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FORGOTTEN BY FUNDERS

An exploratory report on the challenges of resourcing work with and for incarcerated women and girls worldwide



Photo: Tom Bradley/AdvocAid

WOMEN
Beyond
WALLS

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This report was written in a personal capacity and does not reflect the views of any of the authors' institutions or affiliations.

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ABOUT US

Women Beyond Walls is a new movement-building platform, amplifying voices to end the over-incarceration and over-criminalisation of women worldwide. We aim to build collective power and to resource resistance in order to shape political advocacy and agendas. We are a space to bring together women with lived experience, lawyers, activists, academics, philanthropists, criminal justice professionals, feminists and allies. We are a space for people new to this issue, as well as people who have ideas and experiences to share.

For more information, please visit womenbeyondwalls.org



@womenbeyondwalls



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OUR VALUES

- Centering the voices of women with lived experiences of the justice system
- Rooted in solidarity
- Being amplifiers and facilitators for individuals and organisations to be seen and heard
- Learning and unlearning as a way to collaboratively thrive and flourish
- Taking bold action
- Generosity and gratitude
- Celebrate, value, and respect diversity
- Integrity and humility

INTRODUCTION

Impactful work responding to women's incarceration facing an urgent funding gap

Over 1 million women are controlled by the criminal justice system and [over 741,000 women](#) are in prison worldwide. There are [at least 800 women](#) on death row. The global female prison population [is estimated](#) to have increased by about 59% from 2000 to 2020. Over the past decade, the number of women in prison has grown at a [faster rate than that of men](#). Poverty, abuse, discriminatory laws and punitive drug policies are the key drivers behind the alarming increase in women's incarceration. Thirty-five percent of women imprisoned worldwide are [imprisoned for drug offences](#), compared to just 19% of men.

Incarceration has a devastating impact on women and their families. The rate of self-harm in women's prisons [is higher](#) than in male prisons. The [majority](#) of women in prison are mothers. There are at least [19,000 children living in prison](#) with a parent, most often with their mothers.

Despite these stark statistics, as this exploratory report highlights, work with and for incarcerated/formerly incarcerated women and girls is flourishing but desperately underfunded.

Organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls are already operating in a difficult funding context. In 2018, a [study](#) by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) found that development aid funding for justice had decreased by 40% over the past 4 years¹.

[Research](#) by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) found that 99% of development aid and foundation grants still do not directly reach women's rights and feminist organisations. In particular, those groups working on intersecting forms of marginalisation (LGBTIQ, indigenous, migrant and refugees, young feminists, and sex workers) are funded even less. Only 0.42% of foundation grants are allocated towards women's rights.

Organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls are already operating in a difficult funding context.

- Funding for justice decreased by 40% between 2014 - 2018.
- 99% of development aid and foundation grants still do not directly reach women's rights and feminist organisations.
- Only 0.42% of foundation grants are allocated towards women's rights.

Beyond this foundational funding challenge, the issue of women’s incarceration is also deprioritised. Work with and for incarcerated women and girls is far too often [left out](#) of mainstream women’s rights and human rights dialogues, convenings and movements. A prime example was the recent Generation Equality Forum, billed as the biggest convening on women’s rights in the last 25 years. Women’s incarceration [did not feature](#) in any of the six action coalitions - key thematic action areas chosen for the global community to focus on for the next five years - in spite of the relevance of the action coalitions on ending gender-based violence, economic justice and rights and feminist movements and leadership.

Notwithstanding this lack of prioritisation and resourcing, vibrant, innovative, impactful and critical work is being done, in particular by women with lived experience of the justice system as well as lawyers, researchers and activists. In August 2021, Women Beyond Walls reached out to 34 organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls to better understand the funding challenges they face, both in terms of quantity and quality of funding. These organisations span 24 countries across five continents.

Location of surveyed organisations



Africa

Ghana
Kenya
Malawi
Nigeria
Senegal
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Zimbabwe

Asia

Cambodia
India
Indonesia
Pakistan
Sri Lanka

Europe

United Kingdom
France

Middle East

Jordan

North America

Canada
Jamaica
Mexico

South America

Bolivia
Brazil
Venezuela
Colombia

Australia/Oceania

Australia

Methodology

This report draws from the survey responses of a total of 34 organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls. The survey was developed taking into account the objectives of this report, the experience of those involved, and the mandate of Women Beyond Walls. It was also informed by consultations with experts and volunteers.

The study relies on both quantitative and qualitative survey responses. While the former provided descriptive statistics, the latter were analysed using thematic analysis. The authors obtained informed consent from all survey participants and anonymised their responses.

