast majority still going to international NGOs or United Nations agencies. Concerningly, we have actually seen a decrease in funding to local organizations, from 4.8% of all international humanitarian gender funding in 2018 to 3.1% in 2020." - Harpinder Collacott, Laura Kyrke Smith for devex <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-humanitarian-funding-for-women-and-girls-needs-urgent-reform-103047>



DEFINITIONS

Feminist Fund: a national, regional or global organization with a grantmaking mechanism that is informed by diverse, intersectional feminist principles.

Feminist Movements: collectives with explicitly feminist principles that are making demands in a specific geographic and political context through organizing to advance gender justice for all.

Feminist Crisis Response: a type of crisis response that understands and recognizes that crises are often ongoing, multi-dimensional, and deeply rooted in unjust systems and power structures which must be addressed in addition to responding to urgent, live-saving needs. This type of crisis response is informed by intersectional feminist principles, guided by local feminist leadership and responsive to the needs and interests of the most marginalized communities.

Localization: in the humanitarian sector, this refers to an intention to empower local responders in crisis contexts to lead on the delivery of humanitarian aid. As an approach, it seeks to support local organizations with the tools and resources they need to be resilient and responsive to crises.⁸

Rapid-Response Grants: grants that are distributed in a short time frame (often 72 hours or less) in crisis contexts. These grants are often smaller in scale and enable local actors to respond to urgent needs.

Knowledge Resources: for the purpose of this report, knowledge resources refers to tools, data, reports, stories and other forms of information that can be shared to help diverse actors inform their crisis response.

Gender Transformative Approach: a gender transformative approach challenges deeply rooted gender inequalities and disrupts existing patriarchal structures and systems. Using the lens of power analysis, this type of approach addresses the root causes of gender injustice and seeks to reshape cultures, systems and structures so that they are more inclusive for all genders.

Transformative Change: tackles the root causes of discrimination, including structural and systemic discrimination, injustice, inequality and unequal power dynamics in order to achieve long-lasting sustainable change.

⁸ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/localisation_en



Purpose

In 2020, Global Fund for Women co-created Feminist Alchemy and invested in a research process to advance a better understanding of feminist crisis response within the humanitarian and crisis response sectors. In conducting this research, our purpose is to generate a deeper awareness of the concept of feminist crisis response, and to capture the knowledge held by Feminist Alchemy so that others in the crisis response ecosystem and the humanitarian sector understand our approach, seek ways to partner, and integrate feminist principles into crisis response.

Based on research conducted with seventy-three organizations including feminist funds, grantee partners, philanthropies and humanitarian INGOs, this report asks the questions: what does it mean to respond to a crisis with a feminist lens? What is the critical, niche role that feminist funders play in a crisis response? How can other actors in the humanitarian sector integrate feminist practice into their crisis response?

To respond those questions, this report sets out to:

- Articulate the concept of feminist crisis response, in order to build a collective understanding;
- Identify the unique role that feminist crisis response plays in humanitarian response settings;
- Increase support for feminist crisis response amongst funders;
- Influence crisis response actors (in the philanthropic, development and humanitarian aid sectors) to take up elements of a feminist crisis response, such as an intersectional feminist analysis and a participatory approach.



Methodology

The methodology for this research was participatory by design. Research questions were developed amongst the Feminist Alchemy community of practice (CoP). Over two years, the researchers conducted 18 in-depth interviews to members of Feminist Alchemy, as well as organizations outside of the community of practice. These interviews were complemented with two online surveys one was for INGOs, humanitarian organizations and philanthropies, and a different online survey was distributed to grassroots and community-based organizations resulting in a total of 55 survey responses.

The findings herein are also derived from a series of monthly online discussions organized by the CoP, and two in person meetings which took place in Mexico City in November of 2022, and Nairobi in November 2023. This research represents the collective and localized experiences of the Feminist Alchemy community and reflects the community's shared desire for transformative change.

How does Feminist Alchemy define crisis?

Defining crisis

In order to articulate feminist crisis response, we first must define crisis. Our research illuminated that feminist funds and feminist movements hold a broad, holistic understanding of "crisis." Within these spaces, crisis does not just refer to an acute event like a war or earthquake. Rather, it refers to the complex and interconnected systems and structures that maintain inequities and injustice, which compound the impact of acute events- especially for marginalized and disenfranchised communities.



Some feminist funds differentiate between 'crisis' and 'emergency,' and some do not. The latter articulate that a crisis emerges when an emergency persists over time and impacts a large group of people, such as the global Covid-19 pandemic. Other feminist funds define crisis as a moment in which communities are under threat or face violence. According to this understanding, some communities are in a perpetual state of crisis.

