

Conference Voices:

Resourcing Response and Resistance

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Introduction

This series of mini briefings lifts up the voices and perspectives from workshops, plenaries, and breakout sessions at the 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (ACSHR). You can access the full set of briefings and framing reflections [on the ACSHR website](#).

The 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights was a space for girls, young people, advocates and activists to connect and form a common agenda to end sexual and gender based violence. Resourcing resistance was a key theme, and together we explored the financial resources required to sustain this critical work.

Reflecting on the state of philanthropy, Aissatou Bah shared:

“I am hopeful and I am hungry. I am hopeful because we are here; I see all of this energy, surrounded by other Africans. One of the things I really care about is going to the margins...whose faces you are not seeing on the funding side, any time Africans are cast as receivers and not directing where resources are going. I am hopeful as we are seeing...young African people, young African women, coming on the funding side.”

We exchanged creative practices for moving money to movements and activists; named the harms of the current funding system, particularly for young activists on the African continent; unpacked how activists can hold funders accountable; and engaged in a real-time participatory grantmaking process for young activists.

Funders at the conference

As a vibrant space with activists and advocates from across the world, the conference was an opportunity for funders to be in direct dialogue with the communities whose work they support. A diverse set of funders were present at the conference, from women's rights and feminist funders such as Urgent Action Fund Africa, ISDAO and African Women's Development Fund, to private foundations such as Child Investment Fund Foundation, donor governments and UN agencies such as UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, and consortiums and joint initiatives, such as the Spotlight Initiative.

Funders also invested directly in the critical work of coming together at the conference. For example, the Government of Ireland sponsored the youth participatory grantmaking process, ISDAO sponsored the participation of a group of L.G.B.T.Q.I.A+ activists from the region and other funders supported and co-designed sessions with young people.

Many funders expressed a strong sense of support for reforming and reimagining how resources flow to critical work across the African continent. Funders highlighted the importance of a learning stance and showing up with humility. As Emma McLoughlin shared:

"We're always learning as funders. There are many organisations working towards the same objectives and we are learning to not just fund the bigger organisations but fund across different levels".

With over 50% of the 900 participants under 30 years old, the youth voice in this dialogue was particularly present. As Yande Banda shared on a plenary panel:

“Youth engagement is not inviting us to a panel and giving us just three minutes to talk. Youth engagement is not posting on social media for “Youth Day” but not allowing the youth to actually lead your projects for the youth. We should have youth and girls at the front and centre of your organisations! We’ve been missing it for years. Youth should be contributing where we NEED to be, not where you think we should be. We need to change the power dynamics! Let’s apply this to every single aspect in our [organisations and governance] structures. Not just as your social media banners and unpaid internships.”

And Olaoluwa Abagun, Executive Director of ATHENA Network and a youth advocate in her own right, encouraged ongoing dialogue:

“I invite you to have more cups of tea with younger feminists here and back home. Listen, truly listen.”

Moving the money: live youth-led participatory grantmaking

Over the course of the five days of the Youth Pre-Conference and overall conference, Children’s Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF) hosted a live youth-led participatory grantmaking process. A packed room of young people reflected, negotiated, and designed projects to be funded to the tune of an equal share of USD\$50,000. This process was a powerful demonstration of transnational collective design and decision making, under the leadership of the young people involved.

This unprecedented experiment is designed to see what happens when the centre of philanthropic gravity shifts to youth activists. There was no performative pitch nor children's pageantry. Rather, we led with deep trust in their ingenuity and commitment to challenge the practices that undergird how money is hoarded, trickled out, and withheld from African children and youth activists. Over the next year, the groups will receive their funding, implement their projects and be in community with one another to inform our efforts to better resource youth movements.

Bold commitments and a need for a deeper focus on accountability

Generation Equality Forum (GEF) - an opportunity and challenge.

The conference fell on the one year anniversary of the Generation Equality Forum, a UN Women-led process to mobilise multisectoral commitments and investment for gender equality efforts. GEF led to USD\$40 billion in commitments by funders, governments, NGOs and the private sector. During the Youth Pre-Conference, Purposeful held a session with girls to understand girls' and young people's priorities and the relevance of GEF to them locally. This session is part of a broader research project analysing whether and how the financial commitments are reaching girls and young people and through what funding practices.

We heard loud and clear that while the GEF process could support intergenerational collaboration, shared advocacy and solidarity between movements and across the region, it has limitations. In particular, girls in rural areas or who lack internet access are being excluded. To be locally relevant and useful as a collaboration and advocacy

platform, girls and young people need support to get involved, flexible resources to support their organising and practical information on how to access that funding and support. They want to know where the \$40 billion is going and through what funding practices (e.g. will it be flexible, will any be through participatory processes and how big will the grants be), how resources will reach girls and young people in crisis contexts, will funding reach girl- and youth-led or -focused groups and organisations and how will marginalised people be able to access resources.