Who are the organisations?

- The survey focused on the Global South: 32% of responses were from organisations working in Africa and 21% in Asia.
- The majority of the organisations surveyed (more than 60%) operate with less than 20 staff.
- The majority of organisations (74%) have been in operation for over 10 years.
- The majority of respondents are operating on small to medium annual sized budgets. Of respondents to this question, 52% operate with less than \$500,000 per year.
- More than half of organisations have women with lived experience of the justice system involved or leading their work.
- The survey did not focus on organisations working only in the United States of America (USA) as the funding landscape is more complex and there are several organisations working in this space. A dedicated mapping and funding exploration of organisations working only in the USA should be carried out in conjunction with leading organisations, such as the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women.

Our research found that resourcing for work with and for incarcerated women and girls has failed to adequately address the needs and capacities of these groups, including resourcing by feminist and women’s rights funders. The findings below present a compelling case for why work with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system urgently needs increased resources and more effective funding.

Main Findings

- 01 Established organisations are doing vital work using multiple strategies in a challenging context.
- 02 Addressing women’s incarceration is not a priority for most donors.
- 03 Over two-thirds of organisations do not receive funding from feminist and women’s rights funders.
- 04 The majority of organisations lack access to flexible, core funding.
- 05 Most of the organisations surveyed are facing precarious funding situations.
- 06 Organisations are facing challenges with the funding process and are not able to fund key staff positions.
- 07 Organisations receive insufficient funding to fully implement all their strategies, particularly their work with women and girls post-incarceration.
- 08 Organisations are also in need of non-financial support for sustainability.

10 recommendations are listed on page 24

FINDINGS

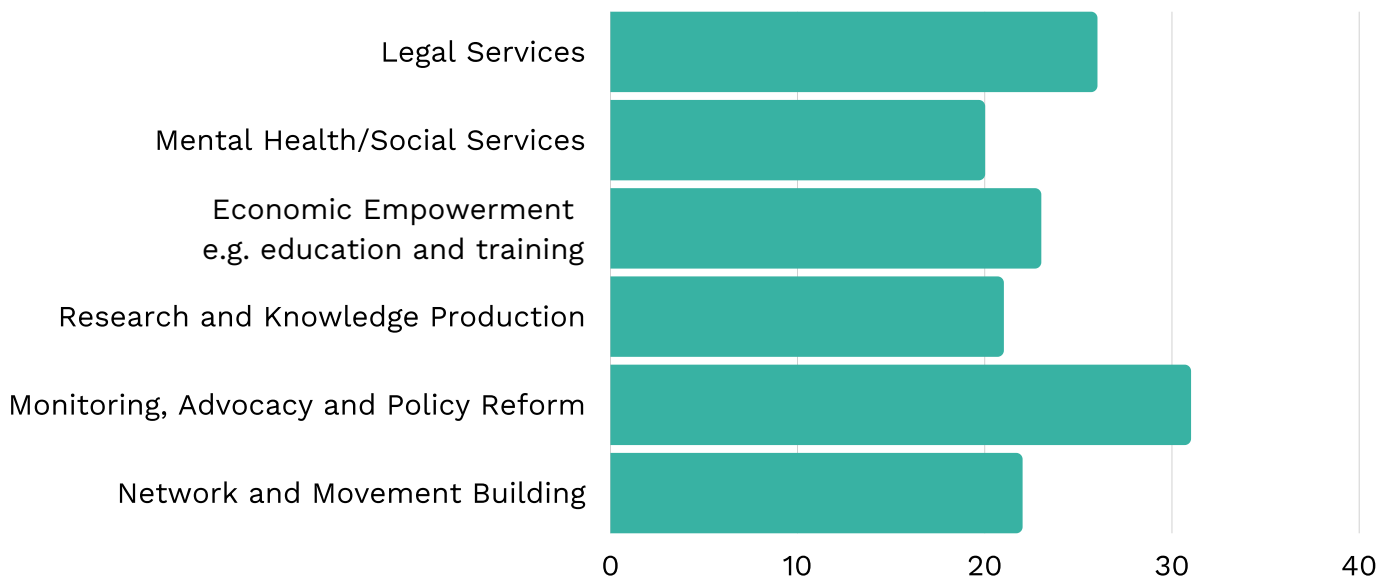
01 ESTABLISHED ORGANISATIONS ARE DOING VITAL WORK USING MULTIPLE STRATEGIES IN A CHALLENGING CONTEXT

The survey demonstrated that there are established organisations worldwide working with and for incarcerated women and girls, using multiple strategies and working in intersectional ways.

