



INVESTING IN EQUITY

Creating Equitable Funding
for Women Peacebuilders

FEBRUARY 2022

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The Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) launched in 2001 with a vision of active peacebuilding. In 2007, the Kroc IPJ became part of the newly established Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, a global hub for peacebuilding and social innovation.

The core of the Kroc IPJ mission is to co-create learning with peacemakers — learning that is deeply grounded in the lived experience of peacemakers around the world, that is made rigorous by our place within a university ecosystem and that is immediately and practically applied by peacemakers to end cycles of violence. The Kroc IPJ is the bridge between theory and practice at the Kroc School, driving the Kroc School's mission to shape a more peaceful and more just world.

This report and its findings reflect a multi-year process, which brought together a range of institutions, team members and leading peace experts. It is based on the lived realities of women peacebuilders and peacebuilding funders. These women bravely shared their work, experiences, learnings, challenges and aspirations for the future, hoping that this report's knowledge will create vital changes in the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) funding system. These are the remarkable organizations and people who informed, shaped and wrote this report.

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Although women are vital to the success and sustainability of peace efforts, and despite progress made by the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda over the past two decades, women peacebuilders remain severely underfunded — and the funding that is available to them is often unresponsive to their needs and characterized by a power disparity between funder and funded.

In an effort to address this problem, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (Kroc IPJ) embarked on a research project in collaboration with a group of women peacebuilders and peace funders to better understand how to craft and sustain more equitable funding partnerships that serve the needs of women peacebuilders — and peacebuilding more broadly. Together, this team worked to ensure that the research contained in this report accurately reflects the WPS funding system's current realities, challenges and opportunities. In particular, to advance women's inclusion in peace and justice processes, this report examines what equitable funding partnerships are, why they are essential to peacebuilding, and how they can best be cultivated, providing evidence from the field to support its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Findings include the need to address key moments in the pre-award and post-award stages of the funding cycle to make it more accessible, along with enhancing the broader inclusivity and responsiveness of funding.

Finally, although the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded some of the challenges facing women peacebuilders, its disruption of standard procedures has actually made possible responsive funding practices previously seen as too difficult to realize. By implementing the recommendations in this report, the peacebuilding field can make even more progress towards an equitable, accessible, sustainable funding system that advances the WPS agenda and ensure it aptly responds to the current peacebuilding realities.

The Vital Need to Fund Women Peacebuilders More Effectively

The evidence on women's inclusion in peace and security efforts is clear: When women are a part of peace negotiations and are involved in grassroots violence prevention, peace is more sustainable.¹ Peace agreements are 20 percent more likely to last at least two years and 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years when women are involved in their negotiation.² Furthermore, women's engagement in community-based protection can prevent the escalation of violence between different groups.³ The world needs women's expertise and participation in peace and security now more than ever. Despite global commitments to reduce rates of violence, conflict-related deaths and other forms of violence are on the rise. In the past decade (2009-2018), global deaths due to armed conflict nearly doubled compared to the previous ten-year period.⁴ Violence is also increasing in areas beyond conflict zones.⁵ In the United States, for example, the Council on Criminal Justice found homicide rates across 32 US cities in the first quarter of 2021 had increased by 24 percent over 2020 levels and 49 percent over 2019 levels for the same period.⁶

Yet, despite this clear need, the peacebuilding potential of women is not being fully engaged. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda — launched in 2000 with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 — has made great strides over the past two decades, considerably advancing women's presence, participation and protection in a range of peace spaces.⁷ Unfortunately it has not yet achieved its goal of equal representation of women in all decision-making processes around the prevention, mitigation and resolution of violence due to a range of barriers, both old and new.⁸ Globally, power structures are still traditional, largely male-dominated⁹ and resistant to bringing in diverse perspectives and groups. Therefore, women continue to lack access to crucial peace and justice decision-making spaces — and some areas they had previously gained access to are even becoming less inclusive¹⁰, the women who are present tend to be elite women (i.e., women who live in capitals, are highly educated, speak English and have access to technology)¹¹ and not always representative of the larger and diverse group of women. Furthermore, women face distinct risks when they participate in peace and justice work, like gender-based violence (GBV) — on the rise in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic¹² — and online harassment.¹³ Additionally, and critically, women peacebuilders and women-led organizations remain severely underfunded, despite growing recognition that their expertise is essential to preventing and reducing violence.¹⁴ Not only are women peacebuilding organizations unable to advance their vital work due to insufficient financial

support, but the funding partnerships they do enter tend to be characterized by unequal power, leading to funding that is not fully responsive to peacebuilding needs on the ground. On the first point, bilateral aid to women's rights organizations in fragile or conflict-affected countries averaged \$96 million (USD) per year in 2017-2018, which is only 0.2 percent of total bilateral aid targeting fragile countries for this period and only 0.005 percent of global military expenditure.¹⁵ These financing realities exist in part because women are not equally present in spaces where significant fiscal decisions occur.¹⁶ Second, for women peacebuilders' work to reach its full potential, research shows funding partnerships must equally value and utilize the skills, expertise, networks and knowledge that both funders and local partners bring to projects.¹⁷

However, funding partnerships are still top-down, lack trust and struggle to value local expertise, which is reflected in how funding cycles fail to sufficiently include the knowledge and experiences of women peacebuilders. This reality results in an information gap that ultimately leads to less effective peacebuilding efforts and prevents donors from achieving their investment goals.¹⁸

While these challenges exist, they also point to the unique position and potential of donors to advance women's inclusion through what they fund and how they structure their funding partnerships. Indeed, some leading peace donors are beginning to implement new funding models to address the twin problems of underfunding and unequal partnerships. In particular, to redistribute power and to build a sustainable and equitable civil society, funders are prioritizing trust-based philanthropy — philanthropy characterized by multi-year unrestricted funding, simplified applications and reporting, and an emphasis on building long-term relationships based on transparency, frequent communication and mutual learning.¹⁹ The peacebuilding field is seeing organizations like UN Women, Global Fund for Women, International Civil Society Action Network's (ICAN) Innovative Peace Fund, and Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) implementing such funding models with promising results.²⁰

Now is the time to strengthen the research base for these models to help them build momentum and gain widespread acceptance. The peacebuilding field needs a clearer understanding of why equitable funding models are important and how they work best.

