



Where is the Money?

Funding adolescent girls and young feminist

SUMMARY REPORT

On 18 July 2023, at the WD2023 Conference in Kigali, Rwanda, the Adolescent Girls Investment Plan and its members hosted the concurrent event 'Where is the money? Funding adolescent girls and young feminists'.

This intergenerational dialogue, hosted by adolescent girls, brought together adolescent girls, young feminist-led organisations, donors, researchers, and intermediary civil society organisations **to identify challenges, showcase innovative solutions, and workshop what needs to shift to make funding more accessible for adolescent girls and young feminist-led initiatives.**

We are thrilled to share that the event not only proved to be popular amongst conference attendants (the room was full!) but that **both our speakers and all participants brought invaluable contributions to advance discussions on resourcing adolescent girls.** A huge thank you to all who made it possible – our moderators, our speakers, our supporters, and of course everyone who was there on the day and shared their attention and ideas so generously.

This event summary report is intended to share **highlights from the panel and the outcomes of the interactive activities.** It is designed to **support you in your own advocacy, and we hope you will become an active ally and continue advocating for resources to be shifted to adolescent girls and young feminist initiatives.**

Presenting the facts on 'Investing in adolescent girls': an overview of the current funding landscape

In 2020, only 5.56% of global ODA was gender- and adolescent-targeted. Yet, in LMICs, 25-30% of the population is made up of youth and adolescents. The AGIP-funded and GAGE-conducted research '[Investing in adolescent girls](#)' produces a comprehensive snapshot of investing in adolescent. The follow-up report '[Resourcing Girls Directly: what does the current funding landscape for girl- and youth-led organisations look like?](#)' highlights the funding gaps that are ever more present, and why it is so important to increase resourcing of adolescent girls and young feminists now.



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Sharing professional and lived experiences from the realities of receiving and providing resources for adolescent girls and young feminists

Joselyne Mucunguzi Izere, Project Lead at Impanuro Girls Initiative

Joselyne highlighted that **young people have been excluded from funding related decision-making for a long time and need to be brought into such processes as they are experiencing the issues firsthand.** Joselyne shared that the Impanuro Girls Initiative (IGI) receives numerous funding rejections due to the organisation's youth-status, which illustrates the lack of trust funders have in young people. To navigate this challenge, Joselyne shared IGI's aim to stay true to their values and their commitment to community development as a key motivator to continue their work. Networking with potential funders is a key strategy beyond simply applying for the open grants. **Joselyne urged all funders to provide flexibility in the funding guidelines and investing in the ideas of initiatives such as IGI to unlock the potential of girls and youth-led organisations.**

'The impact of funding girls and young women-led organizations goes beyond the present. It lays the foundation for a brighter future, where empowered youth grow into empowered adults, ensuring sustainability of progress achieved. [However], ageism has become a significant obstacle to the growth of and development of youth-led organizations like ours. [...] Donors need to shift their perspective and see youth-led organizations as powerful agents of changes. Young people are driven, passionate, and committed to making a difference and their lived experience equip them with valuable insight that cannot be gained with traditional methods alone. If we don't pave the way for the youth, how will we expect them to follow?'

Mayerli, Adolescent Girl Leader, Guatemala

Based on her experience with the Las Niñas Lideran Network (LNLN), **Mayerli illustrated the challenges of accessing funds as a youth-led organisation relating to the lack of the organisation's legal registration, complex application procedures, and lower visibility of grassroots organisations.** However, without funding it is impossible to sustain the important work of youth-led organisations such as LNLN. Mayerli also **shared her experience of accessing fund through The Equality Accelerator, a grant-making project by Plan International.** The funding allowed LNLN to launch the "Getting Married Is Not My Only Option" campaign to tackle the issue of Early Marriages in Guatemala. Grantees received accompaniment through trained leaders who provided capacity strengthening activities, such as effective fund management and reporting. Finally, Mayerli highlighted the importance of flexible funding to enable girls to decide what they want to do in their communities and not be influenced by donor mandates. **Flexible funding is the key to be creative and autonomously decide the focus of their initiatives.**

'Funding girl-led groups helps adolescent girls to organise, plan, and implement actions based on our own feelings and life experiences, rather than actions imposed by others.'

Aminata Kamara, Senior Program Manager & Co-Lead Resourcing Resistance, We Are Purposeful

Aminata reaffirmed the need to work with allies such as CSO, NGOs, and older feminists/activists to shift the narrative on how girls are viewed by the system. Aminata emphasised that **the same trust that is extended to non-governmental and community-based organisations by donors needs to be extended to adolescent girls** – after all, risks are inherent to the funding system as a whole and can be mitigated. Allies already have the networks, power, and the contextual understanding on what it takes to shift funds. Thus, **adult allies must provide support with due diligence, audited accounts, registration, and reporting so girls can focus their energies into building solidarity, coming together as a collective, and using the resources to power their resistance.** Aminata acknowledged the limitations of any fund, including Purposeful's own, in reaching girls across the globe and highlighted Purposeful's approach of engaging in philanthropy advocacy to partner with other funders and allies to broaden the reach to more girl collectives globally.

