

# **Resourcing Girls' Resistance**

**Celebrating 5 years of moving money to the margins 2018 - 2022**

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## **Five Years of Resourcing Girls' Resistance**

### **We are Purposeful**

We are an Africa-rooted global hub for girls' organising and activism. For millennia girls have played a critical role in struggles for freedom and liberation. From Africa's anti-colonial movements to the Arab spring to climate justice organising and everything in between - their resistance has always sparked and sustained transformational change. And yet, too often girls are separated and sidelined from resources and shut out from decision-making spaces, their power deliberately obscured and hidden from view. Centring the political power of young feminists across the world, we work so that girls and their allies have access to the resources, networks, and platforms they need to power their activism and remake the world.

As defined in Our Learning Agenda, found [here in plain text](#), girls and women refers to anyone who identifies as a girl and/or woman, including cis and trans girls and women in all their diversity.

### **We are those Girls, those Women, and their Allies**

To be a girl is to resist. In every village, in every corner of the globe, girls are gathering, reimagining, pushing back to create better worlds for themselves and us all. The forces of oppression exert themselves on girls' minds and bodies in profoundly violent ways - sometimes obvious, often diffuse, obscured but omnipresent. And yet girls find ways around and over and through and under - they run, they stay, they build, they birth. They survive. And they don't survive. And most days they can be found - hidden in corners and out in plain sight - whispering with

another girl, strategising with other girls, sustaining because of another girl. And in every place, across every epoch, they have been supported by women, old and young alike; women who in silent deeds and in loud action hold and heal and raise up and radicalise a new generation of girls. We know this to be true because we are those girls, we are those women and we are their allies, and everywhere we have been and everywhere we have known the same is true.

### **We Resource the Resisters**

Since our very first days, we have known that to build power with girls and their allies is to move resources directly to them. For what is a discussion of power without a discussion of money?

Together we have been moving resources before we had a name, a bank account or formal registration. We have always seen the work of resource redistribution as a critical part of the feminist liberation project, and our own individual political responsibilities.

We resource resistance so that girls can know they matter - that they are held, they are seen and heard and their contribution to the work of social justice matters. More than matters. Is essential for our survival, our shared humanity.

We resource girls' resistance to facilitate spaces, dreaming, concrete strategies and actions for girls and young women to dismantle patriarchy and other oppressive systems. We resource resistance to water the buried seeds of ideas girls carry, and to give them a chance to take root and bloom.

Resourcing resistance means holding the dual truths of girls' power, their magic, their dynamism, and all of the realities of the world we live in right now. The realities of a philanthropic system whose resources were built on the backs of girls' labour - of a system that never in its wildest dreams intended those resources to flow back to girls.

We are here for all of it. For what girls need, and what we must do to get them what they need. To bring resources to girls, rather than having them constantly make treacherous journeys to access the resources on someone else's terms.

Ultimately, to move money directly to girls is an act of solidarity and a political statement of intent, about how the world can and should be. It's also a process of learning, deepening and embedding different world views and different ways of being into organisational practice.

The more we have moved towards girls in our practice, the more we are learning about what is possible as an organisation, as a hub for girls, and as infrastructure for girls' movements. The lessons and insights from listening to girls and understanding their experiences of traditional girls' programming has reinforced what we instinctively know - that so much about development aid is not working.

The more we see how girls are solving challenges themselves, constructing alternative practices for accountability, and modelling horizontal power across their organising, the clearer we are that girls are up to something. They have something truly profound to offer us as activists, as practitioners, as folks who believe another

world is possible - that another world is actually already here. To adapt the phrase from Arundhati Roy, the money - when moved right, with love, care, and political intention, suddenly becomes a portal into another kind of existence.

## **A Five-Year Snapshot**

Our journey of resourcing resistance began in Sierra Leone where Purposeful was born and is headquartered.

*"Purposeful was born on the back of envelopes and on long car journeys through Sierra Leone in 2015, at the height of the Ebola crisis. Formally launching on the International Day of the Girl in Freetown in 2017, the seeds of who we are were laid many many years before. Ours has been a story like all good stories, full of adventure, struggle, inspiration, tears, and some really really good tunes."*

- Purposeful Co-Founders, Chernor Bah and Rosa Bransky

Read more about Purposeful's journey in Building our Feminist Hub, [found here in plain text](#).

Since the initial grants were distributed in 2018, we expanded our resourcing from Sierra Leone to small and newly formed, emerging as well as more established groups, collectives and organisations across the globe; from places often considered too 'remote' for outreach, to others that are extremely hard to move resources into.

***Between 2018 - 2022, Purposeful provided resources of \$5.2 million USD to 613 collectives / organisations in 107 countries.***

From São Tomé e Príncipe, to Honduras, Romania and Palestine we have funded girls and young feminist collectives and organisations working across a range of thematic areas, from Climate Justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to Disability Rights and Indigenous Rights.

Between 2018 - 2022, Purposeful grants total **\$5,236,976.00 USD**. These figures exclude grants distributed under our programmatic work - Girls' Circles Collectives in Sierra Leone.

Table 1

Year	Awarded Sum
2018	\$403,658.00
2019	\$1,162,900.00
2020	\$1,524,330.00
2021	\$1,004,500.00
2022	\$1,141,588.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,236,976.00</b>

Table 2

Region	Total Sum Granted [2018-2022]
Sub Saharan Africa	\$2,727,216.00
Asia/Pacific	\$626,000.00
Arab States/North Africa	\$485,350.00
Americas /Caribbean	\$761,900.00
Europe/Central Asia	\$636,510.00

In addition, we have spent over \$500,000 USD on accompaniment of our grantee partners.

## A Politics of Practice

Girls are organising intergenerationally, as formally registered non-profit organisations and as informal groups, in small and large numbers. They organise in their villages and homes and are embedded in every movement for justice in every corner of the globe. They are working to push back against interlocking systems of violence in their homes, schools and communities, and within formal systems and structures, from local councils to the corridors of the UN.

Collectives are working on a range of thematic areas: from Early and Forced Marriage, to Migration and Displacement, Access to education, Disability rights, Gender Based Violence, Climate and Environmental Rights and Justice, Indigenous Rights, and FGM. But girls' lives are not single-issue lives, and they rarely organise along narrow thematic lines. Girls work to imagine different futures for themselves and for all girls everywhere, through complex strategies building on lineages of freedom fighters, and drawing on new creative methods unique to this moment and this life stage.

Current funding practices do not match up to the depth and breadth, the complexity and the strategic clarity of the way girls organise. As feminist activists first, we know that it is through the *practice of our politics* that we will truly live into our commitment to resource girls' resistance as it is truly lived. In this next section, we share some of these key principles and lift up promising practices we have learned these last five years.

### **Practice 1: Participation**

***Participatory grantmaking is just one of our accountability mechanisms to challenge the repressive silos and power dynamics inherent in the funding landscape.*** A young feminist advisory panel sits at the heart of our model. Diverse in its makeup, advisors represent a variety of contexts, backgrounds, gender and other social and political identities; connectedness to networks and movements; and thematic areas of work. Advisors are girls and young feminists under 30 years old who are strongly rooted in their communities and struggles, who manifest feminist

principles that align with those of Purposeful, and who bring a critical perspective on funding and philanthropy work to the advisory space. Their role goes beyond simply scoring application - the panel calls are spaces where they engage in robust political debate, and the context, strategies, and issue areas to prioritise given the limited funding available in comparison to the number of applications received.

Much of the fear associated with giving up control over where funding goes is driven by colonialist mindsets.

Purposeful uses a participatory approach, even for crisis and rapid response funding. In practice in a crisis context, this has meant convening small panels of advisors from the region and using online communication to ensure they are supported in making rapid and informed decisions on resource allocations. It also means compensating people for their time, and recognising and removing guilt when they are too exhausted or overwhelmed to show up. Without our advisors and the support of young feminist groups and sister feminist funders, we could not do this work.

