Rights and Resources
The Effects of External Financing on Organising for Women's Rights

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This report concerns research undertaken by the international research consortium, Pathways of Women's Empowerment in collaboration with the Royal Tropical Institute in the Netherlands. The research (2009–2010) sought to clarify the conditions under which external financial support to women's rights organisations (WROs) has a positive impact on women's empowerment as well as the conditions in which successful women's organising is achievable without such support. Eleven case study organisations (five in Bangladesh and six in Ghana) were studied in depth using participatory methods of critical reflection. In addition, a wider network of WROs were involved in the study in both countries, as were donor staff in the countries concerned as well as at head offices.

This report brings together the analysis and findings from the two country studies, undertaken with Mukhopadhyay by Apusigah and Tsikata for Ghana and Nazneen and Sultan for Bangladesh and for which there are two separate national reports[1]. In addition the present report incorporates findings from interviews Eyben and Mukhopadhyay conducted with donor head office staff. It also reflects comments and debates from an international conference held in Amsterdam in March 2011 which brought together representatives from case study and donor organisations, as well as international activists and researchers, to discuss the research findings and its implications.

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1   S. Nazneen and M. Sultan 2011 'Mobilising for Women's Rights and the Role of Resources. Synthesis Report, Bangladesh. www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Bangladesh_Mobilising.pdf

Acronyms and abbreviations

6th March	The Sixth March Women's Foundation
AAB	Action Aid Bangladesh
ABANTU	ABANTU for Development, an African-wide regional women's rights organisation
ATWWAR	Advocates and Trainers for Women's Welfare Advancement and Rights
AWDF	The African Women's Development Fund
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association
BOMSA	Bangladesh Mohila Obvibashi Samity
BS	Banchte Shekha
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy
CBOs	Capacity Building Organisations
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DN	Doorbar Network
FIDA	International Federation of Women Lawyers
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G-RAP	Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HLF3	Accra High Level Forum
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KASSA	Knowledge Assessment and Sharing on Sustainable Agriculture
KN	Kormojibi Nari
LCG	Local Consultative Group
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
NETRIGHT	Network for Women's Rights in Ghana
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PfA	Platform for Action
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
RAVI	Rights and Voice Initiative
TAF	The Asia Foundation
The Ark	The Ark Foundation
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	The United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
WAGE	Women's Advancement and Gender Equality
WOM	Widows and Orphans Ministry
WROs	Women's Rights Organisations

Overview

This report concerns the historical trajectory of women's rights organisations (WROs) in Bangladesh and Ghana within the changing national contexts as well as the shifting international aid landscape in the last two decades and identifies the influence of external financing on what the organisations do and how they go about it. The report offers a model for how to study the question in other contexts and it can be used by WROs in other countries to reflect upon the relevance of the findings in their own context and to respond accordingly.

The influence of international aid, particularly in the 1990s and the early part of the last decade was in many ways beneficial for organisational effectiveness. Recently the funding landscape has become more hostile with funders' interest in rights and social transformation declining. Nevertheless in this environment maintaining the legitimacy of the discourse of women's rights as integral to gender and development policies has not been easy either for gender officers in aid organisations or for the WROs and although the organisations have managed to keep their identity, a sense of autonomy and a continued commitment, they are struggling to find their way. International funders are missing an important opportunity to support WROs in a manner that would optimise their capacity to mobilise women to formulate and voice their demands for gender justice.

Main findings

National context has shaped the different origins and mobilising strategies of the organisations studied. In Bangladesh Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) developed because foreign development aid, that supported both government and NGO programmes, was permitted. WROs that formed in the 1980s flourished by aligning themselves to NGOs and to pro-democracy movements. In Ghana, while women's rights struggles were already manifest in the 1980s, it was not till the return to multi-party politics in the 1990s that women's organisations developed with a further process of formalisation.

In both countries, the case study organisations were founded by highly committed persons. Founders and members contributed their income, often provided office space in their own homes and did all the work voluntarily. The period between the WRO foundation and their discovery by the international aid community as suitable clients for development aid varies. The pre-funding era is quite lengthy in Bangladesh and is remembered by the case study organisations with pride because of its voluntarism and activism. In Ghana the pre-funding period was shorter and is rendered almost invisible in the WRO accounts of their history despite the fact that some organisations achieved a great deal at that time.

The *international* context has however influenced the WROs in a fairly similar manner, making it possible to draw some tentative propositions about the impact of such influence more generally in developing countries – propositions that could usefully be tested through further studies elsewhere.

Firstly, the WROs have contributed to and have been shaped by international activism for women's rights, particularly in the run up to and aftermath of the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 whose global platform for action has influenced local agendas. Secondly, it was the Beijing process that also stimulated international donor

organisations to pay greater attention to and be interested in financing struggles for women's rights, applying similar procedures in both countries. Thus life with such funding is characterised by the case study organisations in both Bangladesh and Ghana as institutionalisation when formal structures were put in, staff hired to do the regular work, financial reporting regularised, and monitoring and reporting structures established. In both countries institutionalisation aided by donors was credited as having brought order and systems, extended outreach and exposed the organisations to new ways of working and networking. The organisations became more expensive to run as voluntarism declined, programmes expanded and hired staff had to be paid. Gender specialists in donor agencies at their headquarters believe that their agencies have had a significant and generally unhelpful influence over WROs' autonomy and integrity. The WROs themselves deny that funding has changed their core agendas although they agree that they have had to adapt in order to access funding. Unlike the gender specialists in donor agencies at headquarters, those at the country level did not see their role as being an unhelpful influence on the autonomy and integrity of the WROs.

Thus while there is encouraging evidence that none of the organisations studied have simply caved in to the new agendas and surrendered in a hostile environment, donor funding has had an undeniable impact. In Bangladesh there is a growing homogeneity in agendas and strategies of the WROs. Ways of working and strategies of particular relevance to the national context are sidelined – or if they still happen, such as street activism, are not reported. The search for financial sustainability when donors are unable and unwilling to give institutional grants for the development of the organisation has driven WROs to taking on more and more short-term projects while at the same time having to neglect the pursuit of longer term more strategic goals. Ghanaian WROs struggle to cope with ever-changing policy priorities and reporting requirements which, it was observed, donors change as frequently as they change their clothes.

Both WROs and donor staff perceive advantages and drawbacks to how external financing is provided. Donor emphasis on management systems and reporting has allowed organisational strengthening and enhanced effectiveness, particularly when there is a sense of partnership and trust within a long-term relationship. On the other hand, short-term and fluctuating project-related rather than core funding, combined with the donor pooling of funds, the decrease in direct relationships and increasing emphasis on inter-organisational competition for increasingly scarce funds are all seen, by both WROs and by most donor staff as detrimental to mutual efforts to secure social transformational outcomes. The Aid Effectiveness agenda of harmonisation has discouraged experimentation and risk taking by donors and the emphasis on results has led to a shift from "rights" to "effectiveness". Non-Governmental Organisations generally, including WROs, have shifted from being innovators to contractors.

