

# THE VALUE OF TRUSTING THE EXPERTISE AND SELF-DETERMINATION OF GROUPS



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**One of the most interesting aspects of being part of the advisory group for the Global Resilience Fund was getting to understand local realities of young feminists and their efforts to address the issues they face. We had to ask ourselves, amongst all these amazing projects and groups, which ones should we prioritise?**

Some things were non-negotiable, such as the fact that the group had to be one with little or no access to funding from larger donors. Bigger organisations are not only generally prioritised by funders because they

have a track record, but also generally speak the “funder’s language” and have less trouble managing requests. Fighting for gender justice was also essential - in any and all ways that groups do this, we saw a big variety of approaches from sports to art, from young women with disabilities to trans youth, all bringing in valuable experience.

Looking at all the conversations I took part in, I realise that one of the things that really helped us make informed decisions was understanding the group or organisation’s specific context.

**ARE THEY COMPOSED OF YOUNG PEOPLE? ARE THEY YOUNG WOMEN LEADERS OR TOKENISED? WHAT DOES LEADERSHIP AND INVOLVEMENT MEAN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE? IS IT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO HAVE FULLY YOUTH-LED MOVEMENTS? IF LEADERSHIP OR GROUP COMPOSITION IS MIXED, HOW ARE YOUTH VOICES PRIORITISED? WHAT ABOUT INTERSECTIONALITY? WILL THE WORK OF THESE GROUPS MEET THE NEEDS OF THOSE MOST IN NEED? IS THEIR PERSPECTIVE AN INCLUSIVE AND SYSTEMIC ONE?**

We already knew that intersectional work was underfunded in our region so we prioritised work done by Roma women, LGBTQI+ youth, visually impaired young women etc. The context also supported us to understand the nuances - a trans group in Armenia will have different needs than one in the UK, young women from Bosnia have different realities than those in Spain, and so on.

Understanding each group helped us to understand if they were fighting for communities from inside, or rather from outside, stepping in as a helper role. All kinds of support was welcome and needed, however, we really prioritised groups who had in their composition people with identities for whose rights they were fighting for. We saw many mixed groups of cis and trans women, roma and non-roma, disabled and non-disabled. We also saw fully LGBTI youth groups, girl-led groups or south-asian young women's groups. This information was useful for us to know so we can foresee needs based projects and results that are rooted in lived experiences, and in strong connections with the community.

Another thing that was of utmost importance was each groups' understanding of the need they

were trying to address. Many groups explained how their communities reached out for help or how they tried to research the situation and understand how COVID-19 impacted their constituencies. General solutions don't always go well with specific communities so it was important to be focused and clear.

Lastly, the approach that groups had while implementing these projects was also very important. We constantly asked; 'is it a participatory approach?' - with people involved and their voices prioritised, and without others imposing or believing that they know what's best for them. Unfortunately 'expertise' is too often led by project teams or 'experts', and less from those directly affected, and too often this is an indirect result of funding requirements. We had to prioritise participatory approaches so we can make space for different visions and ways of doing activism or community building.

In the end, I realise that some things often requested in projects are not really as important as building trust that grassroots groups know best how to use funded resources. One of these things is knowing in detail what they will do with the funding - too much detail forces groups to future-write something that needs to unfold as they start working on it. Another

one is innovation - even though it is seen as desirable, sometimes, especially in unprecedented times such as COVID-19, this should not be mandatory. For the sake of innovation, many funders push organisations towards unsustainable approaches, always coming up with something new even though the need requires tested ways of working.

All these being said, I'd like to conclude by saying that the feeling I got from these processes was that relationships matter, and that for me, feminist philanthropy prioritises getting to know and understanding groups and contexts, and developing a trust-based connection that lasts over time. ■

*Dani is a coach, facilitator and community builder, committed to holding space for relational learning that creates more freedom. Most of their work so far has been in LGBTQI+ activism in Romania, and in community organising for social justice. For the past five years, they have coordinated Gender Talk, a community initiative of gender explorers and rebels that works to create more space and possibilities for us all to exist and thrive outside the gender binary.*