This report attempts to provide just that: By drawing on the experience and expertise of women peacebuilders and peace funders, it develops and presents evidence-based recommendations for how to build equitable funding partnerships that more effectively fund women-led peacebuilding — and thereby overcome a persistent barrier to the fulfillment of the WPS agenda. With global violence increasing, it is essential that women, in all of their diversity, be at the frontlines of addressing violence. Adequate and responsive funding is critical to this effort.

The Research Initiative

The Kroc IPJ, in partnership with leading women peacebuilders and global funders,²¹ undertook a multi-year research initiative to examine how to create equitable funding partnerships that authentically address needs on the ground, needs of women peacebuilders and funders’ requirements. This report aims to strengthen the WPS funding agenda by presenting evidence gathered through this research initiative.

LEARNING FROM AND WITH ONE ANOTHER: WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS AND PEACE FUNDERS

The Kroc IPJ believes in creating and holding spaces for peacebuilders to learn with one another, support each other’s efforts, and share their vital knowledge with policymakers and practitioners. For the Women PeaceMaker program and this research initiative in particular, which employed participatory action research (PAR) and human-centered design (HCD) (see Appendix), this meant cultivating a sustained Learning Community of women peacebuilders and leading WPS funders. Together this group drove the research process — an approach that strengthened the people involved and, in turn, the final learning and research outputs.

To build this Learning Community, the Kroc IPJ facilitated a multi-year process beginning in October 2019 with a range of in-person and virtual engagement opportunities. The Community was composed of the following members:

- Women PeaceMakers: Four women peacebuilders from Israel, Pakistan, the United States and South Sudan
- Peace Funding Partners: Five representatives from WPS funding organizations, including the US Agency for International Development (USAID); UN Women; Global Affairs Canada; the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UKFCDO, formerly UKFCO); and Search for Common Ground
- Kroc IPJ’s Women, Peace and Security research team

First, in the fall of 2019, this group came together for an intensive in-person, week-long Learning Lab at the University of San Diego’s Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies. To ensure the attendees and the research being conducted could both reach their full potential, the Kroc IPJ co-developed the retreat agenda and format directly with the Women PeaceMakers and Peace Funding Partners in an iterative, multi-week process before the Learning Lab. During this Learning Lab, the Learning Community co-developed the research design and identified the target audience — including their data needs and how they consume research — to inform their programming. Lastly, the group co-developed a plan to drive the research

initiative forward after the Learning Lab. With this foundation in place, the group was able to transition successfully to a virtual environment. Once in a virtual space, the women peacebuilders and funders leveraged various platforms to sustain the Learning Community and build upon the foundation established during their time at the Learning Lab.

COVID-19 impacted the world halfway through this initiative. Fortunately, much of the Community's work process and research plan already took place in a virtual setting. Therefore, a full pivot to online engagement was feasible and did not significantly hinder the Community's research goals.

Building this Learning Community was critical both for the participants and for the research project itself for three primary reasons. First, the women who co-developed and implemented this research navigate some of the most dangerous environments, so creating a mutually supportive environment was extremely important. As the Kroc IPJ learns with peacebuilders, it must also provide a sustained ecosystem of peer-to-peer support where everyone's expertise and background are valued and heard. This approach facilitates a space where the group can engage in more honest discussions about the challenges they face, learning from one another and realizing that they are not alone in facing them.

Second, to accurately understand, explore and develop new solutions to persistent challenges, the research had to go beyond short-term workshops, conferences and consultations. Instead, long-term and sustained engagement between the members of the Learning Community had to occur. This approach created space for trust to be built amongst the Community members, allowing peacebuilders and funders to have more candid conversations on challenges from both sides of the funding relationship. The members supported each other while sharing unique and complex insights on needs and possibilities. This space also allowed for new solutions to emerge. Finally, continuous and sustained engagement provided the Learning Community with the opportunity to create reflective feedback loops. Such iterative processes allowed for adaptations to the research, troubleshooting and responsive pivots to emerge when necessary.

Third, the Community members represent a microcosm of the more extensive WPS funding system. Therefore, this group provided a space to conceive, test, reflect on and refine ideas before scaling up to the larger WPS field. The Learning Community developed tools for gathering ground-truthed data and effective methods for capturing and sharing research insights. Additionally, the organizations represented in the Community provided a direct line for insights to be plugged into their respective WPS operations. This created space to refine the research initiative's proof of concept and, eventually, an avenue for the research to influence the funding system. In short, this participant-led process ensured that the research initiative accurately captured the realities of the WPS funding system, facilitated creative problem-solving and supported implementation of new ideas while also building relationships based on trust, respect and care among the people involved in the research.

GATHERING DATA

After extensive deliberation, the Learning Community identified a central research question that best captured what both women peacebuilders and funders wanted to learn:

How do funders and women peacebuilders create equitable and sustainable partnerships to end cycles of violence?

To respond to this question, the Learning Community employed qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative tools used were semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups and observational data collection. There were ten in-depth interviews with peacebuilding funders and ten with women peacebuilders. To be selected, peacebuilding funders had to represent either a foundation, an INGO, the UN or a government that had committed funding to the WPS agenda. To ensure a range of institutions and perspectives, the research team aimed to have a cross-section of representatives from these funders. The women peacebuilders selected had all received funding from a non-domestic funder and were chosen with regional diversity in mind.