'It is high time philanthropy, CSOs, NGOs back-off, push back, and allow girls to take up space. Support and trust their leadership. They are already at the heart of the issues and at the frontline of the resistance in the communities. Our role as philanthropies is to support girls in coming together to reflect, build collective power and solidarity, and fund their initiatives and resistance. As CSOs and NGOs, we need to gather the available resources and put them in the hands of girls. We need to keep the doors open, allow girls access to resources, show girls where the resources are, limit the barriers.'

Ruth Graham-Goulder, Senior Advisor, Gender Equality (adolescent girls), UNICEF

Ruth illustrated the issue of bureaucracy within donor systems. While the origins may be well-intended, such as processes around safeguarding or a desire to be impact-oriented, it often ends up becoming a barrier for smaller organizations with limited capacities. Ruth **urged other donors to make investing in girls and women a concrete policy position and program guidance.** Ruth shared that UNICEF's new Adolescent and Girls Strategy and "Core Commitments to Children in Emergencies" has led to \$87m investment in local women-led organisations in emergencies last year. Ruth highlighted the importance of working with partners to shift resources to girl-led organizations; an example is the Global Resilience Fund with We Are Purposeful.

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Ruth acknowledged the difficulties faced in tracking where the money goes and UNICEF's commitment to improving this. Ruth emphasised UNICEF's commitment to improving internal processes as well as continued dialogue via a Learning Circle, hosted together with We are Purposeful and other major donors, as another example of sharing practical experiences and recommendations to scale up resources for girls.

'We need to have a very serious conversation from the largest to smallest funders about risk. There are many well-intentioned processes around tackling sexual exploitation and abuse, corruption, that money goes where it is intended, that have become ridiculously drawn-out and negatively impacted the gender equality movement.'

Helen Lindley-Jones, Social Development Advisor, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Helen acknowledged the challenges the UK FCDO faces in directly reaching small individual organisations given the scale of the department. Helen illustrated **the bigger role FCDO can play in influencing the funding eco-system** and highlighted a £38m program launched this year on International Women's Day that will support human rights and women's rights movements across the world in partnership with the Equality Fund and The Women Of The South Speak Out Consortium. Helen reiterated **the importance of providing long term, flexible funding to diverse organisations**, including girl-led initiatives, and emphasised the research insights by FRIDA and Mama Cash that positioned the ever-present nature of girl-led organizing against the stark absence of adolescent girls from strategic conversations, funding, and key decision-making spaces. Helen reaffirmed **the need to invest in multi-stakeholder dialogues** and mentioned the potential of the Alliance for Feminist Movements that strives to bring together philanthropies, governments, women's rights organisations, women's funds, and youth-led movements to increase quality and sustainable financial and political support to feminist organisations and movements.

'We cannot divide the issues of access to funding and access to decision-making spaces. Donors have the responsibility of always asking the questions on who is in the room, how can we bring more diverse voices into those conversations with an awareness of the underlying power dynamic at the heart there.'

Plenary break-out groups: gathering input on how to better shift resources to adolescent girls and young feminists

Sobered by the facts and inspired by our panellists, the last part of our event was dedicated to having honest discussions amongst our diverse event participants to further **deep dive into the challenges that adolescent girls and young feminists experience when trying to access funding, and what possible solutions could overcome these**. We have consolidated all input by themes and sincerely hope that the list of comprehensive solutions will inspire and encourage donor organisations to improve their funding systems and influence peers to follow suit.

What are the actual obstacles and barriers in funding adolescent girls and young feminists-led initiatives?

Policy gaps

The exclusion of young people's leadership in policy making is reflected in the lack of focus on young feminist agendas and the passive role assigned to young people as beneficiaries of the policy changes. It also mirrors in how other stakeholders design their programmes and interventions in response to the policy priorities - often missing out on youth perspectives and capacities.

Donor processes

Funding priority: Directly funding adolescent girls and young feminists is not a funding priority for many donors.

Funding risks and values: Most funders believe that it is riskier to directly fund young feminists due to doubts around young people's capacity to manage funds effectively and run initiatives that create impact.

Fund design: Young people are not involved in the decision-making spaces where key aspects like what to fund and how to channel funding are being made.

Application process and eligibility criteria: Funding opportunities are not always reaching young feminists and even when they do, jargon, lack of direct and active communication, and lengthy application process deter many young people from applying. There is a clear consensus amongst all stakeholders that the current dominant funding practices are not accessible for adolescent girls and young people. The eligibility requirements of previous 'valid' experience, legal registration of the organisation, documented proof of taxes, etc. exclude most young feminists who work autonomously in response to the urgent needs of the immediate community.