Collaborating with activists - who are often joining calls from bomb shelters, with intermittent access to electricity, who are exhausted and deeply frustrated, who have been forced to flee, but work tirelessly for their people - has meant, we need to truly hold the tension of when participation is meaningful, desired or possible.

This reflection on participatory grantmaking in crisis contexts was first shared in our recent publication:



[Girls and Young Feminist Activists at the Forefront Against Russia's Imperialist War in Ukraine.](#)

**Practice 2: Lowering barriers to access**

***If we want to resource girls and young feminists, it is contingent on us as funders to build financial and compliance systems that are designed specifically for girls because when we reach them, we reach everyone!*** Girls often organise informally, meeting as and when they can - their 'thematic areas' and agendas shift as their lives evolve and contexts change. Because of their age and other identities girls cannot always:

- Register their collectives
- Provide audited financials
- Complete lengthy application forms
- Access online portals
- Communicate in English
- Receive money through bank accounts (or via mobile)

At Purposeful our entire approach to grantmaking centres girls, from our outreach to our learning processes during and at the end of a grant cycle. In partnership with girl activists and their allies, we have designed a grantmaking function that meets girls where they are. Some highlights include:

- Networked outreach in local languages
- Multiple application formats, including WhatsApp voice notes and video messages.

- Call backs from our staff who help complete applications on a collective's behalf

Applications are intended to allow grantees to apply for funding as quickly and easily as possible. Having a flexible application process means that it is constantly evolving, according to the needs of grantees - we learn, we adapt and we improve. Not only does this approach make applications more accessible to grantees, it allows us to expand our learning by finding out about grantees in more creative ways (e.g. in song or poetry) that may not translate to traditional application forms.

- Limited criteria, with collectives defining their own priority/issue areas.
- Proportionate due diligence, including community reference checks for first-time funded groups
- Flexible fund transfers, including to individual or allies' bank accounts, Western Union, Paypal, mobile money and cash

*“Our activities are always shaped by our context and needs. We are flexible towards each other and move our understanding of the cyclical and unpredictable nature of things in our own lives, environments and homes. Our process is organic, and we keep building it as we go and grow. This process of being open to change, being flexible and caring towards each other has allowed us to be strong and connected even in very difficult circumstances.*

*Furthermore, the last year has been trying in terms of personal and collective health and wellbeing, and we have changed and adapted plans to make every part of our process more accessible and energetically right for our group members, shifting to calls when needed instead of physical meetings or going out for a walk to the*

*outdoors instead of being seated. At the same time, we have completed all the proposed activities and projects, however our methods of doing them, the timescales, they have evolved and also the perspectives with which we have done them has changed for us.”*

*- Dhaarchidi, India*

### **Practice 3: From ‘risk’ to ‘trust’**

***Philanthropic approaches to due diligence are one of the greatest barriers to young feminists receiving funding, and one of the key reasons why money continues to flow to national and international organisations, at activists’ expense.*** We understand this focus on the so-called misuse of funds to be inherently power laden – bound up with all of the colonial underpinnings of the traditional aid sector. Because girls live and organise at the intersections of multiple compounding identities - including age and gender - they are particularly impacted by narrow understandings of risk and reward.

By foregrounding trust in our work to move money, we have built an audit-compliant system that builds in proportionate safeguards while centring the lives and needs of young activists. We believe and see every day that with the right support models, girls can manage grants, navigate the complexity of collective financial accountability, and make judicious use of funds.

At the same time, we also make space for girls to try and fail. We understand failure as a critical part of this justice work. We want girls to know that they can experiment, try, fail, and be supported to try again.

#### **Practice 4: Resources mean more than money**

***Working with girls and feminist activists has taught us that resourcing means more than distributing funds. Core and flexible funding is vital, but girls and young feminist-led organisations need more than just money.***

Our Mission is to ensure that:

Girl activists and their allies have access to the resources, networks, and platforms they need to power their activism and remake the world for themselves.

They often need support and accompaniment to organise, expand to new audiences or mobilise new funding. Support may come in the form of a sounding board, a more experienced activist or organiser to engage with and accompany them as their collective evolves and grows - our team and advisors have played a vital role in providing this support. Spaces to network, connect and collaborate with other activists are critical for young activists to help build an understanding of successful practices in sparking and sustaining change as well as overcoming challenges, being rejuvenated and re-inspired.

Girl and young feminist-led collectives may need support amplifying their reach, specifically by funders or other organisations sharing about their work. Equally, access to information on available grants and other non-financial types of support from the organisations that fund them, and beyond, can be incredibly useful. Finally, girls and young feminist-led organisations frequently need access to advocacy and

decision-making spaces which are often closed or by invite-only, as well as costly to attend. Support to overcome these barriers is critical for girls so that they speak for themselves, advocate and influence decisions that are key to transforming the world so that they can live in safety, dignity, and freedom.

***One of our commitments is to create spaces specifically for girls and young***

***activists to convene and build solidarity.*** In 2022, as part of the 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights, Purposeful organised The Girls' Summit and The Youth Pre-Conference. Read more in the following plain text documents:

[The Girls' Summit](#)

[Youth Pre-Conference](#)

*“Coming together in a space where there are young people sharing ideas was beautiful. I learned, I unlearned, and it was actually amazing. I learned a whole lot to be very honest. I’m already implementing some of these things I learned in my projects...It was just beautiful coming together, meeting minds and... discussing and learning about so many things.”*

*– Cheche, 19, Nigeria*

## **Practice 5: Funding across generations**

**Resourcing resistance means understanding girls as part of lineages of activism and ecosystems of actors. It serves no one to focus our funding on the false promise of the singular girl leader that has so proliferated neo-liberal development agendas.**

This reading of girls' resistance is a direct counter to the fantasy of the girl hero, whose grit and determination can lift whole nations out of poverty. Instead, we know that we cannot separate girls from the critical community of feminist allies who have always stood beside and behind - politicising, holding and healing girls as they enter collective space and do the work of justice.

We know that girls are embedded in every social movement in every corner of the world, organising with adult activists, and navigating all of the age and gender-based complexities that come with these relationships. At the same time, many of the most critical services essential to girls' survival are led by adults. We know these essential services are vastly under-resourced - an act of political and economic vandalism on the lives and bodies of girls.

At this moment, in the trajectory of grantmaking for girls, it is critical that we bring a more nuanced understanding of what this work really looks like. In particular, problematising narrow definitions of girls' leadership and centring rooted politics rather than philanthropic performance are essential. As we navigate the dual truths of girls' resistance and their vulnerability in the context of broader struggles for justice, expansive funding for girls and allied services, movements and actors is key.

#### **Practice 6: Re-coupling movement work with service work**

***Supporting girls' organising helps them generate the resources needed to sustain themselves materially - school fees, books, pens, sanitary products and diapers, transport, food, and rent.*** Even in more progressive philanthropy, a deeply unhelpful division has been drawn between 'service' work and 'organising'

and 'advocacy' work, as if it were somehow possible to organise without the material needs of food and shelter being met - as if the struggle for the right to access services, to demand or transform systems and structures of social care have not always been a site for feminist activism. Knowing all this, and then naming it as the work of justice, is the first step in finding and supporting girls' work.

### **Practice 7: Challenge ideas of 'growth', 'progress' and 'impact'**

***Notions of linear progress are contributing to the 'NGO-isation' and de-politicisation of our movements***, restricting activists' work and limiting our understanding of how change actually happens. As we have built our approach to research and learning, we have encountered four key barriers and opportunities to shift practice:

- ***The straight-jacket of professionalisation*** where the assumed route for unregistered collectives is formalisation - even when this is counter-productive or in conflict with their politics. We are particularly careful not to fall back on hierarchical language that suggests one organising structure is more effective than another, and are committed to documenting the hidden ways that girls collectivise and model shared power outside of institutional frames.
- ***The false-promise of scale*** where success means rapidly expanding the size of an initiative, even if this means burdening small teams or transporting practice to a community where a particular approach is just not relevant. We avoid conversations about reach, and connect grantees with peers to explore

horizontal and networked approaches to expanding the footprint of the most powerful work.