Euphonia, a youth activist from Tanzania, summarised her experience of the conference and her reflections on GEF resourcing [in her blog](#). She notes the disconnect between large scale global commitments and her grassroots organising to tackle child marriage. She also recognises, like many at the conference, the huge opportunity that GEF provides to “*learn, unlearn and unpack philanthropy*” so that money can move to girls and young feminists in ways that work for them. Marietha Cedric reflected on the importance of grantmaking that aligns with the needs of youth activists:

“I feel the importance of flexible funding that fits the current context, so that as change makers we won't have to sleep on our ideas just because we don't have the resources or the system is complex.”

Reimagining funding: visions for philanthropy from Black feminist leaders rooted in Africa

In the context of constant backlash and intersecting crises, philanthropy is being called to provide sustained and responsive funding. A powerful panel of Black feminist leaders rooted in Africa offered a vision for a philanthropic ecosystem that meets girls where they are and leaves behind 'conventional wisdom' in the sector that keeps power and money in the hands of a few.

Panellists were: Dr Ramatu Bangura from Children's Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF), Fanta Toure-Puri from Girls First Fund, Aissatou Bah from EMpower, Françoise Moudouthe of African Women's Development Fund, and Isha Conteh and Purity Kagwiria from Purposeful. The panellists offered critique of the failures of the current system, shared the challenges they grapple with and their recipes for change, their sharp political and strategic analysis, and examples of how they are moving resources to girls and their movements.

The panel kicked off with the question, 'Who are we?'

Purity recaps:

"We are girl workers, we are disruptors, we are people who know what we want, we are deeply moved by injustice, we are learners and we are listeners."

Françoise reflects:

"Something that I sit with, is that the revolution will not be NGO-ised, a lot of the way we structure our civil society is around NGOs, CBOs.... you know, but I don't know

that it's what is necessary to transform, and we learn that a lot from the girls. So I sit with this question, as the philanthropic sector, how do we make sure we don't impose that NGO-isation on the work that is being done."

Ramatu comments:

"The other thing about a movement orientation is, you fund the movements even when they are winning, don't cut the funding, cause they have somehow succeeded or achieved their project goals, you fund them, especially when they are winning. Because now we see the rise of authoritarian regimes that have grown in the wake of movements that are not ready to respond or respond with one arm tied behind their back, as they are not being resourced in the ways they deserve or need to. We have to get out of this project-, programme-based funding, we have to fund work like we want it to exist forever, because if we do not, we will lose ground, like we have lost so much ground in the last 10 years."

Ramatu adds:

"Philanthropy is a particular space because the resources and the money that we are distributing don't really belong to the people that have the power to redistribute it. It's money they should have been [tax revenue] of the places where that money was taken from. And so the resources that are trickled down to some of our movements, are often trickled down in ways that are structured for the conveniences who have access to the resources or for those of us who work for them. One of the things we are trying to figure out at CRIF is 'how do we move money in the way that movements work, young people's movements work, and not in the way that we tell

them they need to work for the convenience of moving the money to them?’ And that is difficult, but we are fiercely committed to trying.”

Aissatou reflects:

“We must recognise that our ultimate goal is not even to get the money. It is liberation and progress. We now have to take a step back and figure out where we will find the money to make that happen.”

Françoise shares:

“A reminder that we don’t have to do everything on our own. Something that as philanthropy we encourage in movements, but not something we also do ourselves, recognise when we can’t do something on our own and create the alliances that allow us to move as we learn.”

Isha poses:

“I think it’s high time for funders to learn from the communities especially when it comes to definition of impact. If philanthropy is saying we’ve done this work for years, then you need to test your impact. Go back and give money to the girls you’ve invested in, and support them to do the work.”

Aissatou shares:

“I am hopeful and I am hungry. I am hopeful because we are here, I see all of this energy, surrounded by other Africans. One of the things I really care about is going to the margins who are not seen, whose faces you are not seeing on the funding side, any time Africans are cast as receivers and not directing where resources are

going. I am hopeful as we are seeing hopeful young African people, young African women, coming on the funding side.

There are many times that I sat in a room, and the path forward seemed so easy to me that I thought it was stupid, the solutions – you have people charting super complicated solutions – but the solutions were right in front of me. I took it for granted, this vast experience I had from growing up in a specific context gave me insight that no one else had, and because that was not valued, I myself did not value it. But I feel like the more of us that are coming in this field we are building a groundswell based on our own voices and insight that will shorten the curve to reach some of these solutions. Philanthropy is changing and the face of philanthropy will change.”

Money for Movements

With funder allies, we collectively envisioned funding relationships guided by shared power, accountability and transparency. Together we entered into dialogues, reflected on what is needed to ensure girls and young people can take part in global funding commitments, and practised participatory grantmaking.

Young activists shared what they needed to participate in global funding opportunities like GEF commitments - support to get involved, flexible resources for their organising and practical information on how to access that funding and support. And they highlighted what is at stake if philanthropy does not shift its hardened practices - sharp power dynamics that prevent honest exchange and learning, overlooking the vast

social change expertise that African feminists and activists hold, and movements that are facing down backlash without meaningful support.

Our vision of a world free from sexual and gender based violence is bold. We invite funding partners to be equally bold and build a funding ecosystem that is grounded in girls' and young people's realities on the African continent.

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