Fund size: Mostly, only small one-time direct grants are made available to young people with tall expectations around impact and impact reporting.

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Cultural and social norms

Patriarchy: The deeply ingrained belief that women are less capable and valuable than men create innumerable obstacles for girls and women in taking up leadership roles within their families, schools, communities, local authorities, and other decision-making spaces. Even when girls and women start their own initiatives independently or with peers, they face backlash ranging from bullying, harassment, curtailed mobility, to domestic and sexual violence.

Ageism: In the current system, young people's experiences, aspirations, and demands are either considered less valuable or valuable only up until the point of tokenistic representation but not enough to earn them an equal role in influencing the key decision-making spaces specially when it comes to where and how money is invested for positive social transformation.

Ableism: Event participants resonated strongly with AGIP's research presented during the event titled 'Investing in adolescent girls: mapping global and national funding patterns from 2016-2020'. The proportion of grant funding dedicated to adolescent girls with disabilities is shockingly low compared to the overall gender funding available.

How do we solve those issues to ensure adolescent girls and young feminists-led initiatives can access funds committed to them?

Capacity strengthening for all: While adolescent girls and young feminists will benefit from capacity strengthening activities that support program management, fund management, proposal and grant report writing, networking and more, other stakeholders with resources and power such as donors, policy makers, and governments will also benefit from capacity strengthening exercises focussing on enabling young people's leadership, fostering intergenerational decision-making spaces, and designing and implementing inclusive programmes, funds, and policies.

Transforming the funding eco-system

1. **Trust-based funding** can enable donors to move from positions where they themselves direct the utilisation of funds to a position that enables adolescent girls, young feminists, and community-based initiatives to state what is urgent and important to them, co-decide the best use of funds, and co-create accountability mechanisms.
2. **Simple and inclusive application processes:** One way to ensure accessibility is to work with the target group to adapt application processes to their needs. Simplify in language, providing information in multiple languages, organising info sessions, creating communication channel for queries, allowing application submission in multiple formats, i.e., written, audio-video, and providing compensation where application requires lengthy proposals are a few simple steps each donor could implement quickly.
3. **Multi-year, flexible funding** will enable young feminists to approach their core objectives in a way that responds to the emerging needs of their community while continuing to strengthen their programmatic and operational efforts. It allows sufficient time to test what works, learn from lessons, and adapt to create meaningful change within their communities.
4. **Mutual learning and accountability:** Donors need to demonstrate openness to learning and adapting with adolescent girls and young feminists. Holding space to share what works, what does not, and what needs to change within the donor-grantee relationships will help strengthen their relationships and positively impact the community level work. Co-created accountability mechanism will result in a shift from imposed requirements to co-owned processes.
5. **Localised partnership:** Partnering with national and local community-based organisations that are already established and have transparent, girl and youth-centric engagement practices can help move resources to young people so that both parties benefit.
6. **Documenting funding allocations:** Ensuring clear distinction on identity groups for funding enables all stakeholders, including young people, to track how and where the money flows. Often, funding is not accessible to girls and young people as it is clubbed with resources targeting women and community-based organisations.

Multistakeholder partnerships for policy shift: Multistakeholder partnership of donors, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, community-based organisations, and young feminists can work collaboratively to pool their collective expertise and experiences to demand more inclusive policy process and objectives that enables young people's leadership.

Generating the evidence base: Researchers play a key role in identifying the current funding landscape for adolescent girls and young people, and gaps and recommendations on what works well. Moving towards girl- and youth-led research interventions will enable young people's leadership to be centered and make research processes and findings more accessible to them to use in their collective advocacy.

Summary

Adolescent girls and young feminists are at the forefront of responding to crises and inequalities that affect them and their communities. Despite the large number of youths globally, they represent a demographic that is chronically underfunded – and the more marginalised their intersecting identities are, the lower the funding seems to go. Yet, funding adolescent girls and young feminists and interventions that target them holistically is the only way we stand a chance at achieving SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

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AGIP and its members and partners will continue to advocate for accessible resources for adolescent girls beyond WD2023 – [and we hope you will join us!](#)

Please use the outcomes of this summary report to advance adolescent girls' access to resources, to step into a supportive and empowering ally role, and to advance the changes the current funding ecosystem so desperately needs.

Thank you for being a part of our event – let's make sure we don't stop here!

This event was co-created with Liz and Sumitra, adolescent girl leaders in their own right, and AGIP colleagues.



LIZ LUM
Women Deliver Young Leader



SUMITRA ARYAL
Girls Not Brides

To stay up to date with AGIP's work, please sign up to our [newsletter](#).

Adolescent Girls Investment Plan



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<http://www.adolescent-girls-plan.org>



AGIP@plan-international.org



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