- ***The trap of attribution*** which looks like asking collectives to isolate their own singular impacts and erases their contribution to interlocking movement wins. We avoid asking them to narrate their impact, and instead ask them to explore where they are seeing shifts and changes in the world around them, prioritising questions that help us understand their networks and relationships.
- ***The myth of forward motion*** where collectives are expected to always be 'winning', rather than being recognised and resourced for holding the line or simply surviving in the face of profound backlash. We ask them to share where the work has been most challenging and rewarding, and where they are most scared, afraid, or need external support, rather than rooting learning conversations in the language of success.

## **Meeting Girls Where They Are, While Lifting Up Specific Needs: Our funds in action**

Grounded in feminist principles of solidarity and reciprocity, we are reimagining what it means to hold movement resources in deep relationship and with deep accountability to girls. Working across multiple levels – through global funding windows to deeply rooted community re-granting mechanisms – we re-frame grantmaking practice so that girls and young feminists can define and determine



resource distribution in the service of their own visions, goals and dreams of freedom.

- Meeting girls where they are: The With and For Girls Fund
- Meeting girls at moments of crisis: The Global Resilience Fund
- Meeting movement moments: The Survivor Solidary Fund

## **The With and For Girls Fund**

***The world's first Africa rooted global fund for girls organising and activism.***

Our ambition is to reframe power in philanthropic practice, showing what is possible when girls are put at the centre of resource distribution. We reimagine grantmaking practice so that girls can define and determine the terms of grant money in the service of their own visions, goals, and dreams of freedom.

Since Purposeful took over the fund in 2019, we have moved **\$3,146,247.00 USD** to girls, young feminist collectives, and intergenerational groupings.

Read more about With and For Girls (WFG) objectives and priorities in the [With and For Girls Strategic Plan](#).

## **Main elements of our grantmaking process**

- Our database is always open for groups to submit profiles. Using the database, we invite eligible groups to apply for funding rounds as resources are available. Submit your profile on [this page on the Purposeful website](#).
- Applications are short and can be submitted in writing or over the phone via WhatsApp, as needed. Forms are available in six languages.
- Our application criteria are flexible! We welcome registered, unregistered, and newly formed collectives, as well as those who have never received funding or implemented activities. We have no predefined thematic areas.
- We move money to girls in ways that work best for them; bank, mobile money, cash, MoneyGram, fiscal sponsor etc.
- We facilitate panel group calls with the girl and young feminist advisors to provide additional information which may help them to identify funding gaps.

See this guide they use to make decisions on what to fund:

## **Decision-making Guide**

- The applicant is a small, emerging grassroots group, network, or collective and their work is relevant to girls and holds feminist values.

- The group is led by marginalised girls, young women, trans or intersex youth, and/or the group is advancing and defending the rights of adolescent girls, young women, trans or intersex activists as part of their core work or their specific activities.
- The leadership structure of the collective supports young women, girls, trans and intersex youth, and practices inclusive decision-making.
- The collective has demonstrated that girls' contexts, needs and perspectives determine the priorities and activities of the collective, and it holds itself accountable to girls.
- The funding plans align with the pressing needs within their context.

## **Our spotlight funding windows**

### **Spotlight on: First Moon & Primera Estrella [First Star], our first two global participatory grantmaking rounds**

WFG's first two participatory grantmaking windows were named by the team to celebrate the new journey that the fund was embarking on as a participatory grantmaker focused on funding girl and young feminist organising.

Outreach undertaken through our advisory panel, friends and partner organisations across the world has led to a database of over 1,000 girl and young feminist-led

collectives, and each of these funding rounds has presented an opportunity to resource these collectives. The grant size was initially \$5,000 USD - an amount decided upon through our strategic plan development process with our team and the creative design team made up of girls and young feminists. In 2022, we increased the grant amount for renewal grants to existing grantee partners, to \$7,000 USD in response to the feedback shared by grantee partners, allowing collectives to apply for the amount of funding they needed up to this amount.

The Resourcing Resistance team at Purposeful is currently reviewing the grantmaking policy including the review of grant amounts.

Through these initial grantmaking windows, WFG has supported collectives with \$790,350.00 USD!

First Moon: \$245,000.00

First Moon grant renewals: \$266,000.00

Primera Estrella: \$279,350.00

### **Meet some grantees!**

#### **Hawa Feminist Collective, Somalia**

Hawa Feminist Collective was founded by young feminists in 2018, making it the first feminist collective in Somalia. They organise and mobilise young women and girls to promote the safety, equality, justice, rights, and dignity of young women and girls in Somalia who bear an unequal brunt of hardships exacerbated by poverty, conflict,

high levels of rape and sexual abuse, as well as religious and cultural limitations which promote strict male authority

### **Toward a Better Tomorrow, Jordan**

In response to the influx of refugees and the increase in violence and early marriage cases, Toward a Better Future was formed with the goal to empower refugee and vulnerable girls. One of the ways they do this is by creating interactive plays for the local community. Girls from the wider community, not just members of the group, prepare and perform these plays so that it is clear that the call for girls' rights are shared by girls themselves.

### **Red Las Niñas Lideran, Guatemala**

Las Niñas Lideran, is a rural and indigenous network to mobilise adolescents and girls to actively engage in transforming their lives, families, and communities for a more just and equitable world through local solutions, the strengthening of leadership and the construction of movements at the local level. They believe that life skills, participation in their own liberation and leadership is essential and in all that they do, to ensure that girls lead. Together, they have held a range of campaigns to stop child marriage or defend girls' rights, for example in 2021; 'Getting Married Is Not My Only Option'.

### **Sisterhood Initiative, Sri Lanka**

A discussion and volunteer group dedicated to understanding and addressing issues faced by Muslim women in the country. Their vision is to recognise Sri Lankan

Muslim women as important stakeholders in society with decision-making power and create safe spaces for Muslim young women and girls to come together to share experiences, engage in curated discussions, and find a sense of community together.

### **Association for Development and Education of Youth "Safe Step", Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Founded by young Roma and non-Roma persons, the aim is to provide safe space for all young people in the City of Bijeljina, with a focus on marginalised girls, women, and others socially vulnerable. They work towards the development of strategic partnerships in order to develop solutions to improve the positions of young people in their community.

Read more profiles of our grantee partners on [this page on the Purposeful website](#).

### **Spotlight on: Notre Lumiere, A funding window for Disability Justice and Rights activists**

In 2022, in partnership with the Disability Rights Fund (DRF), we co-created a dedicated funding window to intentionally reach girl and young feminist-led Disability Justice and Rights collectives. Through Notre Lumiere, we made 30 grants to Disability Justice and Rights activists and collectives in 24 countries with a total of \$210,000 USD.

*“When we centre those who are pushed to the margins, something unlocks and a whole new way of seeing and imagining the world opens up in beautiful technicolour clarity. And every time we think we’ve gone deep enough, a new possibility at the intersection and at the margins reminds us that we can always be more inclusive, always more expansive, always hold ourselves more deeply to account - that to centre those most excluded, means to move a little bit closer to liberation.”*

*Rosa Bransky, Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Purposeful*

Together, we questioned our processes and systems and improved accessibility across our grantmaking. Beyond that, we held space to pause and reflect throughout the application process, identifying the need to actively extend our outreach to potential groups and changing our age parameters.

*“In developing countries, becoming an advocate for yourself takes a long time. It is even harder for girls with disabilities - they’re less likely to attend school and if they do go to school, they might start later and not have the learning support they need. Even leaving their bedroom or home can be a challenge, because of the stigma and discrimination they face. We have to be mindful of this reality - becoming an activist, having your voice heard and getting the right level exposure is more challenging. So when we increased the age limit from 30 to 35, we saw more applications, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.”*

*Anisie Byukusenge, WFG Programme Assistant*

Read more about the collectives funded through Notre Lumiere, as well as our journey, learning and commitments across our work on [this plain text document on the Purposeful website](#).