The majority of organisations surveyed had been in operation for over 10 years, with 50% operating for 20 years or more². Half of the organisations have women with lived experience of the criminal justice system involved in or leading the work. Organisations are working holistically, using varied strategies and working with and for women and girls at various stages of the criminal justice process, from pre-trial and trial, through to sentencing and post-release.

² Further mapping is necessary to fully reach out to the variety of organisations and activists working in this space, in particular newer organisations and unregistered groups.

What strategies do you use in your work with and for women and/or girls?



These organisations are creating vital change in the lives of women and girls and are changing the justice system through their work: for example, providing essential legal services and reducing the time women spend in pre-trial detention; abolishing the death penalty; lobbying for gender-responsive drug policies; providing peer support to women impacted by the justice system; assisting formerly incarcerated women upon release; conducting participatory research to better understand the causes and consequences of women’s incarceration; shaping national and global policies. This is a vibrant and innovative area of activism that deserves to be better resourced.

However, the majority are operating on small budgets with small teams.

They are also working in challenging contexts. 68% of organisations said it was difficult or very difficult to do this work in their country, taking into account the political and social environment. They listed various challenges, such as accessing prisons, restricted civic space, and stigma against incarcerated people. These challenges have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic but organisations have tried to adapt and continue their work, such as through the use of technology.

Further, 29% of respondents had members threatened, arrested, or harassed for their work in the last year.

- More than 60% of organisations operate with less than 20 staff members.
- The majority of respondents are operating on small to medium annual sized budgets. Of respondents to this question, 52% operate with less than \$500,000 per year.

*Voices from the survey*³:

Challenges facing organisations working with and for incarcerated women

“In [our country] civil society is at risk, with attacks on civil society organisations, especially feminist ones, and fiscal reforms that make access to financing difficult.”

“Since 2019, there has been an increase of arrests and violations of freedom of speech in [our country]. Many vocal activists were criminalised and attacked.”

“Very negative attitudes towards incarcerated people. The severe marginalisation and lack of safety of so many people we work with”.

“Non-cooperation of some government institutions on some issues, especially access to military detention centres.”

“[Our country] is not an easy country to work in when considering electricity can cut out, internet can stop being available, it takes time to travel due to poor infrastructure, working with officials can be challenging especially when advocating for them to change how things are being done, the justice system is unjust, cultural and social norms create huge gender inequalities, and poverty is endemic.”

02 ADDRESSING WOMEN’S INCARCERATION IS NOT A PRIORITY FOR MOST DONORS

The majority of organisations surveyed felt that addressing women’s incarceration was not a priority for most donors who are seeking to fund human rights, women’s rights or access to justice. Available funding opportunities did not sufficiently align with their strategies or areas of work, making it challenging to access funding and sustain their vital work.

As outlined, these organisations are already working in a difficult funding context with limited funding for justice and women’s rights organisations. [OECD research](#) from 2016–2017 found that a meagre 1% of all gender-focused aid went to women’s organisations. The bulk of this money went to international organisations based in the donor countries, rather than [feminist groups leading their own, context-specific solutions](#).

Voices from the survey:
Challenges accessing funding

"Working with currently or formerly incarcerated women is not a priority topic for many donors though, and this does make securing funding extremely challenging. If we try to fit into their 'economic empowerment' or 'poverty' or 'SGBVH' interventions it means we design whole new programmes that pull a large number of staff away from our core mandate."

"Accessing funding for criminal justice isn't easy at all, it is always overlooked by most donors."

"The donors do not show interest in supporting this part of the population."

"Some funders do not have the criminal justice system as focus areas of interest. There are many organisations competing for few opportunities."

"[There is] lack of interest by funders in issues related to women's incarceration; those funders that are doing this work in the USA are not interested in supporting such work internationally."

"Certain funding does not fall into the category of [our] work."

"While legal aid is necessary for women who are in contact with the law, many funders do not provide funds for legal aid services because it is difficult to put an exact target for case assistance and some cases need more time to be handled."

"The limitation of the themes covered by funders [is a challenge]"

"[There is a lack of] availability of relevant calls for proposals for a niche area."

"Very few grants are opened for the financing of projects for the rights of persons deprived of liberty."

Some participants felt that this lack of prioritisation was a reflection of the negative public perception around incarceration, which impacts donor agendas and also makes it challenging to access corporate or individual support.

Voices from the survey:
Challenges arising from negative public attitudes

“Engaging individual donors is particularly difficult as women in the criminal justice system is often an unpopular cause in a 'tough on crime' political climate.”