Our research with partners mirrors the findings from feminist funds. In surveying our partners, we found that more than 50% do not distinguish between crises and emergencies. Those that do make the distinction were largely from areas that have protracted, ongoing conflicts or are post-conflict, such as Palestine, Ukraine and Syria.

One partner shared the following:

Crisis is the ongoing state of affairs in Palestine and the world at large, with increased economic deterioration of the majority of people, increase in xenophobia, racism and repression of human rights, destruction of the environment. We fool ourselves if we think that things are OK and that crisis happens occasionally. Emergencies are the surges and flares in this constant state of crisis whereby an aspect of the crisis flares up for a set period of time in a specific locality.

-Anonymous Partner from Occupied Palestinian Territories

Our research broadly found that the definition of crisis is contextual. A more expansive definition (that recognizes systemic and structural inequities) speaks more to the lived realities of women, girls and gender non-conforming people than a limited definition that speaks only to an acute moment of emergency.

All feminist funds agree, however, that crises are experienced differently by different communities, and that (as in the case of the pandemic), crises magnify and exacerbate existing inequalities, discrimination, and violence.



Why defining crisis differently matters

When a crisis is understood as a time-bound event, it can elicit a response that falls short of addressing the complex web of factors that enabled the crisis to have a differential impact on marginalized groups. When an earthquake happens, for example, actors in the humanitarian sector might respond by sending in search and rescue teams, setting up water and sanitation systems, or providing cash transfers or immediate housing. Some of those responses may even be gender-sensitive.⁹ Though more frequently, a focus on gender is not seen as critical to life-saving aid and falls by the wayside, especially when there are funding or time constraints.¹⁰

But if the humanitarian sector recognizes that the impact of that earthquake was exacerbated by existing social, legal, and political inequalities- resulting in different and greater impact on marginalized groups- then the response might look different. The response might take into account the needs of communities and involve locally-led organizations. It might strengthen movements to demand accountability from leaders. It might look more like a feminist crisis response, as articulated later in this report.

Often, humanitarian aid (which is short-term and focused on saving lives) is differentiated from development aid (which is longer-term and focused on improving quality of life). But this artificial divide is not always relevant to the lived experiences of communities experiencing protracted crises. Differing understandings of crisis illuminate the need for a different kind of crisis response- one that recognizes deeply rooted systemic forms of oppression and is responsive to the needs of women, girls and gender non-conforming people.

9 See for example: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/gender-and-age-sensitive-aid_en

10 "While #AidToo spotlighted international humanitarian actors' ways of working, there has been little meaningful change in leadership or practices in the humanitarian sector, and major actors and mechanisms like the Grand Bargain remain gender-blind.² As a result, gender-focused programming in humanitarian assistance is just not seen as critical in the same way as other life-saving aid and is often the first to suffer in the face of limited resources or time constraints.³ Likewise, gender analysis is rarely applied to those programmes acknowledged as life-saving, such as food or shelter." https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Gender_IP_final_synthesis_web.pdf



CASE STUDY:

In Perú, the instability of the democratic system fueled a social uprising in December 2022, as democratically elected president Pedro Castillo was arrested and social movements and civil society organizations took the streets to protest against the illegitimate new government.

As repression by police agents and institutions leveraged and intensified against those most marginalized, Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (UAF-LAC) supported various organizations of peasant women, indigenous peoples, students, workers and young women, trans and non-binary activists to strengthen mobilizations and networks through rapid-response grants. In partnership with Global Fund for Women, UAF-LAC began to deploy best practices to meet the demands of groups on the ground that were being exposed to continuous violence and repression.

Funds arrived timely to meet ground needs despite the increased closing of civic spaces.

The impact of the political crisis not only increased the levels of violence against historically marginalized communities, but also food shortages experienced due to road closures and discrimination against peasants and indigenous people's heightened the vulnerability experienced by more than 80% of women and families that lived in the affected areas.

By supporting local women-led grassroots organizations, affected communities had access to safe spaces, food and first-aid kits.

In the north of the country, women and communities affected by extractive industries were able to organize gatherings to assess the situation and jointly decide on key actions such as organizing protests and campaigns. In addition, with the support of the two feminist funds, transportation was made available from the south of the country to the capital Lima to participate in organizing, as well as convene with LGBTQI+

communities and cover legal expenses to those that were being violently persecuted. Without the access to flexible funding, other key activities such as supporting safe shelter, purchase of safety equipment, using safe transportation, medical treatment, and psychosocial support would not have been accessible to groups led by marginalized communities.