## **Spotlight on: Moving Cash Resources to Girls' Collectives Across Sierra Leone**

Since 2020, we've made grants of up to \$2,500 USD to Girls' Collectives in Sierra Leone. So far \$40,000 USD has been distributed in cash. Red metal boxes full of money, love, hope, and possibility have moved from Freetown across the length and breadth of Sierra Leone, on boats and bikes, in cars and Okadas, carried in the hands of the young women activists that power the With and For Girls Fund and make up the Purposeful team.

*I've grown up hearing that you shouldn't give girls money, but I know that it is a way of holding girls back, preventing them from having a sense of independence, from feeling powerful. My experience with the Girls' Collectives has confirmed what I always knew; that girls know how to use their money, and can be trusted to use it in impactful ways."*

*- Isha Morgan Conteh , Purposeful Programme Manager*

The fund puts money directly in the hands of girls without placing barriers on how they apply, receive or use the funding. Delivered in cash at regular intervals, with an accountability mechanism designed by girls - as simple as a box, a lock and a ledger, girls are showing us what it means to hold resources collectively on terms



that make most sense to them - free from the restraints of usual grantmaking world order.

*“This money has brought a lot of positive changes for us and our community. There is a mentee here that dropped out of school because she got pregnant and the man was nowhere to be found. At the end of the day, she also lost her child and so she was feeling a bit down or frustrated. But when she noticed that we were meeting here at the safe space she made some enquiries with my other mentees and she met me. After explaining her story to me and told me that she wanted to go back to school, we decided as a group to give her a second chance.”*

- Mentor

Learn more in our in-depth publication ‘Resourcing Girls Resistance in Sierra Leone’ [this plain text document on the Purposeful website.](#)

### **Spotlight on: Funding Girls through the Generation Equality Process**

In its first year, the GEF Girls’ Fund has awarded \$125,400 USD to 28 girl and young feminist-led groups across the world!

The [Generation Equality Forum](#) presents an unprecedented opportunity to galvanise momentum, resources, and accountability toward a progressive agenda for gender equality, liberation, and human rights through the vehicle of six Action Coalitions and a Global Women Peace and Security Compact. The first year has shown us that there is high political will and commitment, backed by significant financial commitment, but that meaningful youth engagement has fallen short. Despite huge

hurdles, girls and young people have continued to hold the line, tirelessly showing up in critical spaces, and self-organising, even when the formal process has let them down. Despite their persistence and political rigour in raising their voices and holding leaders' feet to the fire, they remain under-funded and left out of key conversations about resourcing.

In response, Purposeful, in partnership with Plan International and funded by Irish Aid, established the GEF Girls' Fund, a specific grantmaking window for girls and young feminist-led collectives to engage with the Generation Equality process using innovative and creative activism and organising. 28 girl and young feminist-led collectives were selected through a peer-led process with grants of up to \$5,000 USD each.

The funded collectives have a range of different strategies to engage with the Generation Equality process. Some are already influencing through the [Action Coalitions](#) on gender-based violence and climate justice. See [this report on the Generation Equality website](#) for more information. Others are advocating with the civil society working groups and national committees. The majority are also working at a community level with girls, women and local leaders. This is because, as explained by Laxmi, from [Access Planet Nepal](#) - one of the Girls' Fund grant recipients - to conduct successful advocacy at the national or even global level, girls and young activists must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to harness their collective power to apply pressure for meaningful change in the systems and structures that shape their lives.

*“They [girls with disabilities] need to know about the laws and policies and need to build confidence in themselves to speak for their rights to the local government. That’s why we conducted the Training of Trainers.....now they are ready to take their issues forward.....local campaigners have been produced.”*

*- Laxmi, Access Planet Nepal*

Purposeful has commissioned research to better understand the financial commitments made to adolescents and young feminists through the GEF Girls’ Fund. This research will be launched during 2023.

### **Spotlight on: Tar Kura - Sierra Leone’s first youth-led participatory grantmaking process**

Purposeful has distributed \$176,500.00 USD to 18 youth-led groups across Sierra Leone!

Young people across Sierra Leone have creative ideas and initiatives to address the pressing issues and concerns in their communities, however, the lack of funding has been a significant barrier to them initiating, sustaining or scaling their initiatives. In recognition of this, and in the deeply held belief that change will come from Sierra Leoneans, Purposeful, in partnership with the Fund for Global Human Rights launched Tar Kura (New Fire), a participatory grantmaking model putting young people at the centre of decision-making and allocating resources to support young people's ideas. The panellists decided on the funding criteria and through learning visits to shortlisted collectives, selected those to receive funding - from solar panel

backpacks that charge as children walk to school and provide lighting for their homework, to farming projects that provide jobs to young people in the community.

The model in Sierra Leone differs from our global work due to the nature of support and engagement that having physical proximity to applicants and grantee partners has enabled. Our team's deep understanding of the context in the different regions of the country, conducting outreach in multiple languages, and responding to any geographical gaps through local dialects, and the ability to meet in person, to receive applications and engage in Krio have all enabled Purposeful to build the strongest relationships with grantee partners and advisors.

In 2021, an external evaluation with youth co-evaluators was conducted. The reflections and lessons learned from the first year of Tar Kura are documented [in this report on the Purposeful website](#).

### **Spotlight on: Karo Kura - resourcing adult allies**

Purposeful has distributed \$1,230,558 USD

Karo Kura means 'New Moon' in three local dialects in Sierra Leone. This funding initiative began in 2017, a few months after Purposeful's official launch. We saw first-hand how local organisations were showing up every day for girls in the most forgotten parts of the country with almost no access to money. Recognising these small grassroots organisations as an essential part of a thriving and healthy ecosystem for girls, we designed Karo Kura to meet a range of community needs, including funding and feminist political education, spaces to convene and share knowledge, and for joint advocacy platforms.

## **'From the Spark grant we were able to catch fire'**

Victoria Renner, Director of Association for Women and Children at Risk brings to life the experience of being a Karo Kura grantee partner:

*"It was January 2019, and I had the post-Christmas blue feeling. All the Christmas celebrations were over, and it felt like there was nothing to look forward to. There was no money with it being after Christmas and I didn't know what I was going to do for the girls that I support. I was listening to the radio one day and heard the call for proposals that Purposeful was advertising. It felt like the right fit, so I applied.*

*After submitting my proposal, I waited a little and then got the call to come to pitch my idea. I was so nervous on the day. I arrived at the address where we were to pitch two hours ahead of the stated time. I must have seemed crazy, but I really cared. Anyway, the pitch was nothing like I expected it to be. It was actually enjoyable, and it felt like Purposeful believed in me and my work. I enjoyed the discussion with the Purposeful team.*

*I was given the grant to run the girls' only spaces in the communities I work in. It was difficult in the beginning. When the community realised we had received a grant, they had extremely high expectations, but I tried to explain to them what we wanted to do and that the funding was small. They understood this and try to support the work I am doing with the girls. The location of the space was another issue as we don't*

*have a permanent structure, but we try to be resourceful and use what we have access to.*

*You can really see the change in the girls. Before the programme, girls did not talk, now they talk about what is bothering them. If a girl is raped, they talk about it, if they are beaten too much at school, they talk about it. I am so proud of them.*

*Before the Spark grant, we were just a drop in the ocean, we weren't anything, but with the coming of Purposeful we became exposed. Purposeful encouraged us. Before now, we were running after donors and partners to work with us. Now they are running after us! I have been approached by so many organisations wanting to collaborate with me it feels wonderful.*

*Working with Purposeful has changed me and my organisation. Since the Spark grant, I have worked with so many different organisations inside and outside of the country, including collaborating on girl-centred projects with organisations from India and Morocco. From the Spark grant, we were able to catch fire, and the fire is burning brightly!"*

## **The Global Resilience Fund**

Between 2020-2022, The Global Resilience Fund distributed grants totalling \$1,461,930 USD.