“There is generally a negative perception about women in prison or prisoners that make it hard for the society to support [them]. The question of crime is never an interest to most donors or corporate [funders] and many would choose not to associate themselves with prisons.”

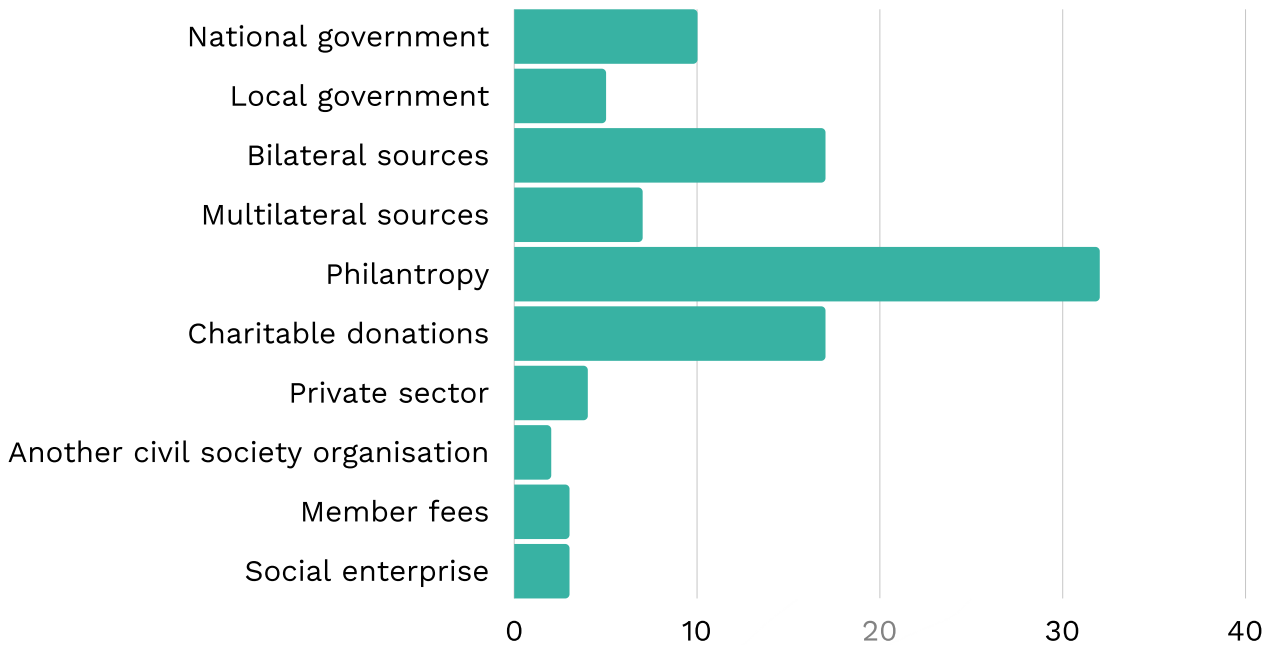
“People do not believe that people with ‘criminal records’ deserve support.”

“The criminal justice system is cut off from the larger public, and public participation in the system is nil. There is a lack of adequate conversation around issues of justice even within the academic circles. Lack of public participation leaves organisations isolated and fighting the battles in the system alone.”

“We believe that in [our country], talking about the criminal justice system is controversial in itself. Talking about women, teenagers and being a group mostly of young Black women, the theme encompasses multiple oppressive social issues.”



Where did your funding come from in the past 2 years?



This lack of prioritisation extends to governmental and multilateral organisations, as well as philanthropic sources. Only 44% of respondents said they received government funding (29% from national government sources and 15% from local government sources). Only 21% had received funding from multilateral organisations (such as the United Nations) in the past two years.

Voices from the survey:

Challenges arising from lack of funding from government/multilateral sources

“[A major challenge is] the government not prioritising funding for criminalised and imprisoned women and girls.”

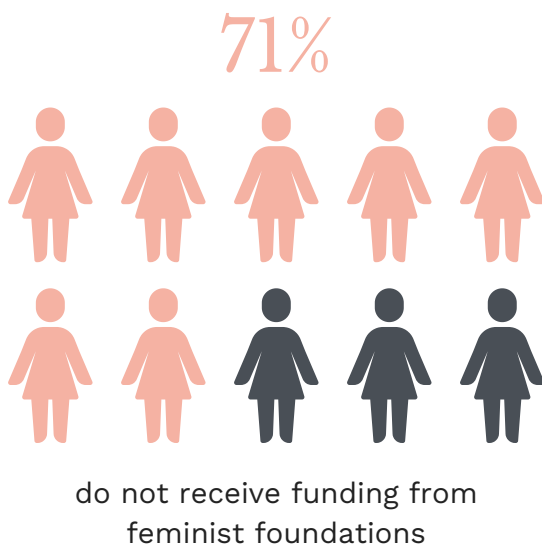
“The rights of those imprisoned/prosecuted is not at the forefront of political agendas and funding focuses primarily on prevention of crime.”

