

Investing in Social Movements: The Connection Between Research, Advocacy, and Philanthropy



"At the Global Fund for Women, we believe that women's agency is central to achieving lasting change at all levels—in households, communities, businesses, and decision-making spaces across the world. Our grantmaking and advocacy work globally therefore focuses on supporting women to occupy positions of power and influence in their communities and organizations; to support developing their own visions and strategies for change; and, critically, to support women's movements that are effective in achieving women's rights."

--Musimbi Kanyoro, CEO & President of Global Fund for Women

We are at a "moment of movements," where human rights funders are increasingly recognizing the power of grassroots organizing and collective action in delivering lasting social change. In particular, women have been at the forefront of responding to rising attacks on civil society activism and repressive governments through new ways of mobilizing.

So how can funders best support women's movements in the current political climate? What opportunities are there for connecting movements both in the U.S. and globally? And what role can research play in building evidence to deepen our understanding about social movements and movement building? Global Fund for Women sought to explore these questions by hosting an interactive panel discussion with advocates and philanthropists in the field.

In May 2018, we brought together researchers, advocates, and philanthropists to participate in a conversation about the importance of investing in social movements in today's world. Panelists included **Olesya Bondar**, Director of the Ukrainian Women's Fund; **Jacqueline Hart**, Vice President for Strategic Learning, Research, and Evaluation at American Jewish World Service; **Irit Houvras**, American Jewish World Service's Director for Strategic Learning, Research, and Evaluation; **Monica Raye Simpson**, Executive Director of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Center; with **Leila Hessini**, Vice President of Programs at Global Fund for Women as moderator.¹ We are pleased to share with you the key highlights from the discussion below.

¹ Laurel Weldon, Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Director of the Purdue Policy Research Institute at Purdue University, was slated to join the panel but unfortunately could not

MOVEMENT TRENDS

- **There are new forms of solidarity across issues, sectors, and geographies.** We are seeing social justice organizations linking up and bridging issues, such as environmental justice with land rights or domestic worker rights with migrant worker rights—bringing together movements advancing racial, gender, social, and political justice. By seeking commonalities and overlapping goals, our collective impact is more inclusive, effective, and sustainable.
- **There are interesting new forms of transnational activism both online and offline,** such as #NiUnaMenos, #Neveragain, and #MeToo. These movements are led by women who have been historically left out of the conversation. They are bringing the marginalized to the center, crossing borders, and allowing online organizing of major protests that bring thousands together in person.
- **Intersectionality² is being recognized as a critical component of social movements.** Audre Lorde understood that we must acknowledge the various ways that discrimination intersect and the commonalities across our organizing when she said “There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives.”
- Related to the current political climate, we are seeing the **emergence of strong opposition movements in different countries,** which forces progressive movements to work and organize across difference and in new ways.

USING RESEARCH TO BETTER UNDERSTAND & SUPPORT MOVEMENTS

Research has shown that social movements are one of the most effective mechanisms to create long-term social change. Building on this knowledge, some organizations are developing tools to engage movement actors and community members to identify strengths, needs, and priorities of their movements and using the data to inform planning. Examples from this session include:

- Ukrainian Women’s Fund (UWF) felt that the lack of dialogue or collaboration among women’s rights organizations was keeping the women’s rights movement from having more influence. They partnered with Global Fund for Women to pilot the Movement Capacity Assessment Tool (developed by Global Fund for Women) as a way to engage key actors to identify strengths and challenges of the women’s movement in a participatory way. They expected participants to debate with others, but were surprised to find that everyone had similar concerns. These included the importance of collaboration within the movement and with allied movements; the need for strengthened infrastructure support for the movement; the need for new leadership; and the need to bring more young women into the movement. As a result of these

due to health reasons. Professor Weldon’s 2012 research demonstrates that autonomous feminist movements are key drivers to advancing progressive policies on violence against women. Her recent work focuses on how best to build and support organized feminism as a route to change.

² Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

findings, one of UWF's priorities this year is to facilitate opportunities for young women's participation and leadership in the movement.

- American Jewish World Service (AJWS) has a similar tool they use to inform their grantmaking strategy, which analyzes a movement using three components: base, structure, and strategy. For example, AJWS used the tool to assess a burgeoning land and water justice movement in Kenya, which resulted in the movement identifying that their base is weak. Their grantee partner is now trying to strengthen their organizing and mobilization strategy to make sure it is diverse and representative of the broader community.
- SisterSong has used storytelling as a form of research to engage communities and gather data for advocacy purposes. For example, they organized "sister circles" in Georgia and Mississippi, states in the U.S. with the highest rates of maternal mortality among black women, to provide an opportunity for women to have deep conversations about their experiences with the healthcare system, sex education, and more. SisterSong then used some of their findings to create a research report about the racial disparities in healthcare that they presented to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

All of the participants noted the importance of continuously reflecting on progress and learnings. When progressive social change happens, backlash often occurs, resulting in the feeling that we are moving (in the words of one panelist) "two steps forward and one step back." It is critical to recognize that challenging discriminatory policies and practices is an iterative and adaptive process, and that strengthening social movements takes time.

FUNDERS' ROLES IN SUPPORTING MOVEMENTS

Movements are necessary to achieving cultural and systemic change and shifts in power, but knowing how to fund them effectively is not straight-forward. We invest in movements recognizing that they are essential to strengthening collective action and producing sustainable change. As funders we must also recognize that movements are fluid and autonomous; we do not create them, but we do need to support them in our grantmaking, capacity-strengthening, and through political solidarity.

CURRENT TRENDS IN PHILANTHROPY ON MOVEMENT BUILDING

- The importance of Intersectionality is being reflected in funding practices. **Funders have a clearer understanding of what intersectionality means and are refining their grantmaking strategies to reflect that.** Funding partners are moving to models that acknowledge the connections between issues and the ways individuals experience intersecting forms of marginalization.
- The current political moment is resulting in unique challenges and opportunities. **Funders are recognizing that culture shift can be a strategy and goal during times when the political environment is hostile toward progressive policies.**

- Funders are in collaboration mode. A positive development of the political moment is that it **forces groups and funders to be innovative, creative, and to partner with each other.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS TO SUPPORT MOVEMENTS

- It is critical that funders **invest in the infrastructure of movements** which helps support their efficacy and sustainability.
- Funders must recognize that **success needs to be measured in ways other than policy change**, and embrace social norm change and culture shifts.
- **It is essential for funders to invest in the next generation pipeline of leaders.** This includes funding education and leadership training for grassroots leaders.
- Funders can play an important role in **supporting the safety and security of women's rights activists and movements under attack**—both online and offline.
- There is an opportunity **for global funders to take the lead in connecting social justice movements in the U.S with international movements.** Many issues that have been receiving increased attention in recent years in the U.S. have been explored in depth internationally for years (maternal mortality as a human rights violation, for example). Global funders have the chance to take the lead in promoting cross-global learning exchanges. There is much to be learned from organizing in the global south and best practices to address shared challenges.

CONCLUSION

Historically, social movements make transformative change happen on a shoestring. Women's movements have ended civil wars, secured equal pay, advanced reproductive rights, and so much more. Despite the power of their work in dismantling unjust policies and practices and challenging the status quo, we have yet to experience power of women's movements when they are funded at capacity. Can you imagine what that would look like – when women are trusted to lead with the resources they need to create a more just and equitable world for all?