Girls and young activists are advocating for gender rights and social justice in every single crisis situation globally - from pandemics to civil war to ecological breakdown -

and yet, girls and young women remain absent from national recovery response efforts and are frequently under-represented in decision-making structures. The humanitarian sector is divided by silos that are focused on immediate response needs and are often incredibly top-down in their approach, leaving little room for any community-based work and much less work led by girls, trans youth and young women. Furthermore, traditional humanitarian response efforts often fail to reach adolescent girls and young women in their response efforts and invisibilise the incredible work that girls and women are doing during crises.

### **Where It All Began**

As the realities of COVID-19 began to unfold in early 2020, it soon became clear that girls and young women, trans and non-binary people – already battling the compounding effects of patriarchy, white supremacy and imperialist extraction – would be the very worst affected. Like any other crisis, COVID-19 exposed and exacerbated the existing systemic oppression and violence that positions girls and young people as particularly vulnerable, especially girls who face multiple forms of oppression.

At the same time, girls and young feminists were showing up in the moment with the bravery, resilience and organising power they bring to all of their activism. As the state and traditional agencies retreated, and as lockdowns took hold across the world, girls and young women responded and organised in their communities. Their ability to be resilient and to resist, care and stand in solidarity with their communities, was fortified by the close relationships and the systems of support they had woven for each other. The emergence of mutual aid networks and solidarity economies to

move supplies, of digital spaces of care and creativity, and of the persistence to find ways to organise, even in the most difficult circumstances, demonstrated their ability to weather the storm.

Housed and facilitated by Purposeful, the Global Resilience Fund (GRF) was launched by a cross-section of donors as a temporary pop-up fund, to directly support girls and young feminist's brave and transformative strategies. Rooted in principles of trust, solidarity and reciprocity, the GRF sought to move resources at speed and scale through models of shared power. Because young activists show up across movements, sectors and regions, the GRF created an opportunity for a diverse range of donors to come together and collaborate in new and transformative ways, leading to unprecedented possibilities.

Because of the funding and coordination gap it's filling, the GRF continues to be called on by activists and funders to move flexible resources to girls and young feminists who are impacted by and responding to crises, most recently in Ukraine, Palestine and Pakistan. In Ukraine, girls and young feminists are using solidarity and mutual aid to reach remote villages near the battle ground, unreached by larger humanitarian aid. In Occupied Palestine young feminist-led groups are resourcing solidarity economies, feminist storytelling and providing critical mental health and trauma support. In Pakistan, groups are providing access to menstrual health supplies to girls and young women in flood affected areas and working with young women with disabilities to ensure they can access basic support services, including food and medicine. Across these contexts, their work is embedded in their communities, reaching those often missed in response efforts, and continues with



minimal resources, revealing some of the larger systemic flaws in humanitarian aid. Therefore, as the GRF transitions from its current mandate as a COVID response fund, it is deepening its work to support girls and young feminists who are organising and responding in crisis contexts more broadly.

Recognising that the GRF is not always the most suited to direct funding, and wanting to work within the broader ecosystem of crisis funders that centre girls and young feminists, the GRF worked in partnership with other funders to move resources in certain contexts. For example, GRF supported MADRE to move funds to young activists in Afghanistan and with Tharthi Myay Foundation to resource girls and young people in Myanmar.

This section was taken from the Purposeful publication 'Weathering the Storm: Resourcing Girls and Young Activists Through the Pandemic', found [on this report on the Global Resilience Fund website](#).

### **Spotlight on: Occupied Palestine**

On 5th August 2022, Israeli Occupation Forces launched a military assault on the 15-year blockaded Gaza Strip, causing a death toll of 47, including 17 children and four women. The emergency response was fragile as the Strip suffers from a severe shortage of medical supplies, lack of clean drinking water, and repercussions of the power outage and fuel depletion in hospital generators. We are committed to deep learning with young feminist activists who are at the forefront of urgent relief and recovery community responses to better understand what they need in critical moments. Young people in Gaza reported this attack was particularly difficult as it

revived memories and scars of previous ones. Some girls have only ever known life under blockade; suffering from depression and fear. This puts their wellbeing and resilience on the verge of collapse.

Rooted in transformative solidarity as a practice of freedom, the GRF moved flexible resources to five young feminist-led collectives in Palestine in light of the August attack. Funding decisions were made by a young feminist panel of three Palestinian advisors and one Palestinian staff member at Purposeful. Grantee collectives affirmed their need for immediate psychological first aid, mental health support, trauma therapy, resourcing solidarity economies, sports activities, and feminist storytelling.

### **Spotlight on: Ukraine**

In the wake of the attack on Ukraine by Russia, the GRF was called to respond by advisors and existing grantee partners. In 2022, the GRF in partnership with WFG, awarded flexible rapid response grants to 20 girl and young feminist-led collectives in Ukraine who are directly responding to the situation and showing up for their communities. The funds distributed went towards (among other things) salaries, relocation costs, food, medication, warm clothing and blankets, generators, psychological support, and shelter.

The GRF began by initially supporting existing partners and then expanded to a broader list of partners across their networks. The fund currently supports groups all across the country and continues to be in close contact to understand how best to

deepen solidarity with them. It also launched a small renewal window for those collectives.

In addition to providing rapid response funding in Ukraine, the GRF worked with advisors and grantee partners from Ukraine and the broader region to convene two activist-funder dialogues in 2022. These were well attended by diverse funders across the funding ecosystem and acted as a chance for young feminist activists to be directly heard by funders and share the frontline responses they were leading on. This also served to organise, support, and shine a light on the limits and failures of humanitarian actors to reach girls and young activists organising at the community level. Despite being disproportionately impacted by the war, girls and young feminists are leading frontline response efforts in Ukraine. Read more in [this plain text report](#) on the Global Resilience Fund website.

### **Spotlight on: Accompaniment in Crisis**

Holding a deep understanding that organisations and collectives often need more than money, the GRF is committed to offering holistic and responsive young activist-led accompaniment to nourish and build people's individual and collective resilience.

Accompaniment is a process of walking side by side towards feminist liberation and social justice, with a grantee partner's needs, realities, and expertise front and centre. A feminist approach to accompaniment is based on the understanding of our expansive interconnection and role in supporting each other.

Following discussions on what GRF grantee partners needed to be even more resilient as individuals, collectives, and organisations; activist-led accompaniment sprouted, deeply rooted in feminist and activist principles of collaboration, self-determination, non-hierarchical and relational learning. Through this process of shared strategy creation, an accompaniment model emerged, grounded in the needs identified by collectives and advisors:

***Supporting deepened connections, cultivating community and increased confidence:***

- **Community circles:** drawing on coaching methodologies, three small groups of advisors came together for eight sessions over an 8- or 16-week period to collectively support each other to work through key issues.

***Supporting opportunities to strengthen their collectives and access more resources for their work, and exchanging skills and experiences:***

- **Webinar, training workshops, virtual learning & teach-ins:** using inclusive and accessible formats, activist panellists led a variety of topics offered based on expressed needs.

***Supporting resilience, collective care and wellbeing:***

- **Collective care festival:** Held in Latin America, the festival offered a series of virtual and in-person spaces with young feminist collectives working on physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

- **End of year celebration:** A moment for our community to gather and enjoy each other's company while participating in facilitated movement and ritual activities, and listening to young feminist musicians.
- **Collective care conversation:** Curated with the purpose of finding shared language and understanding of what self and collective care means for us as young feminists. **Collective care open space:** An activist-led event to explore collective care themes relevant to those who attended; both activists and funders.

***Cultivating critical connection and consciousness:***

- **Connecting collectives thematically and regionally** in different ways, where possible supporting them with funding for collaborative work.
- **Supporting advisors to host spaces** between collectives to enable sharing of knowledge and strategies for surviving and thriving during the pandemic.
- **Community spaces for activists with disabilities** from across the world with the goal of fostering solidarity and care, deepening trust and collective power, as well as knowledge and resource sharing.

**Meeting Movement Moments**

Life, humanitarian emergencies, and movement moments happen outside the confines and timelines of our grantmaking structures and cycles. As the global pandemic showed us, we need to move in new ways to meet the needs of girls and young feminists in the moments they need resources the most.