Focus groups took place with local women's groups in Israel, Pakistan and South Sudan. Additionally, Learning Community members held focus groups with WPS staff from the U.S. government and Global Affairs Canada. The Kroc IPJ research team collected observational data during the five-day Learning Lab in San Diego, including the mapping of challenges and opportunities for strengthening the WPS funding system conducted by the four women peacebuilders and five peace funders.

For quantitative data collection, the Learning Community conducted a survey. The survey was sent to the Kroc IPJ's network of women peacebuilders and other women peacebuilders that the Learning Community identified within their networks. The funders who were surveyed were also identified through the Community's network and the Peace and Security Funding Map.²² The survey was completed by 32 women peacebuilders and 22 peacebuilding funders. (See Figure 1 and Figure 2.) All in all, these research methods were meant to capture the challenges, opportunities, failures and successes within the WPS funding system.

FIGURE 1: WOMEN PEACEBUILDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY, BY COUNTRY

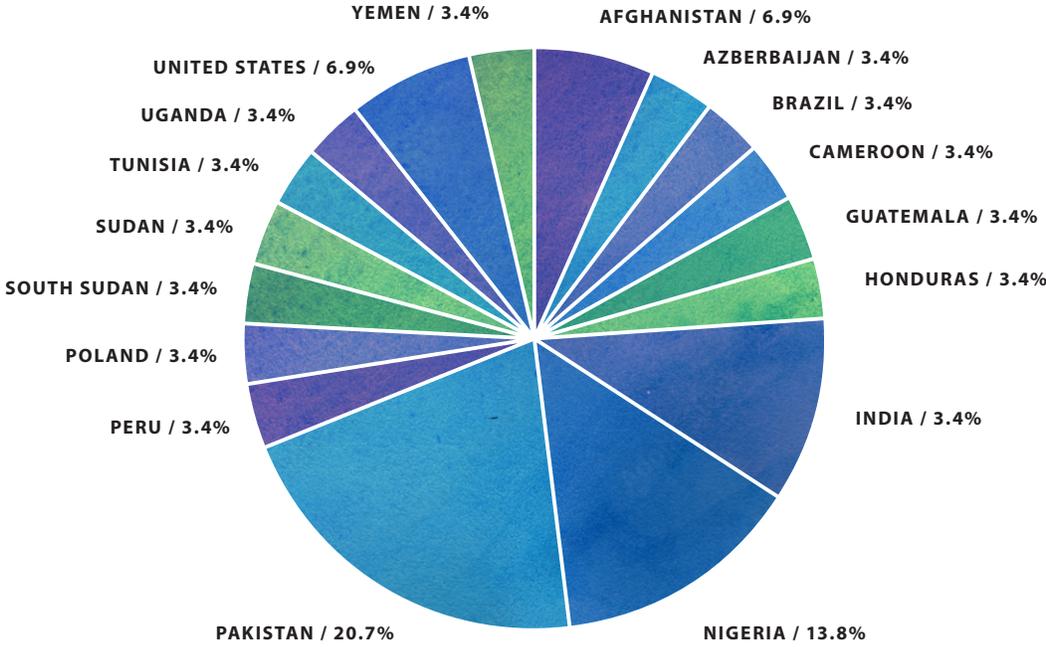
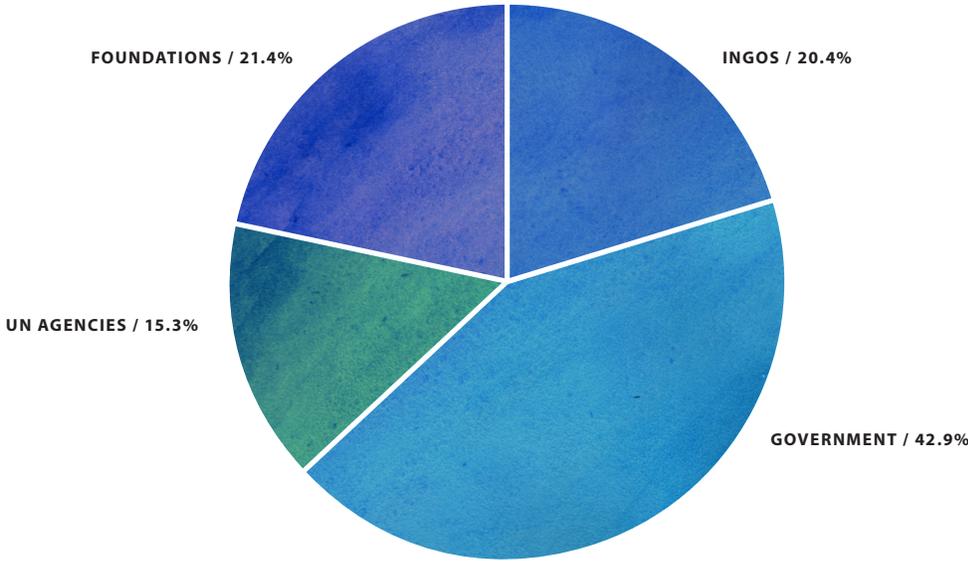


FIGURE 2: PEACE FUNDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY, BY ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDER TYPE



It is necessary to establish what equitable funding partnerships look like, according to women peacebuilders and funders. The starting point for both groups involved in this research was that power imbalances are currently present in funding dynamics and that these imbalances favor the funder and the system they are operating within. Therefore, funders and those funded must address these imbalances to work towards more effective and equitable partnerships.