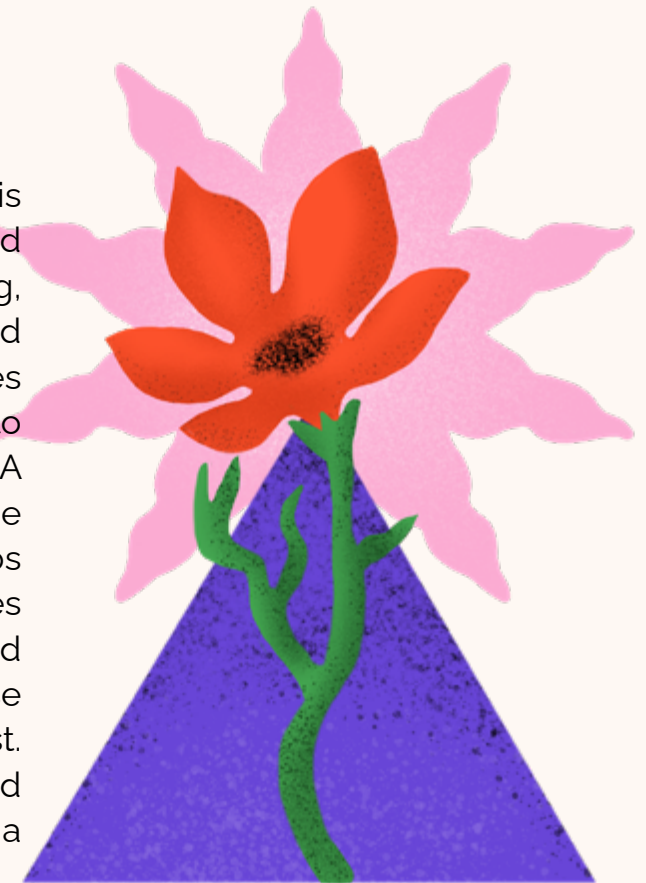
By responding to specific demands from local organizers and frontline defenders, these actions supported their right to defend constitutional rights and uphold a life free from violence. The Global Fund for Women's crisis response, through its core flexible grant-making, provided sustained support as new requests emerged. This approach ensured a comprehensive and adaptive response to the crisis, addressing challenges as they arose.



What does a feminist crisis response look like in practice?

What is feminist crisis response?

Feminist Alchemy defines a feminist crisis response as one that understands and recognizes that crises are often ongoing, multi-dimensional, and deeply rooted in unjust systems and power structures which must be addressed in addition to responding to urgent, live-saving needs. A feminist crisis response seeks to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in a crisis setting, which often requires non-traditional funding modalities and light-touch fiscal reporting so that those groups can focus on what matters most. These modalities require deep trust, and strong relationships with communities at a local level.



Feminist crisis response is an evolving and responsive concept, with no one set of rules. Some of the **principles** of feminist crisis response include:

- Always tailor crisis response to the local context. Women, girls and gender non-conforming people and marginalized communities in different countries, regions and cultures hold critical knowledge and their intersectional identities shape their experience of a crisis.
- Crisis response, support for community preparedness and resilience should bolster movements, not replace them. Funders should seek to contribute to movement autonomy, not depoliticize them. The intention of feminist crisis response is to make movements more sustainable in the medium and long term.
- Crisis response should be led by local, feminist leadership and informed by the needs and interests of communities impacted by the crisis, with a focus on the most marginalized and disenfranchised during crises.
- Crisis response must acknowledge that people affected by crises lean on support systems, and the safety and well-being of these support systems are important. Support should extend to first responders, community organizers, activists, rights defenders, their families and communities.
- Respect for the dignity and human rights of people and their communities is central to crisis response.
- Prioritize individual and collective care as part of crisis response to support staff, organizations, and the community at large.
- Build relationships between funders and partners that are based on mutual trust and respect, and which deconstruct traditional hierarchies and power dynamics.



Some of the practices of feminist crisis response include:

- Offer flexible, unrestricted funding to locally-led, feminist organizations. This requires simplified application and reporting processes so that feminist actors can focus their energy on the crisis- not the needs of donors. This includes enabling grant recipients to change the focus of their work, adapt to the context and respond to emerging needs.
- Offer a range of funding options to enable organizations on the ground to access different types of funding opportunities (emergency grants, core sustainability grants, care and wellbeing grants, etc.), and enable partners on the ground to determine how funding is spent.
- Create funding opportunities that allow movements, organizations, and collectives that don't have formal registration to access funding.
- Support spaces where activists, community organizers, and responders can gather in safely, produce knowledge and learn from each other.
- Resource self-care, collective care and well-being for responders, organizations and movements, and understand care as a political strategy for movement sustainability.
- Meaningfully engage with members of marginalized communities (especially those not typically funded, who experience intersectional forms of marginalization or disenfranchisement) and seek to support them according to their needs.
- Support rebuilding for a just and more peaceful community; support communities to address immediate and long-term inequities.