The funding of gender equality and WROs has had profound effects not only on the organisations themselves but also on the meaning of gender equality and how this is to be achieved through development. First, there is a discernible shift to supporting gender mainstreaming which in donor speak means not supporting programmes targeting women's interests. This shift denies the history of discrimination, leads to the blind inclusion of men and has put paid to affirmative action leading to a devaluation of what the WROs do. Second, the role that donors played in supporting home spun methods of "doing" gender equality work has been over for some time. This has been replaced by and large by programme funding on themes which are internationally

being promoted and frameworks that come from these quarters. The immediate fall out is the homogenisation of discourse on how development, and specifically gender and development, should be done which is further disempowering WROs. Finally, the post-Paris aid modalities have restructured aid in ways that represent an idealised version of state–society relations and one that does not obtain in developed countries either. The state is projected as guarantor of rights and the institution that provides policy, programmes and services. Civil society is everybody else (mainly NGOs) and their role is to advocate for policy.

Although women's empowerment and gender equality remain central objectives for many donors, specific funding for women's rights has shrunk globally in recent years and gender specialists in many donor agencies, including INGOs are struggling to preserve a women's rights discourse and secure resources for WROs despite the evidence that women mobilising is a powerful engine for positive change in women's lives. At the same time, while overall resources for rights are declining, multilateral agencies are playing a more significant role as governments channel increasing amounts for gender equality through trust funds while women's funds are also an increasingly significant player that are likely to have a greater influence in the future. How these organisations, including UN Women as well as women's funds, respond to and support the mobilising strategies of WROs will be crucial.

In response to the reduction in donor resources, WROs are spending more time on the informal policy advocacy and networking that they have continued to do but that did not get the visibility nor were documented in the reports to donors. At the same time, they are seeking to raise financial resources through donations from government and the private sector as well as undertaking consultancies and starting up commercial ventures.

The most important capability that WROs have and that which is likely to sustain them in the future (in a different form perhaps) is their social legitimacy. There is a distinction drawn between what the case study organisations see as their identity i.e. women's rights and the NGO form that became predominant and to which the case study organisations tried to fit in order to access resources. Unlike the mainstream NGOs doing gender and development, the WROs have a cause and an identity in *society* as autonomous organisations defending and promoting rights. The tension is how WROs can keep their distinctiveness and legitimacy in "society" while also being able to access funding. A further question that arises is how should aid modalities be structured in order to accommodate this tension.

The donor head office staff we spoke with are generally very conscious that their organisations could do better when supporting women's rights organisations. Ideally, donors should:

- Let WROs own the agenda

- Provide medium to long-term support

- Be sufficiently in touch with the WROs to ensure that those they are supporting are "well anchored and representative"

- Understand the dynamic political context of the organisations' work

- Invest in the quality of the relationship with WROs because that is what matters most

- Be better at articulating women' rights as a theory of change

- Use WROs as a source of knowledge for policy dialogue

The question as to whether the amount of aid available to WROs in quantitative terms has grown or shrunk is not immediately relevant for the survival and sustenance of WROs (most of whom are medium sized or small and their requirements are modest). Rather the relevant issue is whether the changed architecture of aid makes it more difficult for women's organisations to access funding in their own right and for the concerns and issues that they have worked for. What then should WROs and donors do differently to sustain and expand mobilising for women's rights?

Implications for action

Women's Rights Organisations need to 'play the game but also seek to change the game'[2] by:

- Setting agendas not running behind the donors' agendas

- Ensuring they are transparent, have integrity and are operating within the law

- Sustaining their solidarity, rejecting the donor incitement to competition but rather helping each other, pooling resources and skills to amplify their voices

- Reaffirming and making claims on government budgets, including donor's budget support

- Thinking of themselves as big, powerful actors and positioning themselves accordingly, including with intermediary organisations such as women's funds and INGOs

- Creating or taking space to engage donors including at high level countries of consultation, in campaigns and at national and international forums

- Investing in cross-country relationships and actively engage with international women's alliances, such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

- Setting their own results frameworks by determining the differences they want to make, reflecting on and recording their own progress and identifying indicators accordingly, including those for social transformation

- Strengthening their links with other social justice organisations and movements

- Being more innovative about other ways of raising resources in their own countries

Donors need to[3]:

- Recognise the importance of women mobilising for their rights as the main driver for gender justice and that failure to support WRO agendas will mean donors failing to secure their gender equality objectives

- Understand and treat WROs as innovators not contractors

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2   Conference participants.

3   Conference participants.

- Realise that social change can be slow and difficult and continue to support actions that might take a long time to bear fruit

- Appreciate that social change comes through solidarity and avoid using funding to destroy the relationships between women activists in a country

- Support the links between service delivery and advocacy rather than just fund one or the other

- Ensure greater coherence and continuity in their support to WROs including with their own donor agendas and when these change communicate and consult

- Provide institutional support related to indicators for enhanced organisational performance

- De-mystify and simplify funding applications

- Avoid undermining WROs when recruiting their staff

- Encourage women's funds to take a higher profile in campaigning on women's rights including innovative but rigorous approaches to evaluating actions for social transformation

Introduction, Methodology and Context

Resource mobilisation and financial sustainability for women's movements worldwide is significant for women's empowerment. Many different groups and organisations have taken up the issue. Findings from AWID's and other studies have contributed to debates and discussions at various global fora and the conclusions from these meetings contributed to the 2008 meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In that context the distinctiveness of this present study is that (1) it complements the existing survey data through qualitative research undertaken by independent national research institutes in two countries, Bangladesh and Ghana, where rights based civil society organisations have generally been heavily dependent on external financing and (2) there was no *a priori* assumption that successful women's organising requires external funding.

Rather, the aims of the study have been to clarify the conditions under which external financial support to women's organising has a positive impact in strengthening the realisation of rights, as well as to explore the extent and manner in which successful women's organising is achievable without such support. The data derives from participatory exercises, group discussions, reflection and validation workshops, in depth interviews and document analysis. Based on the criteria decided upon at the research inception workshop (Box 1), five case study WROs were chosen in Bangladesh[4] and six in Ghana. While there are always limitations to case study methods and what happens

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4   One of the six organisations initially selected by the researchers declined to participate.