Characteristics of Equitable Funding Partnerships

When asked to define what characteristics make up equitable funding partnerships, Learning Community members shared the following qualities:



“Trust” and “constant communication” were the top two characteristics identified. Overall, the qualities listed fell into two major categories: 1) interpersonal relationship dynamics between funder and women peacebuilder²³ and 2) the process for developing and funding projects.²⁴ Respondents gave more significant value to the interpersonal relationship dynamics based on the frequency of terms listed. While the qualities listed under the first category may be harder to observe and measure, emerging models can help teams overcome this challenge.²⁵ For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development resource “Guidelines on Measuring Trust” provides tools for measuring the concept of trust. The qualities identified under the second category, developing and

funding projects, tend to be more tangible. For example, such attributes included constant communication, which can be more clearly operationalized and measured. Participants highlighted the following good practices for building equitable funding partnerships:

FUNDER

- Devote resources (e.g., time) to building strong interpersonal relationships with women peacebuilders and to developing mechanisms and processes to measure and actualize these qualities in funding partnerships.
- Ensure communication requirements between the funder (implementing partner) and women peacebuilders are built into the project cycle proposals.
- Continue communication with women peacebuilders after the completion of the project, as sustaining connections beyond just a funding relationship will build trust and commitment to longer term peacebuilding gains.
- Emphasize longer-term, planned engagements that allow for trust-building between partners. For example, organize frequent (at least once a quarter) “pause and learn sessions,” where both funders and women peacebuilders can share what is working, what is not, and other key learnings from their partnership.
- Schedule regular (e.g., quarterly) reflection sessions for 360 feedback with local partners. These check-in sessions should focus on understanding the health of the project and funder/peacebuilder’s relationship.
- Help women peacebuilders build relationships with the funding organization as a whole and not just with specific individuals. Since funders frequently rotate out of posts every one to three years, women peacebuilders constantly have to invest in meeting new people, building relationships and navigating different personalities and cultures — all with the hope that funding comes out of this investment before that person rotates out and they have to start over again. To ensure that this investment is not lost, prepare for transitions between staff at funding agencies — carefully transferring knowledge and relationships to the new staff member — so that trust is maintained between the funding agency and the women peacebuilder, even if the person changes.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- At the beginning of a project, ask the funder for at least quarterly, scheduled check-ins to discuss the funding partnership (e.g., what is working, and what can be strengthened, as relates solely to partnership dynamics).
- To ensure continuous communication, inform the funder about the best methods for staying connected (e.g., WhatsApp messenger, WhatsApp voice messages, scheduled calls, email).

Equitable Funding Partnerships Positively Impact Peacebuilding Projects

While more equitable funding partnerships can and should be understood as valuable in and of themselves, it is also important to understand why they matter for peacebuilding outcomes. Both women peacebuilders and funders weighed in on this question.

Over 95 percent of both women peacebuilders and funders said if equity-based improvements were made to the funding system, the outcomes of local peacebuilding projects would be positively impacted.

Elaborating on this finding, women peacebuilders and funders shared the following observations on how equitable funding partnerships can influence their peacebuilding projects.

Women Peacebuilders shared that equitable funding partnerships can strengthen their projects' impact due to more inclusive and representative decision-making, which ensures that projects respond to the realities the women are seeing and navigating on the ground. The expertise of both partners is integrated, which further strengthens the results of a project. As one woman peacebuilder noted, "an equal funding partnership certainly has a much more significant impact on peacebuilding projects since the decision-making is inclusive. Both donors and partners share their best practices and adopt the most appropriate approaches. Therefore, outcomes are far more significant than the projects designed by the donors and given to partners for implementation only."

Funders shared that they believe equitable partnerships help ensure healthier relationships with their grantees, leading to greater trust and more effective implementation of peacebuilding projects. They further suggested that equitable partnerships create increased collaboration, leading to better quality and more sustainable projects. These projects have a more significant chance of reaching their intended beneficiaries the right way. Additionally, equitable partnerships allow for quick adaptations to projects in response to rapidly changing environments.²⁶ Lastly, as a WPS funder explained, "women-led organizations are going to mold their priorities to the donor priorities. If the equitable partnership starts with the joint building, this will build on the expertise they already have — this could have a massive impact on the entire process."

The research initiative resulted in ten key findings related to what equitable partnerships between women peacebuilders and funders look like, why they are essential to successful peacebuilding projects and how to build such partnerships. The findings and recommendations on how to create equitable funding partnerships are organized into two categories: overarching findings and funding cycle findings. This section includes recommendations and case study examples from funders that have successfully implemented these recommendations, showcasing various organizations, governments, UN agencies, INGOs and foundations.

The research found that the most change is needed in the pre-award and post-award stages of the funding cycle — namely, planning, publicizing, searching for and applying for funding opportunities in the pre-award stage, and then reporting progress in the post-award stage — in addition to a few key overarching changes needed to the nature of funding itself.

It is important to note that, although the findings and recommendations identified here are not exhaustive, if implemented, these recommendations could create meaningful changes to the WPS funding system. Many are easy to implement in that they do not require extensive timelines or an abundance of resources. Forming equitable funding partnerships and creating more impactful peacebuilding projects is within reach.

For equitable partnerships to develop, both actors must do their part. At the same time, since the power asymmetry in funding relationships leans heavily in favor of donors, donors need to make more significant adjustments, explicitly focusing on structural changes and not just shifts in their behavior. Therefore, the findings and recommendations in this section — whether overarching findings and recommendations or those related to specific stages of the funding cycle — are especially pertinent for donors. The case examples included below illustrate how actual organizations have successfully implemented some of these changes to build more equitable funding partnerships, as well as the impacts these have had on their peacebuilding efforts.

OVERARCHING FINDINGS

The overarching findings identified below focus on who provides and receives funding and what type and length of funding is provided. Overall, the findings underscore the challenges faced by women peacebuilders and organizations who may not have the visibility and capacity to easily gain access to the kinds of funding they require — highlighting the need for donors to become more responsive to these challenges.