Any donor agenda which aims to focus resources on human rights, access to justice, gender equality or the “[leave no one behind](#)” pledge (Principle Two, UN Sustainable Development Goals) should consider funding work with and for incarcerated women and girls. Funders should dedicate new funding for this work and create specific portfolios that focus funding in an intersectional and holistic way, rather than through siloed donor interventions e.g. through only a legal services or public health lens.

03

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF ORGANISATIONS DO NOT RECEIVE FUNDING FROM FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS FUNDERS

Seventy-one percent of respondents said they do not receive funding from foundations that identify as women's rights or feminist foundations⁴.



Voices from the survey: Challenges accessing women's rights funding

"We have also found that foundations that fund gender-related work are not interested in incarceration issues."

"Foundations that fund feminist organisations etc are not interested in incarceration issues - and there is a conflict in terms of carceral feminism."

"In the broader women's rights movement it is very difficult to embrace work in prisons and funders exclude such initiatives. They base their argument on the [small] number of women versus the number of men."

This seems to reflect the lack of prioritisation on addressing women's incarceration in the broader women's rights movement. The issue was not featured in the Generation Equality Forum, the largest gathering on women's rights since the 1995 Beijing conference. This consequently meant it was not reflected in resulting [commitments](#).

The Generation Equality Forum garnered \$40 billion in pledges to support a bold strategy for gender equality. For example, [Open Society Foundations](#) (OSF) pledged at least \$100 million over five years to fund feminist political mobilisation and leadership, with a significant amount going to feminist funds. The [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) pledged \$2.1 billion over the next five years to promote women's economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, and women's leadership. This is reportedly the largest-ever funding pledge explicitly for gender equality. These funds have been dedicated to six key issues but, whilst the Forum aimed to foster an intersectional, intergenerational, and intersectoral approach to gender equality, any attention to incarcerated women was notably absent.

⁴ The question posed was: "Do you receive funding from foundations that identify as women's rights or feminist foundations? This could include funders such as Mama Cash, Equality Fund, African Women's Development Fund, Global Fund for Women etc."

This moment - with global attention on and resourcing for gender equality - presents a critical opportunity to address the longstanding neglect of work with and for incarcerated women and girls. Feminist and women's rights funders, as well as other donors, should listen to the views and challenges of organisations working in this space, especially to women with lived experience, and consider how they plan to address issues around incarceration within their women's rights and gender justice strategies.

We are heartened to see increased attention to and discussion around [feminist funding practices](#) and recognise the efforts that many donors have made to re-consider their funding practices. A feminist funding approach will address many of the challenges outlined in this report.

The Astraea Foundation's Feminist Funding Principles

- 01 Fund those most impacted by gendered oppression.
- 02 Fund at the intersection of women's rights and LGBTQI liberation movements.
- 03 Apply an intersectional lens to break down funding silos.
- 04 Provide flexible and sustained core funding to activists.
- 05 Fund efforts to make social and cultural change, alongside and as part of legal and policy change.
- 06 Support cross-issue and cross-regional movement building.
- 07 Go beyond grantmaking: accompany activists with capacity building and leadership support.
- 08 Invest in holistic security and healing justice.
- 09 Support work at the crossroads of feminist activism, digital rights, and internet freedom.
- 10 Partner with women's and other activist-led funds to ensure that funding reaches the grassroots.

04 THE MAJORITY OF ORGANISATIONS LACK ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE, CORE FUNDING

The survey highlighted an urgent need to improve the quality of funding to organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls. With [flexible, unrestricted](#) funding, organisations can self-determine their agendas, respond to changes, seize opportunities, cover their operating costs and invest funds where they are most needed. Providing flexible and sustained core funding is a tenet of [feminist funding principles](#) in order to support the impact and sustainability of women’s rights organisations.