Box 1: **Criteria for selection of case study organisations**

Goals:
- The removal of discrimination (particularly those who are most likely to be excluded) and obstacles that impede women's enjoyment of their rights.
- Promotion of women's citizenship.
- Work for the recognition of women's contributions to society and the obstacles to the fulfilment of these contributions.
- Working to transform gender roles and stereotypes which inhibit women's enjoyment of their rights.

Leadership:
- Women-headed organisations

History:
- Should be established by 2000

in these two countries cannot necessarily be generalised to other aid recipient countries, nevertheless the value of a case study approach is its rich detail and exploration of processes, leading to findings that can stimulate questions and investigations elsewhere (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Furthermore, international aid agencies apply standardised concepts and approaches, for example to notions of "civil society" or "gender equality", that inform how donors understand and therefore choose to act – to some extent – irrespective – of context (Mosse 2011). Thus the effect of donor practices in the two countries concerned is likely not to be that dissimilar from in other aid recipient countries, although local context will of course also have its influence on donor impact.

In Ghana, the final selection was preceded by a mapping study that identified 21 potential case study organisations, following which representatives from these organisations participated in a reflection workshop to discuss the study's research objectives and to consider the initial findings from the mapping study. From this group were then selected six organisations for further in-depth interviews and associated documentary analysis.

In both countries, organisations were chosen to capture the diversity of different types of organisations. Section 4 provides background concerning their histories, activities and donors.

In addition to a study of these organisations, a wider group of WROs were consulted in both countries and the donor landscape was mapped and interviews were undertaken with staff in country selected from those organisations that have funded the case study WROs. Finally, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with 14 gender specialists working at the head offices of some of these same donor organisations to gain a more global perspective on their approach to funding WROs.

Because of the historical nature of the research, less attention has been paid by this study to newer kinds financing, particularly, some multilateral trust funds and women's funds that were not available to the case study organisations until very recently.

Table 1 **Participating case study organisations**

Bangladesh	Banchte Shekha	BOMSA	BNWLA	Doorbar Network	Kormojibi Nari	
Ghana	ABANTU for Development	ATWWAR	Ark Foundation	FIDA	6th March Foundation	Widows and Orphans Movement

Finally, the methodology involved validation workshops in the two countries as well as an international conference in Amsterdam that brought together representatives of all the case study organisations with international feminist activists and representatives of donor organisations to consider a draft of the present report and thus to contribute to this final version. A list of conference participants is provided in Annex A.

The context: women organising and donor responses

The context of this study is the inter-play between feminist activism in local and national spaces and global influences as this relates to WROs strategies and resource mobilisation in the last ten to twenty years.

Circumstances and motives for feminist collective action clearly vary in relation to time and place (Ray and Korteweg 1999). The nature of the state, state–society relations, the structure of gender relations and the particular history of the feminist movement and activism in any country all shape the character of women's mobilisation for their rights. Although Bangladesh and Ghana differ in all these respects, they also share some common characteristics which may not be present in all other aid recipient countries. Both have gone through a democratic transition after a long period of military/one party rule. Democratisation processes led to the state creating new spaces for engagement, including setting up new machineries for addressing women's issues. Democratisation also led to a growth in number and variety of women's organisations and networks that in the last twenty years have mobilised external and internal resources to pursue rights agendas. In both countries feminist activists have focused on engaging with the policy process to voice their demands and concerns.

Bangladesh and Ghana, like most other countries, have been influenced by international global advocacy and the establishment of universal norms for women's rights, (Molyneux 1998). In our two case study countries, the pattern and level of organising in the 1990s was strongly influenced by the Beijing Women's Conference, as was the case in many other countries. Priorities identified by women's organisations and national machineries shaped the Platform for Action (PfA) which in turn influenced national action plans and civil advocacy strategies. In Bangladesh the state became more open to working with WROs who gained new energy and enthusiasm to advocate for legal and policy reform. In Ghana, the Beijing effect continued into the 2000s, resulting in greater capacity building and networking opportunities. WROs in both countries benefited from the additional foreign aid resources that became available in the run up to Beijing – resource flows that were sustained for some years thereafter as donors implemented their plans in support of the PfA.

Globally in the last decade women's activism appears to have lost much of the momentum. Batliwala notes that 'where movement building has weakened, we see a far greater focus on implementing short-term projects and providing services. While these are certainly useful, they are often palliative, without a clear political agenda aimed at transforming gender and other social power relations in the longer term' (Batliwala 2008). This worldwide trend has influenced aid donors' perceptions and behaviour which in turn further constrained women's rights organisations' access to funds and therefore scope for action.

By the tenth anniversary of Beijing 2005 it was becoming apparent that donors were failing to implement their Beijing commitments. A loss of momentum and interest led to a decline in the general availability of resources in supporting women's rights and gender equality. In 2004 AWID started investigating what had happened to the money for WROs, publishing its first findings in 2006. The AWID campaign, combined with an overall increase in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) in the latter half of the decade, reversed the overall decline in financing gender equality and led to the establishment of a number of global trust and women's funds to which WROs can apply.

Fluctuations in levels of financing have not been the only change to donor support in the last decade. The Paris Declaration on Effective Aid (2005) concerned new ways of doing aid with an emphasis on recipient rather than donor countries setting the policy agenda and official donors being encouraged to align and harmonise their aid in support of this agenda. Civil society organisations, North and South, protested that they had not had a voice in the Paris negotiations and that in practice 'country ownership' meant government ownership. They and other voices from within the official aid organisations were also raised concerning the absence of human rights and gender equality in the aid effectiveness agenda (OECD DAC 2008). While the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action partially addressed both these concerns, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) donors continued to seek to apply the Paris principles including harmonisation of aid that led to a rationalisation of their programmes and in most cases a reduction in staff presence in country as they pooled more of their funds, including for civil society organisations. Country ownership and aid instruments, such as sector-wide and general budget support increased donors' interest in both influencing government policy and in strengthening domestic accountability of government budgets into which donor money was now flowing. Civil society found itself cast in the role of policy advocate and watchdog of the state. Donors became less interested in financing civil society to deliver services or to work at changing inequitable power relations within society.

Although most civil society organisations (CSOs) continued to receive much of their financial support from international NGOs rather than donor governments, these international NGOs (themselves heavily dependent on government support) have also been influenced by the ideology of effective aid in terms of what is expected of civil society and the "results" to be delivered. It is against this background that the present study was first conceived in 2006 and finally implemented in 2009–2010.[5]

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5   The delay was due to Pathways funding constraints.