Purposeful has made the decision to not let the plans we put in place limit us from serving girls in those moments. Our participatory grantmaking structure and processes also provide us with spaciousness and clarity when we need to make discretionary and ad hoc funding. This has taken many forms - from one-off funding to support organisations like NalaFem as they organised around the Generation Equality Forum, or the creation of a new type of grant as with the Girls Collectives fund in Sierra Leone.

### **Spotlight on: The Survivors Solidarity Fund - resourcing the movement to end sexual violence in Sierra Leone**

#### **Collectivising, fuelled by grief and outrage**

The failure to invest in and fund essential response services for survivors of sexual violence is an act of political, economic, cultural and physical vandalism on the lives and bodies of girls and women. It serves to strip dignity, to instil fear, to re-traumatise and to allow perpetrators to stay at large. It is at best negligent and at worst intentional. It is the harsh reality in which many girls and women around the world live.

We agitate for change every day but we also know that we cannot wait for others to fund our safety and dignity. In 2020, confronted with the rape and death of a five-year-old girl in Sierra Leone, Purposeful conspired with survivor leaders and allies nationally and globally to take collective action. The Survivors Solidarity Fund was born. Tired of waiting for change and for free, quality services to be resourced,

activists and allies crowd-funded resources across constituencies - from community members in villages to eminent personalities like Idris Elba and Isha Sesay in the diaspora - modelling a new kind of philanthropy.

### **Raising resources**

As the fund came into being, Fund Champions came forward to amplify the collective vision of ending violence against girls and women, and ultimately to generate resources to fuel this vision. Fund Champions straddled sectors and continents, from Asmaa James, Idris Elba, and Isha Sesay using their international and national celebratory power and platforms, to Martin Michael of Mercury International in Sierra Leone, using his private sector position to fundraise. Meanwhile, others from the not-for-profit and academic spaces also leaned in with their voices, stories, and solutions.

The momentum was palpable. A concerted campaign was launched to raise awareness of the fund and its mission. We put out press releases and flyers, spoke on TV and radio, targeted banks and businesses with sponsorship options, and utilised our social media platforms. We used our professional and personal networks to raise awareness of the fund and to raise actual resources. Others followed our lead and we saw young people collectivise to start their own fundraising drive. For example, Femme Collective, a group of young feminists, called for students to make donations and matched every donation made - if a student donated Le50,000, they added another Le50,000 to make the donation Le100,000. A total of \$1,530 USD was raised and donated to the Survivors Solidarity Fund through this effort alone.

We intentionally removed any barriers to making donations - accepting donations through bank transfers, mobile money, PayPal and cash. In six weeks, over \$100,000 USD was raised. The Survivors Solidarity Fund is housed at and facilitated by Purposeful. We are covering the cost of running the fund from our own resources as an act of institutional solidarity. All funds donated go directly to critical life-saving and life-sustaining services for girls and women in Sierra Leone.

The money was shared among four grassroots organisations, providing them with vital unrestricted resources to build on the essential work they already do for survivors. ***Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality, Rights and Social Justice (LAWYERS)*** used the money to remove some of the barriers that survivors face in accessing justice, including establishing a safe space in the Law Court in Freetown for survivors and witnesses to meet with the prosecution and wait for their turn to testify. Meanwhile, the ***Rainbo Initiative and Aberdeen Women's Centre*** leveraged the funding to strengthen the medical and psychosocial services they provide to survivors. Finally, recognising that girls and women with disabilities are often more vulnerable to violence and abuse, yet face even more barriers to accessing response services, ***SMART Women's Initiative***, through its partner Sierra Leone National Association of the Deaf, is pioneering sign language interpretation training for Survivors Solidarity Fund partners.

## **The future**

This experience reminds us of the power of both individual and collective action - when given the space and platform, people will galvanise and take action around issues that matter to them. It is a new kind of philanthropy, focused on the local. The



Survivors Solidarity Fund is committed to continuing to fundraise and grant-make to local organisations now and in the future, while we continue to lobby, advocate, and amplify voices to ensure that quality services are funded and barriers to accessing these services are torn down.

Read more about what we learned about doing this work practically in lessons we shared with the West Africa Civil Society Institute on [this page of their website](#) and follow the Fund's journey on the [Survivor Solidarity Fund website](#).

Learn more about the movement to end FGM in Sierra Leone through these short documentaries on YouTube: [A Bloodless Rite](#) and [Wati Kura - A New Moment](#).

## **Moving Money and Moving a Field: Philanthropic Advocacy**

***Purposeful is just one small part of an ecosystem for girls. We know that the world we are working towards, requires collective action - including action from a cross-section of funders.*** And so, we leverage learnings from our own practice to support others to move from protectionist to power-building approaches to supporting girls. Here we reflect on the importance of donor organising in resourcing girls' resistance.

### **The power of donor organising**

Girls and young feminists bring incredible organising power, creativity, and courage to their activism, working tirelessly to create change in every corner of the world.

They are often doing this at great risk to their safety, health, and wellbeing, and with minimal resourcing (less than 1% of global funding). Recently, we've seen this with the girls and young feminists who are leading protests in response to the death of Mahsa Amina in Iran, those fighting the impact that racism, poverty, and colonialism is having on the planet (their resistance has already resulted in cutting emissions from some of the largest contributors to Climate Crisis: US and Canada), and those girls resisting genital cutting in Sierra Leone. As funders, it's taken us a mighty long time to recognise and honour the ways girls and young feminists organise and to show up for them in ways that are authentic and less donor-driven. The With and For Girls Collective (WFG-Collective) has been learning to show up with that same organising power, creativity, and courage with the ways in which we move resources to their activism, and to advocate with our funder colleagues to do the same.

In that spirit, we launched the first WFG-Collective Learning and Advocacy Agenda, with the intention to make our own institutions more accountable in our funding to girls and young feminists and reorganise power to drive more and better resources to their politicised work. The agenda challenges us to deepen our own learning and internal accountability practices and mechanisms, forcing us to first focus inward on what we can do to centre girls and young feminists in decision-making to meet their needs and support their dreams. From our own institutional commitments and transformation, we are then able to turn outward, sharing our learning and inspiring others to step up to the challenge and be part of the movements that are remaking a better world for us all.

## **Going deeper by centring girl and young feminist activists**

Developing this agenda came at a critical moment in the history of WFG-Collective, which both reflects its legacy and the global moment we find ourselves in. The Collective was launched in 2014, established as an awards programme for girl-led and centred organisations at a time when there were very few funders centring girls, especially organisations led by girls and women from the communities where they work. In its first five years, it has played an important role in recognising and giving awards to girl-centred organisations for their brilliant work, demonstrating the power of their activism and efforts on public stages and spaces. Five years later, we know it's time to go deeper, both in our ability to reach girl-led and centred organisations and in our commitment to shifting the philanthropic sector.

Looking at our own funding history, we recognise that we have moved a lot of resources in the name of girls, but not always into the critical ways girls lead work in their communities. While organisations were receiving resources, girls were not necessarily in control of those resources and adult allies leading this work often went unrecognised in the process. In order to reach girl-led organisations, we need to build a more robust infrastructure to meet the ways in which they are working. By separating the activities of the WFG Fund and the WFG-Collective, we have moved with a deep intentionality to fund work that girls and young feminists truly lead, with flexible, multi-year commitments and in ways that can reach both the informal and formal work of girl and young feminist activists, as well as continuing to recognise and fund critical intergenerational work.

We have also wanted to change the ways in which we approach the spaces we have created in the name of girls and young feminists to be more accountable to them, their work, and ways of organising. Through deepening our commitment to philanthropic advocacy and organising as a Collective, we have created an opportunity for members to learn together how to transform our own practices and use our influence and power in philanthropy to organise and transform the sector so that it is more accountable to girls and young feminists.