- Provide for longer-term engagements that encourage feminist movement sustainability and accountability.
- In partnership (for example, in the partnership between communities in crisis, feminist organizations and feminist funds) identify and name power inequalities. Seek to share power in decision-making and determining where and how funds will be spent.

Feminist Funds “approach crisis as a product of systematic and structural oppressions and discriminations that need to be analyzed and responded to, using power and intersectionality framework. It respects women and marginalized group’s ideas and solutions which incorporate holistic well-being (physical, mental, and spiritual). It also fosters collective organizing and movement building to respond to the crisis.”

- Grantee Partner Survey

What are the models of feminist crisis response?

The strength of Feminist Alchemy, and the larger feminist fund community, to deliver a feminist crisis response derives from our diversity: as a collective of national, regional and global feminist funds around the world, we are able to deliver funds through a variety of pathways, in order to channel funding to feminist organizations and movements who are best placed to understand and respond to the needs of women, girls and non-binary people in crises as well as historically marginalized populations. These pathways are rooted in the values of power sharing among partners, trust, care and respect for autonomy. These include (but are not limited to) the following:



Rapid Response Grants to Feminist Activists and Organizations

Rapid response grants are funds that are distributed quickly; sometimes in as little as 72 hours. These grants may include support to activists and their collectives who are facing violence, harm or are in urgent need. Our research found that typically, regional funds did not, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, make rapid response grants (with the exception of the Urgent Action Sister Funds) however most national funds did. This speaks to the reality that national funds are closer to the realities on the ground, they maintain deep relationships with local feminist movements and contextual knowledge, and along with the Urgent Action Sister Funds they are able to operationalize small funds with a shorter turnaround time.

Sustaining Grants

In addition to rapid response grants, most global, regional and national feminist funds offer medium- and long-term grants to cover core operating costs, which enable grantee partners to continue the work they are doing in addition to their crisis response. This ensures that partners are able to cover their basic operating and infrastructure costs, and that they are able to build

out longer-term strategies for their critical work. For example, Women's Fund Asia established a special crisis fund: the Kaagapay Crisis Fund to support feminist resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fund provides flexible, unrestricted funds to feminist groups who needed to cover operational costs, given that they had to redirect their programmatic efforts to provide Covid-19 relief. The fund also allows funding for trainings so that groups adapt new technologies that would enable them to continue their work virtually.¹¹

Pooled Funding

One way that feminist funds deliver a feminist crisis response is by pooling their funding and channeling collective resources to the feminist fund on the ground that is best placed to respond to the crisis. This ensures complementarity, rather than competition, amongst funders. After the Taliban gained power in Afghanistan in August of 2021, for example, members of Feminist Alchemy pooled their resources and routed crisis response funding through Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific, the organization best placed to deliver rapid emergency grants. In 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine, several feminist funds also pooled their funding to support the Ukrainian Women's Fund.

¹¹ https://www.womensfundasia.org/assets/research-report/WFA_PUBLIC_Advocacy%20Brief_Kaagapay_2023-08-01_final.pdf



Participatory Grantmaking

Feminist Alchemy has discussed the possibilities for participatory grantmaking in crisis settings, and weighed the need for quick disbursement of funds against the need to reach new partners who may not have yet had a chance to engage in a participatory process. Various forms of participatory grantmaking are utilized by Feminist Funds as a tool to determine and map where the community resources are located in a crisis, seeking key input and involvement from local organizations to build solidarity and support networks.

Creating Space for Gathering and Movement Building

Feminist funds and grantee partners surveyed for this report highlighted the importance of making funding available for activists and first responders to meet and create knowledge resources, healing spaces, intergenerational connections and movement building. Staff burnout during crisis has become a predominant issue for various funds as well as frontline responders. Creating spaces for feminists to come together, recharge, and connect is an important part of building feminist movements.

It was very important to see that we are not alone in our work and that so many people are helping refugees in the neighboring countries. It was also extremely important to share experiences, discuss the challenges and develop some future plans together. It was all about people for me and people were amazing. It gave me a lot just being together with them in one space and discussing issues. So I was really inspired after this convening and getting back to my work with some new energy.

- Anonymous participant that attended a gathering organized in partnership with Voice Amplified and funded by Global Fund for Women for frontline responders working on the impact of the war in Ukraine in bordering countries.