The Country Case Studies

Country context

Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 through a struggle against economic exploitation and political and cultural suppression by Pakistan. It is relatively homogeneous in cultural and linguistic terms. Strict social hierarchies such as caste are absent but the state and society is hierarchical by gender and class. The country went through alternating periods of democratic (1971–1975; 1979–1982; 1991–2006) and military rule (1975–1979; 1982–1990; 2006–2008). This has resulted in the politics of engagement between the state and people becoming one of repression and confrontation. Whereas Bangladesh at the time of independence was declared as a secular state, the Islamist parties were reinstated into mainstream politics during military rule when the then military ruler General Ershad introduced Islam as a state religion in 1988. In the post dictatorship period, the two main parties have entered into overt or tacit alliances with the main Islamist party to form coalition governments. Furthermore the main political parties have over the decades managed to penetrate many significant CSOs ranging from professional groups such as doctors associations, to non-governmental organisations and organised groups such as trade unions and university teachers' associations. This has significantly undermined the ability of the CSOs to articulate their collective interests and increased clientelist control by the ruling parties.

Created as an independent country in 1957, as the result of a plebiscite, Ghana became a republic in 1960. In 1966, the first elected president, Nkrumah, was overthrown in a military coup and a series of military coups and rule followed till the 1990s. When he took over in 1979, Rawlings permitted the election of a civilian president to go ahead as scheduled. Two years later Rawlings staged another coup, charging the civilian government with corruption. Rawlings scrapped the constitution, instituted an austerity programme, and reduced budget deficits over the next decade. He then returned the country to civilian rule and won the presidency in multiparty elections in 1992 and again in 1996. Ghana has since emerged from close to three decades of structural adjustment programmes as a success story both in terms of its economic and political reforms. The opening up of democratic space has allowed for CSOs and an independent women's movement to flourish. Civil society organisations have emerged as important players, whether as critics of adjustment policies or as partners in shoring up the democratic and participatory credentials of economic policy making and political practice.

History of women mobilising for rights

Bangladesh has a long history of women's mobilisation tracing back to the anti-colonial nationalist movement, first against the British and then Pakistan. Women actively mobilised in the anti-colonial struggles and extensively participated in various social welfare activities. In the post liberation period (1971 onwards), the women's organisations have focused on a broad range of issues from political empowerment, economic equality, legal reforms of customary and gender biased laws, violence against women, and reproductive rights among others.

During long periods of military rule women's movements were active in the democracy movement and forged links with human rights, cultural and other social movements.

The 1980s saw women's organisations campaigning for legal reforms on dowry related violence and other forms of state violence. The latter half of the 1980s and early 1990s was when many of the women's NGOs were formed which led to a focus on women's economic empowerment and changes in how women's organisations work. They adopted an increasingly professionalised NGO approach. Demands for gender mainstreaming in government policy also became strong during this period. In the 1990s and the present decade, the women's movement has campaigned against violence against women, which includes *fatwa* (religious edicts), violence in police custody, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, domestic violence, acid violence, and violence against minority women in conflict zones. Movement by women workers in the formal and informal sector also gained strength during this time.

The long periods of military rule, the penetration of party politics in civil society associations, and the alignment of national political parties with fundamentalist forces have influenced the choice of actors that the women's organisations ally with. The fear of being perceived as an appendage to political parties and the fear of losing credibility and autonomy have prompted women's organisations to negotiate directly with the state bureaucracy rather than the political wing of government.

In Ghana the growth in numbers and effectiveness of WROs dates to the 1980s. The return to multi-party politics in the 1990s aided further the development of women's organisations, providing the soil in which to work for the strengthening of women's representation in politics. The opening up of the democratic space has emboldened policy advocates to address their issues without the risk of repression. In this connection, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes, the Aid Effectiveness agenda and the work around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provided opportunities for gender equality work.

The 1990s political landscape was characterised by the dominance of the 31st December Women's Movement which was led by Ghana's first lady at the time. Towards the end of the 1990s, there were signs and indications that there was a growing tide of women's rights organising which was autonomous from the state and which was seeking to find voice. With the change of government in 2000 and with it the demise of the overarching influence of the 31st December Women's Movement, the stage was set for a public consolidation of years of quiet activism. Several organisations were formalised through registration in this period. A pattern of organising on particular issues such as violence against women, women's political participation and women's legal rights became clearly established as was a stronger presence of women's rights advocacy on a national stage.

The period from 2000 also marked the start of prominent campaigns such as the one on the passage of a law on domestic violence and the writing of the women's manifesto. These culminated in the establishment of three coalitions with overlapping membership, the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), the Domestic Violence Bill Coalition and the Women's Manifesto Coalition. These new organisational approaches lent a collective spirit to the work on women's rights in Ghana and also created the platform for women's groups to engage in collective discussions about issues concerning them. Not surprisingly, women's groups under the leadership of NETRIGHT successfully campaigned to change the orientation of the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (G-RAP), the first of the multi-million dollar collective funds that was established by the donors in that period, which was

originally aimed at supporting the larger and more established organisations. NETRIGHT also organised women's groups to participate actively in preparatory processes for the Accra High Level Forum (HLF3) and hosted a one day international Women's Forum to prepare women's groups for the Forum.

The growth of women's organisations in Ghana has been supported by a resurgent international women's movement from the 1990s. Involvement in the world conferences of the 1980s and 1990s, most especially the 4th World Conference and its follow up meetings of the 2000s has been a largely positive experience for women's organisations in Ghana. NGO preparatory processes in Africa and on the global stage offered resources, capacity building and networking opportunities. Women's organisations slowly became more adept at sustaining work in between conferences and through this strengthened their legitimacy.

History and present context of development aid

During the first two decades of independence, Bangladesh was heavily dependent on donor financing. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) flows have since declined. With sustained GDP growth, Bangladesh's aid dependence has dropped sharply and ODA is now only about 2 per cent of GDP (down from 10 per cent of GDP in the 1980s and 1990s). The four biggest donors in Bangladesh are the World Bank, UK Department of International Development (DFID), Asian Development Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). These four donors collectively account for about 80 per cent of the official development assistance currently received by Bangladesh.

Government development strategy has been guided by various documents over the years, most recently by the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) of 2003 and the PRSP. There is also a Local Consultative Group (LCG) with participation limited to donors, with monthly meetings and with 30–35 subgroups organised to manage work in specific sectors and sub-sectors. The LCG sub-group that deals with gender equality issues is the known as the LCG Sub-group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality (WAGE).

The Paris Declaration has reorganised the aid scenario in Bangladesh. The state has again become the preferred interlocutor and the NGOs are losing favour. A new approach to aid coordination resulted in the Joint Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) and plans coordinated by the World Bank, initially supported by the four main donors and finally in 2008 by fifteen donors. The Joint Cooperation Strategy between the donors and the Government of Bangladesh that resulted was presented at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Ghana and the Bangladesh Development Forum based on this agreement took place in February 2010. Although this was preceded by various consultations with both civil society and government on aid effectiveness and harmonisation, WROs were not invited to participate. Some donor representatives in the LCG-WAGE tried to make gender one of the agenda items of the Forum but without much success. The Joint Cooperation Strategy signed in June 2010 does not make any mention about gender inequalities or women's rights or development. The Development Results Framework does not seem to have any indicators related to women's advancement or inequalities.