Our strength comes in the diversity of entry points that bring us to funding girls and young feminists - from children's rights to women's rights to feminist philanthropy to youth rights and beyond. Girls and young feminists unite our work because they show up across every sector and movement. In other words, no matter what sector or issue or population a funder focuses on, girls and young feminists are relevant to their strategies and work because of the intersectional and cross-movement ways in which girls and young feminists organise, strategise, and power social transformation. Regardless of how the members arrive at the decision to fund this work, we all bring a common commitment and accountability to moving resources to girls and young feminists. We all know that if we do not use our power, we will not be able to achieve sustainable systemic change. As Audre Lorde's wisdom reminds us:

*“Power that is not used is dangerous because power is never quiescent; it's never neutral. If I do not use my power, however relative it is; if I do not find out what it is and learn how to use it, someone else is using it. The power you do not use is being used against us, against me, against our children, against our world.”*

## **Transforming the philanthropic sector through collective learning, advocacy, and organising**

The philanthropic sector exists because of inequality and exploitation fuelled by a colonial legacy which is clearly noticeable when we take a look at the largest and most powerful philanthropic institutions in the world. It is also visible when we look at the way in which funding is not reaching communities that have, and continue to be, marginalised and experience multiple forms of oppression. Recognising that the systemic change needed in the sector is only possible through collective organising efforts, as the WFG-Collective, we have been working together in creative, vulnerable, and community-centred ways with girls and young feminists. As Sandile Ndelu, Advocacy Manager at FRIDA Young Feminist Fund — a WFG-Collective member, reflects:

*“Donor organising enables feminist funds to build power through pooling resources, building knowledge, sharing experiences, leveraging relationships and collectivising action for the benefit of the feminist ecosystem. When funds are organised, not only are they able to move more and better resources to the movement faster and more effectively, but they are also able to act as a formidable counterweight against the regressive forces that are threatening the movement’s gains.”*

Donor organising has been essential in breaking silos and rooting our efforts in ways that are generative for the ecosystem and transform our common interests into concrete action. It also allows us to move money beyond our own organisational priorities. In a rapidly and constantly changing world, we know that people’s lives and

needs do not follow neat logic models. Coco Jervis, a WFG-Collective member from Mama Cash reflects:

*“Throughout all our work, we are dedicated to forging strong partnerships based on respect, trust and solidarity as well as building knowledge and networks to strengthen movements and inspire donors to deepen their support of feminist movements. This is why we were excited to help shape the WFG-Collective from the start, taking what was just an idea at the time and collaborating with peer funders to channel our shared interest into concrete action and more accessible resources for girls organising around the world. This type of donor organising, when done well and aligned with the priorities of movements themselves, enables us as donors to move beyond our organisational silos and advance a common agenda to — hopefully — bring about more just and joyful communities and futures for us all.”*

Our role and responsibility is to ensure we are working in ways that are relevant to the needs and context of girls and young feminists. This requires us, as funders, to be constantly learning from and with each other, girls and young activists, and to be vulnerable about our own limitations and the challenges we face in philanthropy. Based on the history of philanthropy and the ways in which it is exclusionary and often built on a culture of perfection and performance, funders aren't often vulnerable together, and certainly not externally or with partners. There are very few spaces where funders can truly learn together and transform their practices. As the Collective, we've set out to create a space where funders can be vulnerable and learn from each other's experiences. We are also intentional about cultivating opportunities for funders and activists to be in dialogue with each other - easier said

than done, but we have found commitment and camaraderie in the Collective partners and a willingness to experiment and learn together.

Learning together, sharing risks, holding ourselves accountable to girls and young feminists, and experimenting outside of the Collective has already transformed members' funding practices of accountability mechanisms, as member, Global Fund For Children, shares:

*“When we know that other funders are creatively experimenting to eliminate barriers to getting funding to young people and opening space for them to influence the sector, each of us is encouraged to go further. During our time as a member of the Collective, we were inspired to form a youth advisory council, carry out a participatory evaluation with young women, hold space for an adolescent girls’ summit, start funding unregistered groups, and launch the Spark Fund, a youth-led participatory grantmaking fund. When we intentionally organise as donors, we open the door for ourselves and others to examine our practices, let go of control, and centre girls and youth as actors in movements with their own visions and dreams to bring to life.”*

Most importantly, donor organising has unlocked resources for girls and young feminists. The GRF is an example of the power of donor organising in the midst of crisis — bringing together many members of the WFG-Collective as well as other funders across the ecosystem to resource girls and young feminists at the forefront of COVID-19 response efforts. ***Fuelled by GRF and WFG Fund members, we have moved over \$5M USD to more than 500 girls and young feminist***

**collectives — both registered and unregistered - in the past five years.** This also provides more evidence of how combining our resources results in further reaching girls and young feminists. For some, this is about sharing risk and an infrastructure that is built around the needs of girls and young feminists. Many funders are not able to fund unregistered collectives or lower other barriers such as due diligence, application processes, and reporting requirements, which are necessary for funding most girl and young feminist-led collectives. For others, girls and/or young feminists may not be an institutional priority, but the WFG Fund becomes a place where Collective members can move resources to girls and young feminists and learn about their work. By pooling our resources and sharing risk, more resources can flow in ways that are critical, not only to the work led by girls and young feminists, but their whole communities.

*“While we are currently developing our own philanthropic advocacy strategy and are constantly on a learning journey, we have heard a clear call from our partners, including the With and For Girls Collective, that it is our responsibility as a funder to share our intersectional, feminist grantmaking principles with the sector to unlock more and better resources for feminist movements including girls, gender expansive youths, and young feminists. We believe in donor organising and influencing that truly centres, uplifts, is accountable to movements every step of the way, and has the potential to strengthen the feminist funding ecosystem at every level — local, regional, global. Donor organising is also an opportunity for us at FJS to examine our own positionality as private donors within the philanthropic system, learn from other feminist donors, and evolve our own practices and thinking to be more feminist, just, intersectional, and inclusive. So much more becomes possible when we collectively*



*challenge each other to be better. This means deeply listening, learning, and taking action in community which is what the Collective is about and why FJS is committed to engaging and contributing across teams and alongside its members and allies.”*

*- Juliana Velez, Rophiat Bello, Rebecca Reeve, Foundation for a Just Society*

As an ecosystem, we acknowledge that it's not just about funding for girls - there are many ways of being in community with girls and young feminists that extend beyond funding and we are supporting them to receive other resources and to access what they need. We hold a strong responsibility to facilitate other forms of nurturing and holding spaces that allow girls and young feminists to be seen, heard, and funded to thrive. We commit ourselves to learn with and from girls and young feminists, questioning our norms in order to truly be in community with them.

We are building on the legacy of feminists who have supported girls and young feminists in their communities for centuries, often without resources. We can no longer continue to benefit and celebrate how 'little' it takes to do girls' work. We must be willing to show up for them in generous ways that break cycles of scarcity. As Dr. Ramatu Bangura rightly states, *“we must fund girls and young feminists like we want them to win”*.

Jen Bokkoff (Director of Development at Disability Rights Fund) and Rosa Bransky (Co-Founder & Co-CEO of Purposeful) Rosa Bransky have also reflected on funder collaboration [in this article on the Alliance Magazine website](#).

## **A Feminist Approach to Learning**

For many collectives and organisations, learning has become wholly defined by the needs of donors; a burdensome process they endure to access funding. Funders often justify the imposition of indicators, methodology, and other reporting requirements as the need to be accountable to their own stakeholders - most often, their boards. The use of unnecessarily complex jargon, data tracking that has very little to do with how activists themselves understand change, creating long reporting templates and so on, robs activists of the time and energy they need to transform the world.

### **What we mean by 'Learning' at Purposeful**

The spectrum of our learning and research work ranges from formal and informal documentation of insights, such as partner reports and WhatsApp messages, research generated by girls, to activities led by our internal learning team or external consultants. In more traditional development spaces, this could also be seen as including monitoring and evaluation, however we recognise the roots of these practices as 'the master's tools' and we intentionally seek to unlearn these practices and lean into the learning aspect of our work. As our core purpose is to collect and generate meaningful insights and learning, we refer to the team leading this work as the Insights & Learning team.