Diversifying Funding Recipients

Funders tend to be risk-averse, resulting in funds going to the same organizations and “donor darlings.” This approach prevents innovation and progressive strategies from advancing the WPS agenda. Women Peacebuilders cite this as one reason the WPS agenda is dated, stagnant and not well aligned with current peacebuilding needs.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Carve out a percentage of funding in each funding cycle to go directly to women peacebuilders, including women who have never received funding. This amount can start small and build over time. Support must be provided to grow the organization’s capacity so that funding recipients can receive and process larger grants.
- Identify and gather the data that is needed to build a case for trying funding models that might be defined as “risky” in your organization.
- Commit to donating to a new number of organizations each year. To help with this process, allocate organizational resources to identifying and reaching out to new local initiatives and civil society organizations (CSOs), and encourage them to apply for your funding opportunities.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Work with funders to provide them with the data needed to test and try new funding models.
- Become their internal-organization-advocacy partners. Provide them with the support they need to modernize funding models and mechanisms.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

International Civil Society Action Network's (ICAN) Innovative Peace Fund (IPF)

ICAN recognizes that women peacebuilders are part of the cultural, social, political and religious fabric of their communities. They understand barriers to change, and their solutions are locally rooted and thus entirely transformational. The women peacebuilders supported through ICAN's Innovative Peace Fund (IPF) are equal partners in the mission to promote peace, resilience, equality and pluralism (PREP). Trust is key to achieving this goal. ICAN believes that women peacebuilders have the wisdom, trust, access and courage necessary to tackle critical peace and security issues — and helps them deepen and broaden their impact by investing in that trust. IPF partners define their priorities and design their interventions. ICAN offers strategic guidance to encourage innovative approaches.

A second fundamental tenet of the IPF is constant communication, which ICAN maintains with each partner throughout the project life cycle and beyond to ensure their support is responsive and maximizes the flexibility they offer. In the words of one Cameroonian partner/peacebuilder: "ICAN has a unique way of communicating with us. The monthly follow-up calls on project implementation progress are something I find so enriching and impactful. It motivates us to keep focused on our objectives, and we look forward every month to giving a brief verbal report of our accomplishments. But more than that, they're there for us as a real partner, giving us solidarity and friendship when we most need it — and [are] always available so we know we are not in this alone."

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

Canada Fund for Local Initiatives

Through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), a small-projects fund managed directly by Canada's network of diplomatic missions abroad, Canada can support a range of local organizations, with gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as both stand-alone and cross-cutting programming themes. Local organizations have a strong understanding of the local context and community needs. CFLI's project size, averaging \$28,000 (CAD), and simple application and reporting requirements allow new and maturing organizations to access funding. During the fiscal year 2019-2020, 38 local women's rights organizations in fragile and conflict-affected states received grants from CFLI. For example, in Colombia, CFLI supported a local project to promote the political participation of Awá Indigenous women. Training on women's empowerment and political participation strengthened the leadership of Awá women and made the political process within the Awá councils and in local government more inclusive, responsive and effective in meeting the needs of its constituents.

Addressing Competition Among Different Organizations

The vast majority of women peacebuilders surveyed (75 percent) noted a significant increase in competition for funding among local organizations as well as with INGOs working in-country. Some women peacebuilders find that local staff with funding application skills often leave for better salaries at INGOs. Peace funders express concern about creating unintended competition.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Jointly assess the nature of the relationships between INGOs, local women-led peacebuilding organizations and external funders to ensure a more equitable funding allocation and avoid harmful competitive dynamics.
- Require that all INGO capacity-building efforts include modules on fundraising, contracting mechanisms, other technical skills, so capacity is regularly built and replaced within partner organizations.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Create networks and build coalitions that can jointly address critical local issues. Together these networks can also apply for funding. Such an approach can decrease the competition and increase the group's capacity to receive more significant funding amounts.
- Seek out and negotiate strategic partnerships with INGOs that share the same values, mission and equitable practices. This approach can maximize and leverage fundraising resources and open access to larger pots of funding.

Building Direct Funding Relationships Between Funders and Local CSOs

The majority of women peacebuilders expressed a need for CSOs to receive funding directly from the funder rather than via a grant going through a third party (e.g., an INGO). For this to occur, funders should be ready to work with CSOs to build their capacity to meet donor requirements.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- To build CSO capacity, provide (virtual and in person) capacity mentoring.
- Earmark a percentage of available funding to help CSOs build the capacity necessary to reach more considerable reporting and organizational structure thresholds. However, base these thresholds off a reasonable amount of growth for a CSO. Do not make assumptions; instead, define together with the CSO what is appropriate.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Work with funders to understand their reporting requirements. Be honest with them about the achievable ones and the ones for which additional capacity is needed. Be ready for this to be a process.
- Be open to receiving smaller amounts of funding from a donor, successfully implementing this project, and then finding ways to grow funding partnerships.
- Form or join women's peacebuilder networks. Networks bring together more capacity and opportunities to receive more significant funds.

TOGETHER

- Identify what capacity both parties need to develop to ensure more direct funding is allocated to CSOs. Building capacity should be a two-way street.
- Work together to develop a process like a venture capital funding structure. The CSO can start with a small amount of start-up funding and increase their capacity and project effectiveness over time. Once they do this, they can be eligible to receive more significant funds to improve their capacity and scale their ideas, which will again position them to receive increased funds.²⁷

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

Wikimedia Foundation

To address a range of inequities within the funding system, the Wikimedia Foundation prioritizes a participatory decision-making model in its grant-making process, mutual trust between funder and funded, and long-term relationship-building with its network of thousands of volunteers in 80+ countries. The Foundation implements various funding methods to achieve these priorities and pursue its goal of advancing knowledge equity. This case example highlights how the Foundation works closely with grassroots volunteer groups to build their capacity to receive direct funding and eventually larger grants.