Historically there has been an evolution in sources of funding for NGOs. Starting primarily with small international charities and foundations, larger international

NGOs entered the scene. International foundations such as Ford Foundation and The Asia Foundation also played an important role up to the 1990s. Bilateral funding for NGOs became important in the late 1990s and early 2000s and was the main funding source in the promotion and development of WROs after Beijing and till 2005.

The women's empowerment agenda has been promoted by different actors in Bangladesh: the women's organisations, local and international NGOs, the government and the donor community. In the 1970s and 1980s, the availability of donor funding for gender related projects had created an incentive for the Bangladeshi state to promote the gender and development agenda. This has led to development of a particular type of women's empowerment discourse that promotes women's productive role, economic empowerment and family welfare. The proliferation of donor funding for gender and development (GAD) had created a context where links with the donors have been strategically used by women's organisations for engaging the state on a wide range of issues.

The interpretation of women's rights issues as development issues was also fuelled by the availability of donor funding. The large NGO sector which has expanded since the mid 1980s because of donor funding came to dominate civil society space and has taken up this interpretation. This has had a dual effect on WROs. On the one hand the WROs have increased the number of allies and thus can create more pressure on the state. On the other hand, the NGOisation process and the use of external funding have also created pressure on many women's organisations to design their activities in a particular manner, which has affected their autonomy and activities, and, in many cases has led to a de-politicisation of their agenda.

While Ghana's political and economic successes in the last decade are much lauded in international development circles, the country's aid dependency, debt burden and the accompanying loss of policy autonomy is less often discussed. Because of this aid dependency there has been continuous tension between government and civil society as to the role of the latter. As a result of a relentless campaign by public officials with the support of the media, it is common place to speak of CSOs, particularly NGOs, as more interested in lining the pockets of their founders than in genuine service to communities. Derogatory terms such as "brief-case NGOs" and "non-governmental individual" are often thrown at NGOs to denote their temporary and contingent character and their lack of organisational structures beyond single individuals. In this discourse, NGOs are often accused of raising questions about government policy only to impress their donors to keep their funds flowing in, which funds they then misapply. A variation on this is that NGOs have no interest in the solution of problems they identify, because it is the problems that keep them perpetually relevant and in business. Often, these views are expressed in response to NGO demands for public accountability and they serve to lower the threshold for conflict, tensions and mistrust between governments and NGOs.

In Ghana in the last few years, donor efforts at harmonising aid for both the state and civil society through the creation of basket funds have changed the funding landscape. While the Ghana government now operates within a multi-donor budget support system in which it negotiates with collectives of donors as opposed to individuals and is subjected to a consolidation of conditionalities, civil society organisations in Ghana have been dealing with a proliferation of collective funds – Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (G-RAP), Knowledge Assessment and Sharing on Sustainable Agriculture (KASSA) and Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI), among others. The logic

of harmonisation represented by these funds has acquired momentum with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its agenda of action. In the context of the principles of the Paris Declaration such as country ownership, alignment and harmonisation, as well as the political processes of the Aid Effectiveness agenda, CSOs have found their voice to raise important questions about the impacts of aid on countries' development, as well as its implications for civil society organising.

Donor interest in supporting NGOs to undertake programmes of micro-credit, infrastructural development and appropriate technology has shifted to support for policy advocacy. This has affected the work of women's organisations, with their strong tradition of service delivery.

Introducing the case study organisations

In each country, Bangladesh and Ghana, WROs were selected for the study based on their willingness to share their experiences. Although only up to six organisations were selected many others were consulted in both countries.

In Bangladesh the following five organisations were the subject of the study:

- Banchte Shekha (BS), a women's NGO working on women's economic rights and livelihoods

- Bangladesh Mohila Obvibashi Samity (BOMSA), an association of migrant women workers

- Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA), an association of women lawyers

- Doorbar Network (DN), an independent network of women's organisations

- Kormojibi Nari (KN), an organisation working with women labourers

Name	Focus	Date established	Membership/staff	Budget	Main donors
BS	Poor rural women's economic development	Started work in 1976. Registered in 1981	250,000 rural men and women. 227 staff	86 million takas 2009/10	NORAD, NOVIB, Ford, TAF, Oxfam, MJF
BOMSA	Women migrant workers	2000	7000 members. 10 staff	2 million takas in 2009	CIDA, MJF, IOM, UNIFEM
BNWLA	Women lawyers and women's human rights	Started work in 1979. Registered in 1981	1200 members. Approx 250 staff	125 million takas in 2009	NORAD, MJF, USAID, TAF, CIDA
DN	Violence; political participation and organisational capacity building	Started work in 1995. Registered in 2007	550 women's organisations	No external funding	NORAD, Danida, CIDA, British Council
KN	Women labourers rights	1991	450,000 group members	36 million takas in 2009	NORAD, MJF, Oxfam, GTZ, AAB

In Ghana the six organisations were:

- ABANTU for Development (ABANTU) is an African-wide regional women's rights organisation

- Advocates and Trainers for Women's Welfare Advancement and Rights (ATWWAR) to mobilise existing and new groups of women to build their capacities for accessing existing opportunities and creating new ones. It also offers a platform for sharing knowledge and skills as well as advocating for women's and children's rights

- The Ark Foundation (The Ark) established with the sole aim of providing empowering spaces for women and children to rise above oppressions and all forms of violence.

- The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) was formed as a membership organisation by a group of women lawyers who wanted to assist fellow women to access legal aid

- The Sixth March Women's Foundation (6th March) was formed in Sunyani in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana as an organisation for the mobilisation of women toward sustainable livelihoods and dignified living

- The Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM) was formed in Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region as a membership organisation for widows

Name	Focus	Date established	Membership	Main donors
ABANTU	Governance Climate Change	1998	–	Ford Foundation, G-RAP, AWDF
ATWAAR	Health and Education, Child Rights	2000	Women's groups	DANIDA, Children's World Sweden, Ghana Aids Commission
Ark	VAW Legal Aid	1995	–	AWDF, CORDAID, G-RAP
FIDA	Legal aid/justice	1968	Lawyers	UNICEF, AWDF, CORDAID
6th March	Economic Justice, Reproductive Health	1993	–	Action Aid, Ghana Aids Commission, Ibis
WOM	Human Rights, Economic Justice, Child Right	1996	8,796	Action Aid, Ibis, German Widow's Charity

Life before Funding

Founding principles and identity

There is a great deal of similarity in the founding stories of the WROs in Ghana and Bangladesh. In both countries the WROs were founded by highly motivated people (often women) who felt strongly about a particular aspect of women's position and rights. In Bangladesh the organisations are said to have been founded because the founders, a person or group of persons, 'were passionate about particular issues that were not addressed within the women's movement or by other CSOs or supported by donor funded development projects'. Similarly in Ghana too most of the organisations came into being because of the personal commitment of a person or a group of people who felt strongly about an issue.