***Our learning, as with all our work, is rooted in a power-analysis, designed to:***

- Centre and build girls' power through its very form and function
- Prioritise peer learning

- Value girls as holders and producers of knowledge
- Ensure we collect only what we will use and share
- Embrace many ways of knowing and create opportunities for girls to tell their own stories.
- Challenge traditional approaches to learning by using a decolonial and feminist lens in our entire approach, from the ways in which we hear from grantee partners, to the ways in which we make sense of and share data.

We believe that girls are the experts of their reality. We partner with them to learn how change is happening, to challenge the linear understanding of change and the normative understandings of growth, progress, and success.

Because of this, girls have been able to:

- Stand firm in the knowledge that it is within their power - and of interest to our learning - to use their funds in a completely different way than perhaps initially planned; i.e., paying rent to keep their spaces open, or to respond to an immediate crisis.
- Frame their work as part of a larger local movement to collectively apply pressure and to recognise that they are contributing to some of the wins - for example, ensuring that legislation in favour of girls and women is not overturned.
- Acknowledge that change takes time - for instance, that the shifts in how local leaders frame and speak about an issue that they have started to observe,

are an indication of changes to come, and that these shifts within cultural expectations and conversations are a small step towards changes in structures, systems and the many ways in which patriarchy manifests itself.

- Share that they are facing backlash; organising in a context of constant threats to themselves and their families, and that members of their teams are being arrested and/or physically harmed.
- Share that the biggest change they have seen has been internal - in the renewed sense of hope of their team now that they have some financial support for their work.

*“Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair.”*

*- bell hooks*

These are just a few of the messages we have been hearing from girls, in our informal chats via WhatsApp, lunchtime conversations during kick-off meetings and in the more structured ways that we've set up to hear from girls.

## **Hearing from Girls**

Purposeful was founded on listening to and reflecting with girls. We have carried this foundational practice into our learning approach today by making use of virtual and in-person opportunities and tools. We currently have three main ways from hearing from and learning with groups:

- **Learning Calls** that move beyond functional reporting to create a space for sharing experiences, ideas and hopes. These calls are held across thematic areas and countries in each region and in multiple languages. The groups receive reflection questions in advance and the calls are co-facilitated by a member of the Purposeful team and an advisor from the region. By relying on these calls as the primary way to hear from collectives, we have created an opportunity for them to learn from each other and build solidarity. Knowledge is a powerful resource, and should not only be shared in one direction (from one grantee partner to the donor). To share strategies of resistance between grantee partners and reflections on how to catalyse change in certain socio-political circumstances is a valuable use of partners' time and energy; decentring the donor in the learning process.
- **Written reports:** Not all collectives have access to good wi-fi, nor do they always feel comfortable speaking about their work. Others cannot make the learning calls due to school, full or part-time jobs in addition to the work of their collectives, even when scheduled at weekends or the most convenient times. A short online written report template includes explanatory text to clarify what is being asked and why. Collectives in Sierra Leone, who cannot access the form have the option to share updates through WhatsApp or on a separate call with one of our team members in the country.

*“Since there are very few people in our team, due to lack of time, we are not always able to connect to the online events that you organise, but we always follow the updates.”*

- Sarpa, Uzbekistan

- **Learning visits:** In traditional funder-grantee partner relationships, these visits have been used more as spot-checks and audits; verification of whether indeed groups are doing what they'd said they would do; a way of learning that is rooted in mistrust. We believe that when planned well and rooted in feminist and decolonial thinking, learning visits are a great way to build relationships with grantee partners, an opportunity to better understand their context and nature of their work, and in turn, to provide the support they need.

### **Girls are the experts of their own reality**

In addition to these ways of hearing from and learning with girls, Purposeful is trialling a number of ways of hearing from girls through supporting them to tell their own stories:

### **Learning grants**

Most of the literature in the girls and young feminist ecosystem is not written by them. Adult allies often have access to the resources needed to produce and share knowledge about girls, from the contexts they live in and reflections on response and resistance strategies, to the changes sparked by the work of girls and their allies. Producing and sharing this knowledge, particularly with a feminist and decolonial lens is an act of solidarity, and it pushes those within the girls' ecosystem to show up for them in a way that is aligned with their reality.

At the same time, we believe that we should not always speak for or on behalf of girls. We view girls as the experts of their own reality. They hold and produce knowledge, and it is part of our role to support them to document, produce and share knowledge from their own frame of reference, in their own words and in the ways that they prefer; as blogs, journals or visual diaries, articles or reports etc.

In 2023, Purposeful will launch a grant specifically for learning, research and documentation, so that in addition to having a core grant, collectives interested in conducting their own learning/research/documentation initiative will have the resources they need to do so. They will have support from the Purposeful Insights and Learning team, and the final outputs that they share with Purposeful will be made publicly available. In doing so, we fully break the pattern of speaking for and about girls, and create a further opportunity to hear directly from girls and build a counter-narrative - that girls hold and produce knowledge.

### **Resourcing learning**

Purposeful has committed to resourcing its learning work sufficiently in its allocation of people and money, so that we can collect, analyse, and share in ways that are aligned to our values. We acknowledge this and aim to be transparent. We have been able to develop a feminist approach to learning specifically due to flexible and core funding that has enabled us to dream and implement freely. With more restrictive donors, we work within their frameworks, but design processes aligned to our values and principles as much as possible.

Read Purposeful's full Learning Agenda [in this plain text document](#) on our website.

## **Documenting stories**

In East Africa, we have started documenting the process of moving money to girls in new ways that meet their needs, as well as the impact of meeting girls where they are with resources. Working with 18 partners in Kenya and four in Tanzania, we will be supporting girls' autonomous organising and informal projects.

This project is the first step towards changing the way in which donors and other decision-makers think about, talk about, engage with, and ultimately resource girls' work. It is also an offering to the girls' rights field, and girl activists at large. The project records the power and possibility of girls' resistance, so often marginalised and hidden from view. Girls' stories need to be amplified - they have a fundamental, indelible right to narrate their own lives in all their complexity, to see representative images of themselves in the world, and to engage in deep dialogue about their realities.

We need these stories to be the grounding force behind the resourcing of girls' work globally as currently, the prevailing narratives about girls either invisibilise them altogether or move resources through frameworks that do not align with girls' lived experience. By bringing together documentation, advocacy, and grantmaking, this project aims to transform how girls are seen and resourced.



## Into the Next Five Years

Even as this publication was being written it was fast moving out of date, for the work continues at pace through 2023 as we listen, move and respond to girls where they're at, not least in moments of profound urgency, like moving rapid response funds to girls and collectives of over \$77,000 affected by the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and moving over \$335,000 through GEF Girls Fund to new applicants and for renewal grants. We have also begun rolling out individual personal development grants to young women mentors we work with across Sierra Leone for them to pursue their personal goals - for many this has been named as returning to education, vocational training, or the capital to strengthen or start up businesses.

2023 sees the launch of the Feminist Scholar Award, awarding \$50,000 in unrestricted funding to a feminist leader in the Global South and in the diaspora, offering space and time away from the burdens of institutional fundraising or commercial income generation to advance stories about the power of girlhood and the boundless possibilities of girl-led organising - and in turn, a new way for philanthropy to resource activists and activists to move hearts and minds.

These first years have just served to cement our grounding truths of reciprocity and solidarity in how we continue to resource girls' resistance, how we support girls across to build trust, exchange strategies, foster collective power, and ultimately build a base for their shared struggles to bring their visions to the fore.

None of this is possible without shifting money - who holds it, and how we understand it. We continue to humbly ask, what does it mean to move beyond the function of grantmaking to the political practice of resourcing resistance? We

continue to boldly set out to resource girls, young feminists and the older allies who stand with them, expansively, where they are. And because we know these resources are just a drop in the ocean - we continue to seek to politicise the movement of money across philanthropy and development, so that it is returned at scale to where it should really be.

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