When a small grassroots volunteer group requested funds for \$14,000 (USD) to recruit and train new volunteers across several language communities, the Foundation knew that while this group did important work, it was not clear that they could execute at the scale their project proposed. Because the Wikimedia Foundation relies on a participatory decision-making model for funding grants, the selection committee consists entirely of volunteers who bring their own experiences of running projects like the ones they are reviewing. Consequently, they readily look beyond specific proposals or projects to the longer-term impact potential of the people and organizations behind them. When staff reported concerns about the applicant's capacity for this particular proposal, the committee was opposed to letting these concerns become a threshold barrier that might prevent the realization of vital local initiatives. A priority goal of their decision-making was welcoming newcomers into the free knowledge movement to create a more diverse and representative volunteer community toward the larger goal of greater knowledge equity. In line with this goal, they sought a solution that would address the risk identified by staff while still supporting the potential of the applicant, a relative newcomer to the funding space.

Here is the approach they agreed upon: The participatory committee recommended a split funding approach. They invested in a grant award for 50 percent of the requested amount. Half of the funds would support a pilot version of the proposed project, and half would be directed to growing the capacity of the volunteer group to help prepare them to expand the project over time. The intention was to offer more robust funding in the future to implement projects on a larger scale and support the group's goal of increasing representation of their cultural heritage on Wikipedia and becoming a more robust part of the global Wikimedian volunteer community.

Following the committee's direction, Wikimedia Foundation staff worked closely with the volunteer group to identify their capacity needs, helping them source training and mentorship support when needed and — more importantly to their success — actively encouraging them to pursue local channels for capacity development whenever they saw them as most relevant to their needs. The volunteer group has been actively applying the skills in which they sought training — for example, by fostering new partnerships, guiding other groups, and fine-tuning their pilot project in terms of its strategic focus and implementation plan.

Capacity concerns could have led to the rejection of this funding request. However, this funding approach was able to strengthen the mutual commitment to the shared goal of knowledge equity and deepen the partnership between the Wikimedia Foundation and this volunteer group. This partnership now has longer-term potential for realizing impact than the modest scope of the discrete project that prompted it.

The Need for Flexible and Rapid Response Funding

Women peacebuilders identified flexible and rapid-response funding as the most needed improvement among the types of grants offered.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Each funding cycle, earmark a percentage of funding as flexible and rapid-response funding.
- Provide some funding that is smaller in size (\$1,000-\$5,000 USD), requires minimal application steps (one to two pages maximum), and can be allocatable in 10-15 business days.
- Ensure that reports for these types of funds are not an extra burden on peacebuilders. Think of the top three to five reporting requirements and be open to receiving answers through various media (e.g., over WhatsApp messenger or audio voice message).

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Work with funders to help them build a case for rapid responsive and flexible forms of funding. Give donors clear examples of how such funding will enable more effective responses to the community's peacebuilding needs.
- Be prepared to complete reports and provide feedback. This process helps the donors build their capacity. It empowers them with the data they need to create a case for why these funding models matter and how an organization can implement them.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:**Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund**

In 2019, to advance the meaningful participation of women in peace processes, the UN Secretary-General called upon the UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund to open a rapid response window to address the funding gap for urgent practical support to civil society organizations. The Direct Support stream of the WPHF Rapid Response Window (RRW) opened for applications in September 2020 and is designed to ensure that women peacebuilders and civil society organizations can request and access a wide range of rapid and flexible support to address immediate logistical and technical barriers to their participation.

In February 2021, RRW received a request from a CSO for urgent logistical support for a woman peacebuilder's participation in a peace process. A total funding amount of \$20,500 (USD) is disbursed in monthly tranches of \$4,100 (USD) to cover daily subsistence allowance costs, including transport and accommodation. The proposal was approved in five business days through the RRW's governance mechanism, and the first tranche of support was allocated within 15 business days of approval.

○ The Need for Long-Term, Core Funding

While 58 percent of peace funders indicated that their most common timeframe for WPS funding is one to three years, most women peacebuilders expressed a need for core and project funding of at least two to five years to plan, create and adequately implement effective peacebuilding programming. Women peacebuilders cited a decrease in the long-term and core funding available over the past five years despite the fact that peace funders reported an increase in the overall funding to WPS initiatives during that period. A lack of core funding remains the most cited barrier to achieving women peacebuilders' organizational growth.

Recommendations**FUNDER**

- Consider shifting more funding to long-term, core support.
- If shifting funds to core support is not possible, work with women peacebuilders to understand how project support can best be utilized to implement projects while also addressing organizational or technical needs.
- Where timeframes cannot be extended, come to a shared and honest assessment with women peacebuilders about possible outcomes within the shorter timeframe.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Help peace funders advocate within their organizations for longer funding timeframes when needed.
- Explore different organizational structures and collaborative models that require less core support to sustain peacebuilding programs.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

The Women Peacebuilders Envelope

In October 2020, to highlight the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and address gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs announced a \$5 million (CAD) envelope dedicated to supporting women peacebuilders. This new funding envelope aims to directly support women's peacebuilding organizations (WPBOs) and break down barriers to funding by assuming a more flexible programming approach wherever possible. The application and reporting templates are the same for other programming by Canada's Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, which are less burdensome than for most development programs. Still, hands-on support will be provided to organizations to develop concept notes, proposals and logic models in their application process.