There is also similarity in the way these organisations talk about their principles. In both countries the fundamental principle on which the organisations are founded is to uphold women's rights. In Ghana each of the organisations espouses some important rights issues. As the mission of WOM (Widows and Orphans Movement) eloquently puts it the vision is 'widows without tears and intimidation'. In many cases religion and religious values (read Christian) were an important element of the fabric of several of the organisations initially but over time became eclectic in trying to accommodate the needs of women of diverse communities in which they grew. In addition in Ghana all six organisations identified themselves as being feminist in orientation by which they meant 'committed to challenging and overturning patriarchy and improving the human and socio-economic rights of women' although their individual articulations of feminism and its politics differed. In Bangladesh too the organisations introduce their rationale for existence as being to promote and defend some aspect of women's rights. Their self-definition is not as NGOs (since there are so many in Bangladesh and their founding and growth are identified with the availability of donor funding) but as rights organisations and as part of wider social movements for equality.

Structure and methods of mobilisation

In the pre-funding era WROs had loose, informal structures and relied extensively on their founders, on voluntary time of a handful of people, and on consciousness raising and networking in communities. In Bangladesh their initial years were spent in building up membership strength, identifying core principles and in setting up the institutional structures. Some unique features of the organisational structure and decision-making roles that in the initial period formed the mainstay of the organisations tended to get lost once they were funded and expanded operations. As for example, Banchte Shekha (BS), an organisation of rural women fighting for socio-economic rights had to let go of their participatory and inclusive decision-making structure. A unique feature of BS was the direct role that the village women had in implementing and managing the programme. 'This integral role of the village women in the initial years was acknowledged and a governance role in the organisational structure was envisaged for them. However, subsequently, as the organisational structure changed when the programme expanded, this was lost'.

In Ghana too the organisations initially had loose, informal structures. Some like FIDA were membership organisations depending on voluntarism of its members and

affiliates. It took them six years from their founding in 1968 to formalise their existence and till 1985 before they started a Legal Aid Centre all on their own steam and without funding. Some of the others like ATWWAR, WOM, and 6th March, started mobilising rural and urban women to promote their rights. Group formation was a very important strategy, particularly of the region based organisations. Among the three, ATWWAR's group formation strategy was the most structured. The groups were taught to keep records for individuals and the group as a whole, they learned new skills and were introduced to banks which could give them credit. WOM organised widows in several communities, although increasingly, widows would organise themselves and invite WOM to support them.

Resources

The main resource available in the pre-funding days was the enthusiasm and commitment of the founders and the considerable amount of voluntary time that members put in. In Ghana the most important resources in the pre-funding period were largely the location, resources and commitment of the founders. Apart from providing leadership, they contributed their own earnings and other private resources such as accommodation. Many founders used their connections, social capital and facilities as state employees (ATWWAR, Ark, 6th March, WOM, FIDA, ABANTU) to support their early work. The Ghana report points out that it was the 'self-exploitation of many founders of organisations which has been established in the service of others' that made it possible for these WROs to survive.

In Ghana we also find that joining networks (of NGOs) helped the less endowed and more rural organisations to get new ideas and to learn about methods of work. In the pre-funding days capacity building activities were voluntarily given and thus those organisations that could not pay nevertheless benefited.

Similarly in Bangladesh the organisations relied on voluntarism, membership fees and contributions of the founders from their own earnings. As for example BOMSA (which was set up by two migrant worker women who were not middle-class and did not command the kind of resources available to some others) which nevertheless survived because these founders gave their earnings from work with research organisations, such as the Refugee Migratory Movement Research Unit, to build the organisation.

Since the organisational structures were informal and relied on voluntary labour rather than on paid staff; membership fees, labour contribution, and other forms of resource mobilisation were sufficient to keep operations at the level and scale that they were then. The critical contribution of founders to resource mobilisation is seen in the case of 6th March in Ghana where the death of the founder led to a collapse of the organisational strategies of group formation and development. 6th March took on an NGO format, was funded and relied on funding to establish itself.

Similarities and differences

Apart from the obvious difference that the date of establishment of most Bangladesh organisations is earlier than most organisations in Ghana, there are differences too in the way organisations in Ghana perceive their past. Perhaps because the pre-funding phase was quite short in Ghana, many of the organisations tended to downplay their achievements in that period. This period is rendered almost invisible in their accounts

of their history. With the exception of FIDA, all the organisations studied expected to rely on donor funds to establish themselves fully. In Bangladesh the pre-funding era is actually remembered with pride because of its voluntarism and the movement like activities that many organisations undertook. The Bangladesh report points out that 'donors actively sought them [the WROs] and supported them specifically because they were vibrant organisations doing innovative and effective work, had committed members and a vision for social change'.

In both Bangladesh and Ghana the oldest of the selected case study organisations are those set up by professional lawyers committed to creating consciousness about and improving women's legal rights and also the position of women in the legal profession. In the 1970s the focus was on women's legal rights and women professionals were at the forefront of reforms in developing countries. FIDA in Ghana was set up in 1968, formalised six years later, established a legal clinic in 1985 and outreach programmes by 1990. This was all before they received funding. Similarly BNWLA was set up by women lawyers in 1979, to build the capacities of women lawyers and to fight the discriminatory practices they faced and is the oldest and largest professional women's organisation. Their activities were focused on training and mentoring young female lawyers, pro bono legal aid work and solidarity network building among members. When their kind of work became attractive to donors, they were offered funding making them realise that their activities could be externally financed. It was only after a number of years of functioning independently, that their work on anti-trafficking and advocacy on legal reform led them to seek external funds.

Life with Funding

Institutionalisation

Life with funding is characterised both by the case study organisations in Bangladesh and Ghana as institutionalisation when formal structures were put in, staff hired to do the regular work, financial reporting regularised, and monitoring and reporting structures established. Writing project proposals to meet the requirement of donors in the language that they would understand was a special set of skills that the organisations had to acquire. In order to put these systems and structures in place the organisations had to hire people with the skills to do so. In Bangladesh the organisations whose leadership was urban and professional proved more competent in handling the changes whereas the rural organisations led by semi-professional women had more difficulties.