Funding Solidarity and Collective Care

Feminist funds recognize that the holistic well-being of activists is an important part of a feminist crisis response. Another way in which feminist funds deliver a feminist crisis response is by making grants that focus on reducing burnout and stress, create safe spaces, and provide psychosocial care for those responding to crises as well as their support systems. 98% of partners surveyed for this report included care strategies as part of their emergency response. Feminist funds are continuously learning how best to support feminist activists and are thinking outside the lines of western medical knowledge to understand how communities define well-being. For example, Urgent Action Fund for Latin America & the Spanish speaking Caribbean (UAF-LAC) has pioneered providing collective care grants as part of their accompaniment support.

Mobilizing Resources Beyond Funds

Feminist funds understand that funding is not the only type of resource that activists and organizations might need in a crisis. In-kind resources, such as medical support, safe shelter for women and gender nonconforming people, safe transportation, food delivery, connections to humanitarian relief organizations, are among some of the services provided especially by national funds, who are closer to the crisis and able to deploy quickly.

Furthermore, 80% of partners surveyed integrated digital and physical security into their crisis response. Numun Fund supports feminist activism, organizations, and movement to build and sustain technological infrastructures which has become increasingly important in the context of crises as it pertains to digital security as well as communications with partners and people affected by crises.



CASE STUDY:

For many years, the Moroccan High Atlas region has been marginalized, primarily due to its resilience against various forms of oppression. This neglect has significantly disadvantaged the area relative to the rest of the country. The disparity is particularly acute for village women, who endure daily treks of several kilometers to access clean water, while essential services like schools and maternity wards remain inaccessible.

In response to a destructive earthquake in September 2023, the Mediterranean Women's Fund (MedWF) extended support to fifteen local organizations in the affected area. An emergency fund was established to address significant needs, with local partners leading efforts to alleviate community suffering—a crucial step in a context where women's needs are often overlooked. MedWF not only provided immediate, direct funding to these organizations but also engaged various donors to enhance resource availability. Additionally, MedWF facilitated partnerships with the French Secours Populaire and Humanity Diaspo, coordinating direct aid on the ground.

Immediately after the disaster, women's associations swiftly organized aid, compensating for the lack of governmental response. Women face additional violence and vulnerability during climate emergencies, exacerbated by the absence of basic facilities such as sanitation and healthcare.

To coordinate efforts effectively, MedWF set up an emergency unit within their offices. Initial actions included assessing the wellbeing and safety of partners, conducting field visits with organizations like the Ytto Foundation to determine immediate needs, and facilitating quick financial transfers. Once immediate needs were met, MedWF focused on psychological support, promoting girls' education, and creating safe spaces for displaced women and girls.

In this context, the leadership of women's associations is crucial. They are pivotal in ensuring aid reaches those most in need, providing not just immediate relief but also fostering long-term solutions to address systemic inequalities that affect women in times of crisis.



What Sets Feminist Crisis Response Apart?

There are early signs that the humanitarian sector is beginning to incorporate some of what Feminist Alchemy considers to be part of a feminist crisis response: there is increased interest in addressing the needs of women, girls and gender non-conforming people, and a drive towards funding locally-led leadership and response.¹² However, broadly speaking, these efforts have been minimal, largely ineffective, and often stated but not acted upon.

Despite an increase in attention to issues facing women, girls and non-gender conforming people, Oxfam reports that “aid that targets gender as a principal objective represented less than 4% of aid in 2017; 62% of aid continues to be gender-blind.”¹³ When it comes to gender-based violence (GBV), IRC reports that “GBV services accounted for just 0.12% of the \$41.5 billion allocated for humanitarian funding from 2016-2018.”¹⁴

The IRC reports that just 3.5% of The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)'s allocation went to women's rights or women-led organizations (WROs/WLOs) in 2021. This despite the fact that 27% of OCHA's allocation went to national and sub-national organizations that year, which points to the reality that WROs/WLOs face “different and persistent barriers than other” organizations.¹⁵ In essence, despite a named commitment to fund the specific needs of marginalized groups and an intent to distribute funding to locally-led organizations, this is not yet happening.