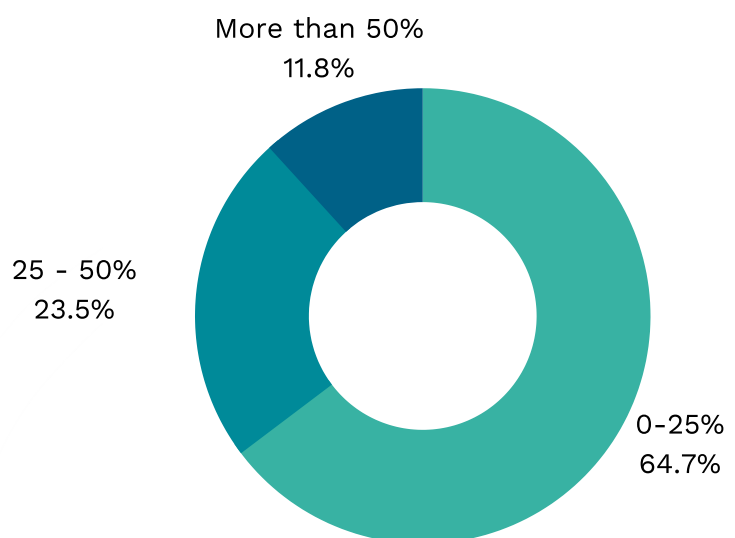
However, the majority of respondents received less than 25% of core funding in the last two years.

Voices from the survey: Challenges accessing flexible, core funding

“There’s an increasing recognition that women’s rights organisations require core/flexible funding but there’s not very much out there and it’s very competitive.”

“[There is a] lack of core funding opportunities.”

What percentage of the funding that you have received in the last 2 years is core funding?



There is limited availability of flexible funding and many organisations working in the human rights space find this challenging. However, research in 2018 by the [Human Rights Funders Network](#) showed that there are regional disparities. Many Global North funders provide more restricted forms of funding to recipients in the Global South and East, or don't fund them at all. Funding to North America is six times more likely to come in the form of core, flexible grants than in Asia and the Pacific, and 15 times more likely than in the Caribbean.

Project funding, which is favoured by many donors and especially by bilateral donors - such as through Embassies - is highly problematic. It undermines organisations' agency and autonomy. It limits their ability to pursue the mission and vision of their work as they have to shift priorities and framing based on donor interests and agendas, which can change year on year. It presents real pragmatic problems to organisations with retaining staff and covering overheads. It also means that organisations face challenges with responding to emergencies or opportunities, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or a shift in the political landscape.

Funders need to not only increase the quantity of funding, but also improve the quality of funding by expanding access to flexible, core grants to organisations working in this space.



05 Most of the organisations surveyed are facing precarious funding situations

The survey highlighted an urgent need to improve the quality of funding to organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls. With flexible, unrestricted funding, organisations can self-determine their agendas, respond to changes, seize opportunities, cover their operating costs and invest funds where they are most needed. Providing flexible and sustained core funding is a tenet of feminist funding principles in order to support the impact and sustainability of women’s rights organisations.

However, as outlined above, the majority of respondents received less than 25% of core funding in the last two years.

26%



said they may not be able to operate next year due to lack of funds

30%



said they have to make cuts but will survive

The majority of organisations’ reported that the quantity and quality of funding they receive has not improved this year in comparison to last year.

Voices from the survey:

Challenges with a precarious funding situation

“Working with imprisoned women and girls is very difficult for us as an organisation and when we don't get funding support it demoralises us and our team. There are very few organisations working with incarcerated women and girls and with this situation we may not sustain our interventions.”

“Our organisation represents the situation of larger NGOs that are well funded, but where this area of work (women and incarceration) is very underfunded and may not be able to continue for that reason.”

“Over the last 10 years, there seems to have been a general reduction in funding for work with incarcerated people. Many of those who are interested in funding this work have very small budgets to give. Budget cuts experienced by foundations themselves and disagreements between liaising foundation staff and final decision-makers on the board have been a barrier in the past. [There is] resistance amongst many donors to give core support.”

“In the last five years access to funding for prison work has been restricted. [There are] reduced funding streams to provide support in prison for Black and migrant women.”

“There have been less funding opportunities. Most funding opportunities [came] to a halt during COVID-19. The funding sector has become competitive so sometimes funding is granted to organisations with short term projects or are focused on the political season ahead as well as the current social problems which narrows our chances.”

“Organisations working in the women's sector face incredibly tough competition when applying for funding. As a result of COVID-19, even more organisations are competing for a smaller pot of money.”

Many organisations listed Open Society Foundations (OSF) as one of their key donors. However, there is ongoing uncertainty with concerns that the current OSF restructuring will result in loss of funding for an already underfunded area. Given that “justice and intersectionality” is one of [three key pillars](#) of the new OSF restructuring, there is an opportunity to expand, deepen, and holistically fund this area. It also creates new opportunities for other donors to meet this gap and reduce over-reliance on one donor.