In Ghana the donors required proof of the legitimacy and sustainability of the organisations and therefore the organisations refurbished their financial management and administrative systems as proof of legitimacy. Staff strength and qualifications, history of managing donor funds, existence of institutionalised management structures and proof of financial propriety have been key determinants of institutional strength and the organisations had to work hard to acquire these. The organisations have often found donor demands for periodic reports, monitoring visits and financial management reports onerous and time-consuming.

All of the case study organisations in Bangladesh had mixed feelings about institutionalisation. On the one hand, they acknowledged the importance of keeping

records, and having good financial systems which helped them plan better and more efficiently. They also felt that donors' demanding of reports was fair since they provided the money. However, they also pointed out that the paperwork was time consuming and at times reporting to different donors for different funds and activities diverted their energies from doing movement related work. This feeling was echoed by the organisations in Ghana who said that the donor requirements had enhanced efficiency especially in the keeping of records and documents, but the lack of uniformity among donors in relation to these also meant that those dealing with multiple donors sometimes had to spend several work hours meeting the various requirements of each of their donors:

> It's not that donors should not ask for reports, it is their money after all. However, having different donors asking for different things, using different formats, particularly if they are as complicated as USAID forms, translates into having someone glued to the desk filling in forms. And if you are as small as we are, doing the kind of mobilising work we do, this means people having less time to work on the ground.
> *Interview, Bangladesh case study organisation, January 2, 2010*

One of the key features of the pre-funding era that was lost in this period was that of voluntarism. In Bangladesh, for example, the organisations saw how the pattern of voluntary effort changed as peoples' time got monetised. Generational and class differences between those who gave time voluntarily and those who did not began to crop up. Less well off women workers expected to be paid since they could not afford to do this work otherwise and working in non-profit organisations gradually became a recognised profession. Younger women professionals, as for example lawyers, sought work in women's organisations doing legal work both because it was a vocation and also because it was a career. Older women and especially better off, more established professional women were more likely to give their time voluntarily and continued to do so. The up-side of these developments especially in Bangladesh was that many more young women from lower middle class backgrounds entered the WROs.

Influence on agenda setting and mobilisation strategies

What has been the impact of donor funding on the agendas and mobilisation strategies of the WROs?

In Bangladesh the case study organisations said that the issues they chose to work on with donor funding were closely linked to their founding principles or were issues they chose to address in light of the changes in the national or international context. This finding is contrary to what has happened in the NGO sector in Bangladesh where most organisations have changed their agendas in order to meet donor requirements and have often become implementing agencies for donor programmes. Undeniably at times the WROs have strategically chosen supplementary issues to work on which was not part of their main agenda but was related in order for them to access funding to continue working on their core agenda.

In Ghana all six participating organisations argued against claims that life with donors had any significant impacts in shifting their agendas. As in Bangladesh here too the objectives and activities have often been expanded to reflect ongoing trends and needs while maintaining the organisational visions and missions. The changes in

mobilisation strategies are seen as having contributed positively to the development of these organisations and is attributed to the availability of funding. As for example, the organisations which started off as women's empowerment initiatives with emphasis on service delivery were able to take on political issues such as policy advocacy on the women's rights issue that was their mission. Larger organisations with less outreach have been able to partner with smaller organisations for outreach programmes as a result of the funding they received. Such partnerships have resulted in the sharing of funds with less financially successful organisations but with greater access to communities. Donor resources have also made it possible for the organisations to expand their reach, initiate capital intensive projects, scale-up programmes, introduce programme novelty and adopt more sophisticated mobilising strategies through the use of mass and/or electronic media.

That donor funding has enabled these organisations to expand their horizons and outreach is undeniable. However, it cannot be said that there are no impacts on the way organisations are setting their agendas and how they go about doing their work. These impacts are difficult to discern unless they are scrutinised from the perspective of the mission of WROs. In Bangladesh, for example, the move is towards growing homogeneity both of agendas and mobilisation strategies. An example given was that of a certain advocacy style which has emerged in the present decade that all organisations use. While this could not directly be attributed to donor funding the fact that donors have set the indicators for the measurement and reporting of the 'successes' of advocacy work has meant that all the organisations not only report according to these criteria but also do advocacy within the set styles that have become normative. Surprisingly while many of these WROs extensively engage in street level activism, this form of mobilisation and advocacy did not feature in how they measured their success.

Another aspect of growing homogeneity of agendas and strategies is evident in Bangladesh wherein certain issues which have gained priority in the international gender and development discourse have been picked up by all of these organisations. This points to the epistemic powers that donor discourses have over setting the international development agenda. Furthermore, there is increasing focus by these WROs on legal and policy changes often to the detriment of working towards structural change. This shift also indicates a qualitative change, where the emphasis on constituency building for structural change receives less attention. This does not mean that the organisations do not want to build social movements but that their activities in recent years have an excessive focus on lobbying the state for policy change or legal reform and a certain style of advocacy (i.e., roundtables, seminars, workshops aimed at policy change). This focus on policy changes and specific advocacy styles are primarily results of the overall context where influence and success is measured by focusing on legal changes and policy gains and where other ways in which WROs work are not counted.

In Ghana too while these trends are apparent their manifestation is somewhat different. What the WROs do report are the difficulties of retaining their women's rights agendas and their own definitions of what it is that they stand for when they say they are feminist in a context where there is a growing hegemony of the concept of gender where gender is meant to signify men plus women and not the relations between them. These definitions have become normative because of the power of resources backing them. Consequently when WOM is pushed by donors to include widowers in their organisational work they believe they should refuse funding not

because they do not want to work with men as such but because their understanding of widows and orphans is that these are categories of individuals who are at a particular disadvantage in terms of rights and entitlements. On the other hand, the representative of ATWAAR interviewed stressed, 'we do not say because we are a women's organisation we should all be women. We have both male and female on board. We feel that we need to put the two sexes together to work holistically. The male factor is important for you to sensitise the man for him to go and say that after all the women have done, if we do this to them, it is not right'.

In both countries, Ghana and Bangladesh, the search for financial sustainability in a context where donors are unable and unwilling to give institutional grants for the development of the organisation has driven organisations to taking on more and more short-term projects while at the same time having to neglect pursuing strategic directions.

Relations

The relationship between donors and their WRO grantees has changed in the past decade and the Paris agenda has accelerated this change. The major change is that donors are no longer interested to support the long-term institutional development and sustainability of the WROs. The bilateral organisations that primarily gave institutional grants to these organisations for their development have withdrawn from directly funding NGOs.