12 In 2017, United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for Humanitarian Coordination called for “...ensuring the specific needs, capacities and priorities of women, girls, men and boys are identified and that assistance targets the persons and groups most in need...[and] identifying and dismantling barriers and discrimination, including by promoting and enabling women's leadership at the community level and in other decision-making processes.” <https://ictlogy.net/bibliography/reports/projects.php?idp=3724>

13 <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620755/bp-feminist-aid-g7-090519-en.pdf>

14 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/where-s-money-how-humanitarian-system-failing-fund-end-violence-against-women-and-girls>

15 <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Why%20Wait%20Summary%20-%20ENGLISH.pdf>



Our research found that feminist funds see a distinct difference between a feminist crisis response and a more traditional approach to humanitarian response. In interviews and surveys, feminist funds and grantee partners reported that the traditional approach includes:

- Rigidity in terms of what gets funded and how; complex proposals and reporting mechanisms that make it difficult for smaller or less resourced organizations to access funding;
- A short-term engagement on the acute crisis rather than a sustainable engagement with communities that addresses entrenched inequalities that exacerbate crisis for marginalized groups;
- Fiscal conservatism, where funds are only routed through larger organizations who have financial and banking systems in place;
- A lack of engagement with/outreach to grassroots communities, especially those from historically marginalized and oppressed groups;
- Gender-blind approaches (which ignore gender entirely), or approaches that are gender sensitive (which factors in gender as a consideration, but not does necessarily seek to shift gendered power structures) but lack a transformative change agenda (which seeks to address systemic and structural gendered inequalities for long lasting, sustainable change);
- A lack of feminist/intersectional analysis;
- A focus on food, medical supplies and shelter without attention to the more holistic needs of communities (such as mental health);
- A focus on numbers as a means of measuring impact, rather than utilizing stories and qualitative methods that contribute more nuance to the larger story of change;



- Top-down, hierarchical crisis response where decision making (and power) lie with the larger, global organizations who are disconnected from local contexts. This power imbalance is at the root of what sets conventional humanitarian response apart from feminist crisis response, which seeks to redress power imbalances.

Research published in the *Journal of International Humanitarian action* found that “gender mainstreaming, which is the approach the humanitarian sector has taken to address gender inequalities, has not been effective,” and “the culture of humanitarian organizations has been characterized as hierarchical and driven by a short-term crisis response with a distinctly macho style of functioning, which is misaligned to a gender mainstreaming approach.”¹⁶

Feminist crisis response sets out to do something different: to fund and act in line with feminist values, and to shift power dynamics in a real and transformative way, by putting funding in the hands of those who are on the ground and best placed to understand the needs of the most marginalized communities.

In this way, feminist crisis response plays a niche role in the humanitarian sector. Feminist organizations are positioned to respond to the needs of the communities that are often hit hardest by disasters, and feminist funds have the existing relationships, contextual knowledge and mechanisms in place to support their work.

¹⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10152570/>



CASE STUDY:

In August 2023, amidst Afghanistan's complex humanitarian crisis compounded by political instability and militarization, the urgent need to prioritize resources for empowering Afghan women, girls, and non-binary people became clear. These groups, disproportionately affected by these challenges and victims of gender apartheid, required immediate and targeted support to safeguard their rights and well-being.

Through direct engagement with activists and groups on the ground, we learned that liquidity was essential to support their efforts. Without funding, these groups faced severe limitations, with little to no capacity for action. Additionally, as communities organized and responded, they sought support to advocate for their various unmet needs.

At Feminist Alchemy, we pooled funds to support the Urgent Action Fund Asia and the Pacific. They took the lead in efficiently channeling funds directly to activists and defenders, not only in Kabul but across Afghan provinces. This initiative focused on evacuating women and non-binary defenders facing immediate threats.

Women's Fund Asia (WFA) also played a crucial role, supporting groups in Afghanistan and those working with refugee women and girls in Southeast Asia and South Asia. In August 2023, WFA launched the Afghanistan Fund, providing core and flexible support to build resilience during ongoing violence and instability. This support is planned to continue through fund renewals over at least the next two years. WFA also forged connections with sister funds, peer donors, and local and regional advisors and partners, illustrating the critical role of trusted relationships in the feminist funding ecosystem to amplify impact and build solidarity.

Additionally, a coalition called Feminist Action for Afghanistan (FAA) was formed by ten feminist organizations. Since its inception, the FAA has focused on uniting feminist funds and women's rights organizations to bolster funding

and advocacy efforts, and strategically support Afghan women's rights defenders at immediate risk. To date, the FAA has successfully raised issues with multilateral and bilateral donors and secured funding to support Afghan women's rights organizations and defenders both inside and outside Afghanistan.

In a country where advocating for women's rights can endanger lives under a militarized regime, the commitment of Afghan women to drive positive change remains strong. The support from feminist funds has not only facilitated survival but also sparked a revival, empowering these organizations to continue their mission despite significant risks and draw more donor attention. As the crises continue to unfold without hitting the headlines, it's crucial now more than ever to ensure that women, girls, gender nonconforming people, and marginalized communities are not only well-resourced but also play a pivotal role in decision-making and leadership during crisis responses."