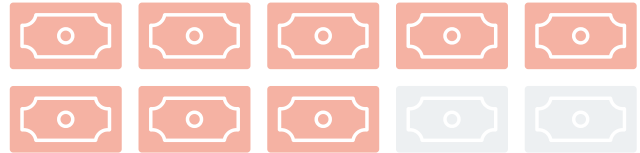
The survey also indicated that there is a heavy reliance on individual donors and fundraising events which is unpredictable and leaves organisations with unstable funding sources.

50%



named individual donors/ fundraising events as a source of funding in the last two years

79%



had reserves or savings of less than six months of their annual budget

Few organisations have stable reserves or savings. The majority of respondents (79%) had reserves or savings of less than six months of their annual budget. This puts organisations at risk, particularly if there are delays in donor funding, and means they are less able to respond to changing circumstances, such as during the Ebola or COVID-19 pandemics.

Funders should build multi-year partnerships that allow organisations to do long-term strategic work and support organisations to build reserves to allow for sustainability.

Three main issues were identified as key barriers in being able to access and implement funding:

a. Challenges with the funding application process

Voices from the survey:

Challenges with the funding application process

“Many of the foundations function on an invitation only basis, thus limiting access to funds to those who have the right connections.”

“Timing - we cannot turn things around in the ridiculously short time frames donors give us. Calls sometimes only have a week in which to provide information, and then the donor takes months to get back to you.”

“The requirements of the donors in applying for calls, the restrictions on the fund budget and the topics that must be worked on, in addition to the procedures for obtaining government approval for the fund.”

“Exposure to new foundations, inexperience in writing overly technical grant proposals to win bids for international calls such as those issued by the EU and the UN.”

“The main difficulty is that we are a relatively small group to apply for certain funds, but too large and organised for others.”

“We lead joint bids on behalf of smaller charities so are sometimes seen as richer than we are and ruled out as [we have] over £2m income.”

“We are still a startup, and still building our portfolio and successes to attract major multiyear funders.”

“Fundraising feels so incredibly hard, all the time.”

b. Lack of flexibility and onerous requirements from funders with implementation

Voices from the survey:

Challenges with implementing funding

“Donors have their own agenda and want to fund us to implement their projects rather than funding projects/ideas that are driven by our organisation.”

“One of the barriers is the lack of flexibility of some funding when we need to change the activity. For example, during the pandemic, there are many instances when we shift the activities from offline to online, resulting in the budget under-spending. While some donors are quite flexible and allow us to propose other activities, some required us to undergo long processes that eventually exhaust our time.”

“Finance team is absorbed in donor reporting/requirements rather than organisational finance and this puts huge pressure on a small team.”

“Monitoring Evaluation and Learning capacity - every project has a different log-frame and requirements.”

“Working in consortiums takes time, and when led by an international NGO, places huge pressure on us to adjust our systems/processes to their needs.”

“COVID-19 funding put a lot of pressure on our systems, as it involved a huge amount of purchasing which needs to be scrutinised - the time/capacity to manage this is rarely accounted for by the donor.”

“Funding restrictions (sometimes we don't have that flexibility in budget revision or reallocation).”

“The inflexibility of budgets.”

“Most funders have a target oriented approach, forgetting that people are not targets to be achieved but human beings, all of whom are works in progress.”

“Donor inflexibility.”

“Restructuring by most funders leading to delay, or suspension of funds.”

c. Funders not being willing to adequately fund staff positions, in particular Development or Monitoring and Evaluation staff, which were seen as critical to operational effectiveness and to securing further funding

Voices from the survey:

Challenges with funding staff positions

“It is challenging to find high calibre staff who will accept the salaries we can offer with the low funds we have - international NGOs make this all the more challenging with the packages they can offer and causes a constant brain drain for the organisation. Even with the right salaries/packages, some skills are just very challenging to find - including business development/fundraising and Monitoring Evaluation and Learning.”

“Capacity - we don't have someone with the expertise to write winning bids or pull together proposals in the way donors require (log-frames, theories of change etc.). Every donor template is different, meaning we're constantly re-doing what is essentially a proposal for the same thing, but we have to re-write it each time.”

“Our Monitoring Evaluation and Learning capacity is relatively low, meaning we cannot always provide the data as evidence of our impact or value for money.”

“Having no one to do the positioning/networking makes it hard to secure [core] funding.”

“[Lack of] capacity to seek out more funding.”

“[Insufficient] time as no bid writer.”

“[Lack of] capacity - we don't have someone full time able to network and be aware of upcoming calls for proposals to position us well.”