The types of interventions can include but are not limited to technical capacity-building on diverse areas of expertise, including organizational development, conflict resolution, negotiations, strategic accompaniment, small grant-making and protection of peacebuilders. Expected outcomes will remain high level and as flexible as possible. Duration of projects will be 12-24 months to allow maximum flexibility for project implementation and recognition of time needed for many peacebuilding activities. There is a minimum benchmark of \$100,000 (CAD) to a maximum of \$1 million (CAD) per project. Eligible expenses will include the incorporation of risk assessments, protection mechanisms to ensure the safety of peacebuilders, institutional capacity-building, and psychosocial and emotional support. The goal is also to ensure a fair allocation of resources among parties where primary partners who sub-grant to smaller organizations are doing so equitably.

FUNDING CYCLE FINDINGS

In addition to the overarching findings in the last section, the research initiative revealed several findings relevant to various stages of the project funding cycle. From decision-making about funding priorities to the accessibility of funding announcements and applications to the challenges of meeting reporting requirements, these findings all point towards changes that can make the stages of the funding cycle more accessible and inclusive.

Decision-Making About Funding Priorities

While 92 percent of peace funders indicated that the WPS agenda has an important influence on decision-making about funding allocation, 42 percent of peace funders reported that funding decisions are made by staff and top-level leadership in strategic planning meetings — meaning that these funders make decisions on priorities with little input or collaboration from Women Peacebuilders.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Create processes that allow decision-making to begin with landscape analysis and proactive input from women peacebuilders on needs and emerging issues.
- Advocacy for a renewed WPS National Action Plan (NAP) can support locally driven shifts to funding focus areas at a national level.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Build relationships with funding partners, women peacebuilding networks and WPS organizations that inform funding agencies, and let these entities know your willingness to help inform and shape their funding opportunities. If they do not have a transparent process for doing so, advocate for one (e.g., form a women peacebuilders advisory committee, whose members rotate).

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:**U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)**

In Northeast Nigeria, USAID is working to strengthen women and girls' resilience to security threats by enhancing their roles in their communities to promote peace. USAID works with community-based organizations, government agencies, traditional and religious leaders, and local women leaders to promote platforms and build coalitions that bring women together for dialogue, engagement, advocacy and experience-sharing to enhance women and girls' opportunities for safer, more productive lives.

○ Funding Announcement Visibility

Peace funders tend to announce funding opportunities through internal or partner networks (25 percent) and via the peace funder's website (22 percent). Meanwhile, women peacebuilders most often look for funding opportunities through email or an existing peace funder relationship. Therefore, if a woman peacebuilder is not a part of the funder's announcement list or aware of their website, nearly half of the announcements may exist where women peacebuilders are not looking.

Recommendations**FUNDER**

- Release announcements where women peacebuilders access information, including email, online and printed media sources that target women peacebuilders, messaging or social media platforms.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Attend networking events to increase visibility, build connections with peace funders, and educate yourself about other funding sources.

Funding Announcement Accessibility

Funding announcements are perceived to be “elite” and out of reach for many women peacebuilders since they are often written in English, offered through the internet only and structured in a way that demands prior technical capacity.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Create internal procedures for more equitable outreach, including analog application options and announcements in multiple languages.
- Form a committee of women peacebuilders with whom to beta-test funding opportunities’ announcements. Be prepared to offer an honorarium to these women for their time and expertise.
- Allow other types of submissions, like presentations and pitches, in place of written concept notes so that you can hear people’s best ideas rather than simply relying on who writes best to within outlined structure.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Proactively request technical grant writing support from peace funders and partner networks before funding opportunities are announced.
- Inform donors if you are willing to serve on or be part of any funding development process. Being a part of this process can provide a chance to let donors know whether their funding opportunities are too “elite” and inaccessible to many women peacebuilders.

○ Addressing Barriers in the Application Process

The vast majority women peacebuilders (85 percent) find it “generally difficult” to apply for funding. Online platforms, application length and complexity account for 54 percent of significant barriers to completing applications as identified by women peacebuilders. A potential contributing factor to this challenge is that only one in four local, women-led peacebuilding organizations has dedicated staff for fundraising and proposal-writing.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Shift to initial Statements of Interest, which are shorter and might better enable equitable processes such as co-designing the project and timeline.
- Consider holding office hours, advocate for longer response times for funding application cycles, and place completion time estimates on each announcement.
- Post funding opportunities on lightly designed websites that are backward-compatible with low-speed internet and a range of personal devices. Beta-test websites on target audiences to ensure they work well in a range of local contexts.
- Invite women peacebuilders from other countries to join in scoring proposals, and be prepared to compensate them for their time and expertise. (Reach out in advance to these women to ensure no conflict of interest.)

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Seek out local or external resources for support in efficiently responding to funding opportunities.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

Search for Common Ground

Search for Common Ground (Search) is implementing a project in coastal Kenya, and an element of this project focuses on supporting small initiatives led by young local peacebuilders. In Search's first attempt to identify projects, they followed a "traditional donor model": they put out a call for proposals and asked community-based organizations to apply using a 10-page format that outlined their idea, justified the problem rationale, and provided design logic. After doing this twice, Search realized that all of the applications they were receiving were from men. Search realized that their "traditional" approach reinforced the systemic discrimination based on gender, age and religion that they were seeking to address.

It was at this point that they decided to change their approach to granting out funds entirely. To begin, with the next pot of funds, they set aside funding just for applications from women and only accepted applications from female-led organizations.

Next, Search started the funding process with a pitch session rather than written grant proposals. After a project activity, Search gathered the young women and asked them to share ideas they had for small peacebuilding projects that would address tensions in their communities. Together, Search and these young women brainstormed their ideas verbally so that people could express themselves in a context that worked for them. Search then identified the people/organizations who would move to the next phase of the process, submitting a short written proposal.

The third change Search made was to reduce the written proposal to just two pages. This document focused on capturing the ideas agreed upon during the brainstorm session and was not an appeal for funding. Search also supported the writing process as needed, and electronic submissions were not required.