What challenges do feminist funders face?

Feminist crisis response has been hampered by the rise of nationalist, right-wing governments who express anti-feminist sentiment and make it difficult for feminist movements to organize or operate.¹⁷ Feminist funds have had to think of new and creative ways to support resilient movements in these challenging political contexts. For example, an alliance of feminist funds launched an initiative called Knocking on EU's Door, which works to engage and influence European grant makers to advance women's rights and gender equality, in the context of funding cuts by right-wing governments in the region.¹⁸

Feminist funders face political, logistical and technical challenges when implementing feminist crisis response. Logistically, it can be difficult to find opportunities for cross-regional collaboration, strategizing and learning. Technically, feminist funders are continuing to learn how to offer application processes to partners that are simple and accessible, to broaden access to available funds. They also sustain learning and creativity on how to move funds rapidly in difficult contexts.

17 <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Discussion-paper-Democratic-backsliding-and-the-backlash-against-womens-rights-en.pdf>

18 https://www.citizensforeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/wfe-genderequalityreport__1_.pdf

Feminist funds also face funding challenges; feminist funds, particularly at the national level, often lack visibility in the broader philanthropic community and struggle to mobilize funding to carry out a feminist crisis response. Furthermore, as there is no understanding of the crisis as long term, feminist funds are lacking long-term funding to support crisis from a feminist perspective.

In light of these challenges, Feminist Alchemy seeks to advocate for the integration of feminist principles into the humanitarian and philanthropic sectors, and the channeling of humanitarian funds to feminist funds and feminist movements where possible. Strengthening a common understanding of feminist crisis response- which this report seeks to do- is a step towards that vision.

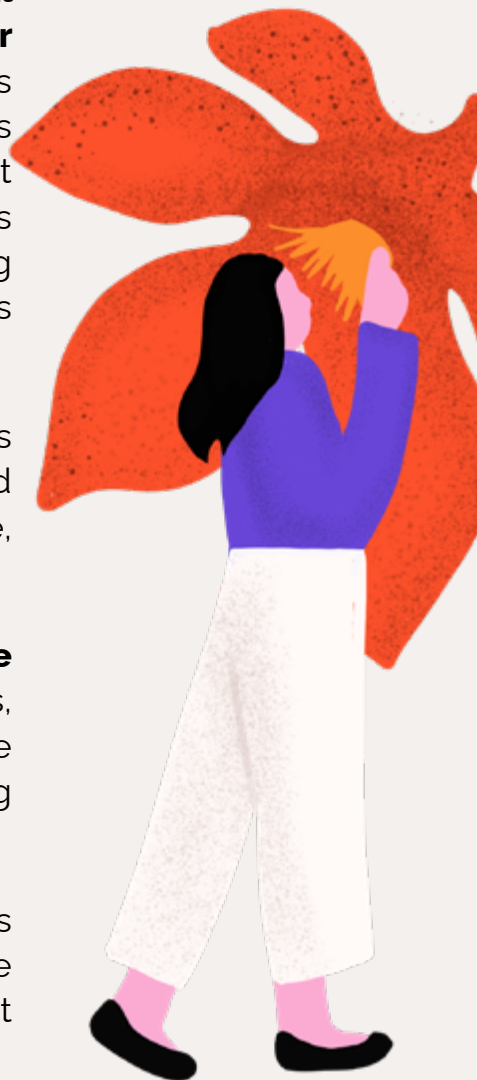
Together, the members of Feminist Alchemy plan to create opportunities for greater collaboration and coordination, as a means of deconstructing borders of language and space. We see these collaborations are essential for conducting an effective response to a multi-dimensional crisis.



Recommendations

Feminist Alchemy, as a community of practice, holds deep knowledge and understanding about how to mobilize a feminist crisis response. While our community continues to learn- from each other and our partners- we also seek to share our knowledge with others in the crisis response sector, including funders, philanthropies, crisis responders, humanitarians, and more. The following are recommendations for how other actors that do crisis response can integrate feminist crisis response:

- **Analyze crisis through the lens of structural injustice, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and other systems of oppression.** Recognize that every crisis response must be intersectional, in that it accounts for the diverse, intersecting identities of the most marginalized communities and individuals. This requires integrating knowledge and understanding of systemic and structural inequalities in crisis forecasting and mapping, and in crisis response.
- **Expand the definition of crisis** so that it includes the complex and interconnected systems and structures that maintain inequities and injustice, which compound the impact of acute events.
- **Look to the analysis, research and knowledge produced by feminists:** feminist organizations, movements and feminist funds can help inform the contextual analysis when preparing or delivering crisis response.
- **Go further than 'localization.'** While there has been increased attention to localization in the humanitarian sector, in practice this concept



perpetuates the same hierarchies that have always existed in the sector. For example, international aid organizations may hire local aid workers to carry out work in local communities, but local aid workers often do not have an equal say in decision-making nor equal pay to international workers. We recommend that the humanitarian sector follow the lead of feminist funders and commit to a flexible, community-led approach which empowers local strategizing. Those impacted by crises, particularly the most vulnerable groups, must be at the front and center of designing crisis response: how, when and where resources are spent.