“[Lack of] capacity to apply to everything we want to apply to.”

“Ensuring salaries commensurate with the experience of the staff acts as a demotivator and not having sufficient flexible funding for programme expenses as per need.”

“Inadequate human resources [because] most funding is activity based.”

There is a need to combat narratives that it is [negative to fund overheads and operational costs](#) for organisations. This is vital for many organisations, particularly those led by communities of colour and other marginalised groups. Whilst many human rights organisations face these challenges, those working with and for incarcerated women and girls face additional barriers, amplifying the fundraising challenges within an already restricted and difficult funding environment.

A core tenet of [feminist funding](#) is to create a more accessible and flexible funding process. However, as highlighted above, the vast majority of organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls do not have access to feminist funding.


07 Organisations receive insufficient funding to fully implement all their strategies, particularly their work with women and girls post-incarceration

Organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls receive insufficient support to fully implement their strategies.

Eighty-eight percent of participants said there were strategies they would like to implement but could not do so effectively because of lack of funding.

These included:

- post-prison support - e.g. work with and for women on release from detention,
- legal services and strategic litigation,
- research and policy work,
- national, regional and international advocacy,
- ability to test new strategies/innovative ideas, and
- scaling up work to different areas/countries.



SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO BE COMMITTED TO WHAT DONORS DECIDE TO SUPPORT EVEN IF WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO IDENTIFY THE PRIORITIES OF WORK IN TERMS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS' ISSUES AS WE ARE THE ONES WHO ARE WORKING ON THE GROUND AND HAVE THE ABILITY TO REFLECT THE REAL NEEDS TO BE WORKED ON.

Fifty-six percent of participants said they would like to undertake strategies that donors will not fund. The majority of these strategies involved support for formerly incarcerated women. Others included advocacy, research and communications strategies.

This reinforces the critical need for flexible, core funding as outlined above so that organisations, who best know the needs of the communities they work with and the most effective strategies, can decide how to allocate funding.

Organisations working with and for incarcerated women and girls are also in need of non-financial support, such as technical assistance or leadership support, in order to improve organisational development and create more robust and sustainable organisations.

Organisations working with and for incarcerated women are often left out of mainstream women's rights or human rights movements and convenings.

This deprives them of networking and partnership opportunities, as well as learning and exchanging on different strategies and ideas.

Funders should invest in supporting networking and convening amongst different groups working on these issues in order to better support movement building, shared learning and cross-regional collaboration. It is positive to note that more than half of organisations surveyed have women with lived experience of the justice system involved or leading their work. Many organisations working in this space, and the wider women's rights and human rights movement, would benefit from learning from and listening to these groups⁵.



“WE NEED CONNECTIONS TO FUNDING AND NETWORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.”

Recommendations

- 01 Resource a global mapping of organisations and unregistered groups working with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system.
- 02 Hold a donor convening to hear from organisations working in this area and from women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, in order to shape funding priorities and interventions.
- 03 Dedicate new funding for work with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system:
 - a. Ensure new funding goes specifically to organisations working with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system.
 - b. Create specific portfolios that focus funding in an intersectional and holistic way, rather than through siloed donor interventions e.g. through just a public health or legal services lens.
- 04 Increase and prioritise feminist funding for work with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system.
- 05 Make funding more accessible to organisations working with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system:
 - a. Create explicit open call processes.
 - b. Simplify funding requirements.
 - c. Partner with women's funds and public foundations that have the capacity and expertise to work with small and/or unregistered groups.
- 06 Improve the quality of funding for organisations working with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system.

a. Provide flexible and unrestricted funding that allows organisations to pursue their own agendas.

b. Build multi-year partnerships that allow organisations to do long-term strategic work.

c. Support organisations to build reserves to allow for sustainability.

07 Explore funding gaps and how to better support investment in these areas:

a. Explore under-funded regions, particularly across the Global South.

b. Better resource work supporting formerly incarcerated women.

c. Invest in research and knowledge production to bolster advocacy and movement-building.

d. Better support direct services, such as legal services, mental health and economic empowerment.

e. Resource and support Development and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning staff positions.

f. Allocate funding to test new ideas and approaches.

08 Increase non-financial support to organisations working with and for women impacted by the criminal justice system, contributing to their sustainability.

09 Invest in wellbeing initiatives given the challenging context many individuals and organisations are working in.

10 Invest in movement building, networking initiatives and shared learning between organisations working with and for women and girls impacted by the criminal justice system, as well as with the wider women's rights movement and human rights movement. In particular, support learning with and from women with lived experience of the criminal justice system.



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