Developing Reporting Requirements that Work for Both Funders and Women Peacebuilders

A common barrier identified by peace funders is that women peacebuilders' project evaluation reports often do not meet peace-funder organizational standards. Women peacebuilders express difficulty fulfilling monitoring and evaluation requirements, noting that quantitative indicators are insufficient to capture program impact.

Recommendations

FUNDER

- Pilot different evaluation approaches and use those pilots to advocate internally for more participatory, evaluation processes.

PEACEBUILDER/APPLICANT

- Collaboratively work with peace funders to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan that realistically aligns with your organization's data collection capacities and the funder's needs.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:

Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW)

To ensure that reports are not an extra burden on peacebuilders, WPHF requires only one report within two weeks of completing all tranches of support. The RRW Direct Support stream uses a short and straightforward narrative process rather than a log frame approach for CSO reporting since the support is related to practical and specific logistical or technical costs rather than a project-based grant.

The RRW Direct Support stream complements WPHF's regular funding stream. RRW's approach enables women peacebuilders to address immediate barriers to their participation in formal peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements, ensuring that their knowledge and expertise inform current decision-making on peace and security.

The WPS agenda has taken significant steps towards realizing women's greater inclusion in all decision-making regarding peacebuilding and protection against violence. However, there is more work to be done. Unfortunately, the agenda has not met its goals due to multiple barriers — some compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic — including inadequate funding devoted to women peacebuilders. Addressing rising levels of global violence and continuing to advance the WPS agenda will require changes to the WPS funding system. This report brings evidence-based solutions to this endeavor, facilitating the critical shift to more equitable funding partnerships.

Funding partnerships are often the first opportunity for non-domestic WPS organizations to build relationships with women peacebuilders' communities. Therefore, as this research found, how these relationships are structured will influence how responsive current and future peacebuilding efforts are to needs on the ground — and therefore how effective peace projects will be. Simply put, if the funding partnership is equitable, then the peacebuilding project's impact increases.

Additionally, on an encouraging note, this study found that achieving equitable partnerships does not require endless resources or sweeping changes to the WPS system. As the findings section highlights, improvements to the WPS funding system are within reach. If implemented, these modifications have the potential to create more inclusive and effective funding. A larger swath of women peacebuilders with various backgrounds, experiences, ages, ideas and capacities will be brought into the WPS space. By bringing in new women peacebuilders that break from the usual "donor darlings" or organizational types, the WPS agenda can advance. Making these changes will require funders to fund differently. Funders will need to provide time and space to conceive, test and implement new approaches.

One noteworthy discovery: COVID-19 has changed the funding landscape — and, in many regards, for the better. Before the pandemic, donors often expressed their inability to implement rapid-response and flexible funding, offer small pools of funding, continuously communicate with funding recipients, or decrease over-burdensome application and reporting processes. However, the research found that donors have increased their communication and engagement with women peacebuilders during the pandemic.

Specifically, 84 percent of the women peacebuilders surveyed said that communication with new and existing donors has increased and that donors use various mediums to engage with them and seek their inputs. Additionally, the research found that donors have increased their rapid-response and flexible funding.

Lastly, as the global community continues to navigate a COVID-19 reality, this pandemic has brought new and persistent issues to the surface. It has also put tremendous pressure on existing systems. In response, these systems are bending or breaking down. The WPS funding system is one of the systems under pressure and adapting to this new reality. The disruption and stress COVID-19 has brought to the world is also driving innovation and creating an opportunity to build a better future. As our and other research highlights, the WPS funding system has made significant and critical adaptations in response to the pandemic. These pivots also prove that this system can change and respond rapidly to women peacebuilders' needs. The WPS funding system can fund differently, and — with the evidence-based solutions offered in this report — peace funders and women peacebuilders can work together to create a more effective, inclusive and equitable funding system that advances the WPS agenda.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research team turned to participatory action research (PAR) to guide their research. First, PAR provided a methodology for increased accountability, inclusion and substantive interchange between researchers and Learning Community members who would otherwise be considered research “subjects.”²⁸ Second, this methodology provided a structure for data collection informed, led and created by all Community members. This process ensured the research agenda accurately captured the realities and needs of the WPS funding landscape. The research objective of identifying and investigating equitable partnership models is better served by adopting equitable methodological strategies that include the perspectives of and foster effective collaboration between trained researchers and Learning Community members. PAR provided this methodology. The research integrated PAR’s emphasis on cycles of reflection throughout its process. This iterative process refined the research focus, the approach to data collection, and the framing of the research outputs.

The research team also used human-centered design (HCD) to inform its process. HCD ensured that the people most actively engaged with the WPS funding system were put at the center of problem-solving, such that the answers emerging from the research were tailored to their realities and needs. To implement this approach, the team used the five steps of HCD thinking to develop its research: leading with empathy, defining the problem, ideating, developing model prototypes, and ground-truthing ideas.²⁹ This process worked to ensure that the research aligned with the WPS policymakers’, practitioners’ and funders’ data needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND UNITS OF ANALYSIS

It took six iterations to develop the final research question. During each iteration, the women peacebuilders and funders further revised and refined the question to ensure that it accurately captured the realities and needs of both groups. The final research question was:

How do funders and women peacebuilders create equitable and sustainable partnerships to end cycles of violence?

Based on the research question, the Community members chose women-led peacebuilding initiatives and organizations, women peacebuilders and INGO-, IGO- and NGO-based peace funders as the units of analysis.

The research sub-questions guided both the qualitative and quantitative analysis. To develop them, the Learning Community progressed through four iterations and ended up with the following:

What current and past challenges, successes and opportunities exist within the WPS funding landscape?

Why are equitable funding partnerships essential to peacebuilding?

How can an equitable funding partnership be built?

How has the WPS funding system responded to COVID-19?

How can the WPS funding system be improved to best align with current and future women peacebuilders' needs?

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