- **Practice transformative flexibility.** Be flexible in terms of how and where funds are transferred, and how funds are utilized. Review due diligence processes to ensure they reflect feminist values: streamline processes and make them accessible, eliminate onerous administrative burdens, including application processes and reporting mechanisms, and limit paperwork requirements. Work on building relationships based on trust and ensure that processes and communications limit risk for those affected by crises.
- **Allow for shifting priorities as crises evolve.** Recognize that the impact of crisis changes over time, and that those on the ground are most attuned to the real-time needs of communities. Sometimes plans need to shift quickly, and funders should be prepared to offer flexibility to partners so that they can adapt swiftly to the evolving context. Flexible core and institutional funding enables organizations to make medium and long term plans. A rigid and unpredictable funding model that is project-based limits the capacity and potential of organizations to strategically challenge structural injustices, marginalization and oppression.
- **Bridge the artificial divide between humanitarian aid vs development sector.** The lived realities and experiences of people affected by crises are intersectional and the needs are vast. Strive to work beyond silos and thematic priorities that often divisive and



hinder, rather than support, the variety of challenges that are faced on the ground when responding to crises.

- **Fund and support practices and communities of care.** Providing resources for care and wellbeing is one way that feminist crisis funds have enabled feminist actors, organizations and movements to thrive. By supporting those experiencing crises to care for themselves and their communities, funders support movement sustainability and long-term resilience.
- **Understand crisis response as a pathway towards gender transformative change.** Crisis, broadly defined, illuminates the ways in which injustice exists in societies. Responding to crises with a feminist lens includes redressing the inequalities that leave marginalized groups with scant resources, political voice, power and safety. In doing so, feminist crisis response can help shift power and transform communities, so they are more equitable and resilient.
- **Support crises that do not make headlines.** As the world faces multiple protracted crises, attention is paid to crises that make the most noise on news headlines. This leads to several crises to be silent and with little to no support. Visibility is key so that communities can receive the support they need to overcome their lived realities. Advocate and influence to support crisis response where it is needed the most as identified by local organizations, feminist movements, and marginalized communities
- **Decolonize risk.** Local grassroots organization are often overlooked in larger humanitarian aid response, multilateral and bilateral donors mostly because they unable to meet inflexible due diligence requirements and are thus considered “too risky” to support. This risk significantly ignores the risk taken by those actually doing the response and perpetuates the colonial power dynamics that are rooted in the humanitarian sector. Rethink how risk is defined and consider further flexibility to allow local organizations to have more agency and resources to respond to the demands in their communities before, during, and after crises.



- **Operational and administrative costs should not be a limiting factor.** Responding to crises demand organizations to pivot and incur expenses that are often prohibitive to staff wellbeing and the long-term sustainability of an organization if not adequately funded. When providing support to local responders, avoid limiting the flexibility to only programmatic support and consider also giving ample support to allow operations to be carried without causing staff burnout and financial stress in the long-run.
- **Invest in feminist funds.** Feminist funds themselves need resources to deliver feminist crisis response, we have the experience, knowledge and connections to local grassroots organizations around the globe. Recognizing the valuable role that feminist funders play in the humanitarian ecosystem- and funding those who deliver feminist crisis response- is an important contribution, partner with us.



Additional Resources:

Collacot, Harpinder and Smith, Laura Kyrke. "Opinion: Humanitarian Funding for Women and Girls needs Urgent Reform." Devex. 19 April 2022. <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-humanitarian-funding-for-women-and-girls-needs-urgent-reform-103047>

"Pathways to Building Back Better: Advancing Feminist Policies in Covid 19 Response and Recovery." UN Women. July 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Think-piece-Pathways-to-building-back-better-en.pdf>

"The Impact of Covid-19 on Women's Rights Organizations." Oxfam Canada. 19 July 2021. <https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-womens-rights-organizations/>

"Why Not Local? Gender-Based Violence, Women's Rights Organizations, and the Missed Opportunity of Covid-19." International Rescue Committee, November 2021. <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/6378/irc2021whynotlocalgbvreport.pdf>