In Bangladesh there is a perceptible shift in relations from long-term funding and institutional support to project type funding. Foundations that provided institutional support funding such as the Ford Foundation have moved away and The Asia Foundation's funding capacity has become more limited. The International NGOs are also unable to have long-term funding relations with WROs. Long-term funding, which used to be their practice has been phased out by the bilateral agencies. Solidarity funding as for example staff in donor organisations creatively interpreting the rules of mainstream programmes in order to support innovative approaches by WROs is mostly at an end. The WROs in Bangladesh are aggrieved that whereas the Paris agenda stresses accountability there is no mutual accountability between donors and WROs. Small organisations such as theirs were never represented in the international forums where decisions to restructure aid were taken.

In Ghana we find that although women's organisations played an active advocacy role in initiating processes for mobilising and sensitising women to understand the Paris processes and to contribute to the 3rd High Level Forum, which gave birth to the Accra Agenda of Action, life with donors had changed irreversibly since Paris 2005.

WROs in Ghana find that in the post Paris Declaration era most donors want to support NGOs (as also the WROs) to do policy research and advocacy. However, the WROs suggest that the situations on the ground that made them go into micro-credit programmes, skills training and other service delivery programmes have not disappeared just because there is a Paris Declaration. The Ark argued that its work in combating violence against women was incomplete without the delivery of legal aid services and shelter for battered women. The Ark, ATWWAR, 6th March and WOM all said that service delivery and rights advocacy were not interchangeable. Both are critical in their work with resource deprived women.

The new aid modalities have impacted on the WROs in very specific and often deleterious ways. One such modality, which is more prominent in Ghana, is pool funding arrangements whereby funds for civil society are given by the main bilateral agencies to organisations set up for the purpose of administering these funds. Whereas the main bilateral agencies in Ghana as in Bangladesh were sources of funding for WROs which they independently could access and which provided institutional support, in the new pool funding arrangements the smaller, more community oriented organisations which are mainly based outside Accra have lost out since they either did not have the absorption capacity or the policy analysis and advocacy orientation that some pooling arrangements make a condition for grant giving. Where WROs like WOM have been unsuccessful in accessing funds from pooled windows created by the donors they have had to become the implementing partners of more successful organisations with consequences for their autonomy and their agendas.

Another modality which is also more common in Ghana is mediated management systems which make the relationship between donors and WROs even more remote. Under the umbrella of partnership-building, grantees have been encouraged to build networks and platforms for increased visibility and effectiveness. Funds have been disbursed to umbrella organisations which network with smaller organisations, often community-based organisations, to implement projects. This arrangement results in a three-tier hierarchy of implementing partners, grant recipients and donors. The grant recipient, as intermediary, deals directly with donors, on one hand and implementing partners, on the other. The cost saving, capacities enhancements and collective mobilisations intended through mediated programming were given mixed reviews by the participating organisations. For instance, WOM explained that while they welcomed and actually enjoyed the benefits, the divergence in the politics of the organisations in partnership sometimes limited the expected learning benefits.

An equally important programming framework that is reshaping the landscape in Ghana is the shift from women's only programming to gender mainstreaming. Although gender mainstreaming was intended to frame women's questions within the broader social context, its implementation limitations have been unappealing. Also, it was explained that although gender mainstreaming in Ghana dates back to the late 1990s, the renewed emphasis by donors in the forms that exclude targeted programmes for women and the blind inclusion of men denies the history of discrimination and limits affirmative action.

As mentioned in section 2, the quantity of resources available to WROs may be less relevant than the manner in which these are provided. The concurrent shift in aid modalities that has led to fewer projects and more harmonised sector wide and general budget support has influenced how donors are financing civil society organisations, including WROs. This includes multi-donor basket funds and new in-country funding mechanisms such as G-RAP in Ghana and Manusher Jonno Foundation in Bangladesh. These funds and conditions for accessing them raise issues about the fate of smaller and weaker organisations, the politics of the intermediation role of larger NGOs and the sustainability of funding for long-term planning. The question whether the amount of aid available has grown or shrunk is not immediately relevant for the survival and sustenance of WROs (most of whom are medium sized or small and their requirements are modest). Rather the relevant issue is whether the changed architecture of aid makes it more difficult for women's organisations to access funding

in their own right and for the concerns and issues that they have worked for. The quantity of aid may have grown but the organisation of aid through trust funds, tender consortiums and other means makes funding for small and medium sized women's organisations harder and in some cases impossible to access. This has affected the work of women's organisations, with their strong tradition of service delivery.

There is a lot of discomfort with having to be in competitive bids, both because it undermines solidarity and because it is seen as being the same process as contractors bidding for construction work, with the associated connotations of corruption, money making and lack of ethics or commitment. The recent experiences of BNWLA or BS in Bangladesh seem to have confirmed them in this understanding. In addition the procedures are unclear and also biased against small organisations. There is the requirement in some cases to spend the money upfront, only being reimbursed for expenses incurred after a certain period of time. Although the organisations have tried to learn the rules of competitive bidding and play by them, there is a lot of discomfort about the whole process which they have not been able to ventilate in the appropriate fora.

Life on the Donor Side

The funding landscape

Since 2004, AWID has been surveying its members – WROs – concerning their sources of external financing and in 2008 reported that most of its members' funds come from the following sources (1) bilateral and multi-lateral (2) international NGOs (3) women's funds and (4) philanthropic foundations. Of these, it is bilateral and multilateral organisations that continue to provide the greatest amount of money overall; philanthropic foundations give substantial amounts but to a limited number of grantees while women's funds do the opposite, giving small amounts to a large number of organisations. Much less significant in terms of volume is funding from national governments, small private foundations and the business sector (AWID 2008). In Ghana the most important sources for the case study organisations have been INGOs, bilateral agencies and women's funds. In Bangladesh it has been bilateral agencies followed by INGOs.

These different categories of donors each have their own identities and ways of working and we should be cautious in assuming a greater homogeneity than actually exists. Even among a single category of donor, we can observe distinct differences in their approach to women's rights, for example the bilateral aid policy of the UK as compared with Sweden. The differences between donors can also be particularly noticeable at the country level, partially dependent on the character and priorities of the country programme staff. At the same time, these different kinds of donors have a strong mutual influence upon each other in terms of co-financing arrangements, in movements of staff and in discursive perspective.

The funding landscape for WROs is better understood when viewed as a system (Figure 1.). Let us take the case of Mama Cash – a women's fund (that is a funding organisation run by women to support WROs) is financed by the Dutch, Irish and Swedish governments and by Hivos – an international NGO whose major funding is from the Dutch government – as well as by various philanthropic foundations, including Ford, Nike and Sigrid Rausing. All these various organisational sources of

Figure 1 Financial flows to women's rights organisations
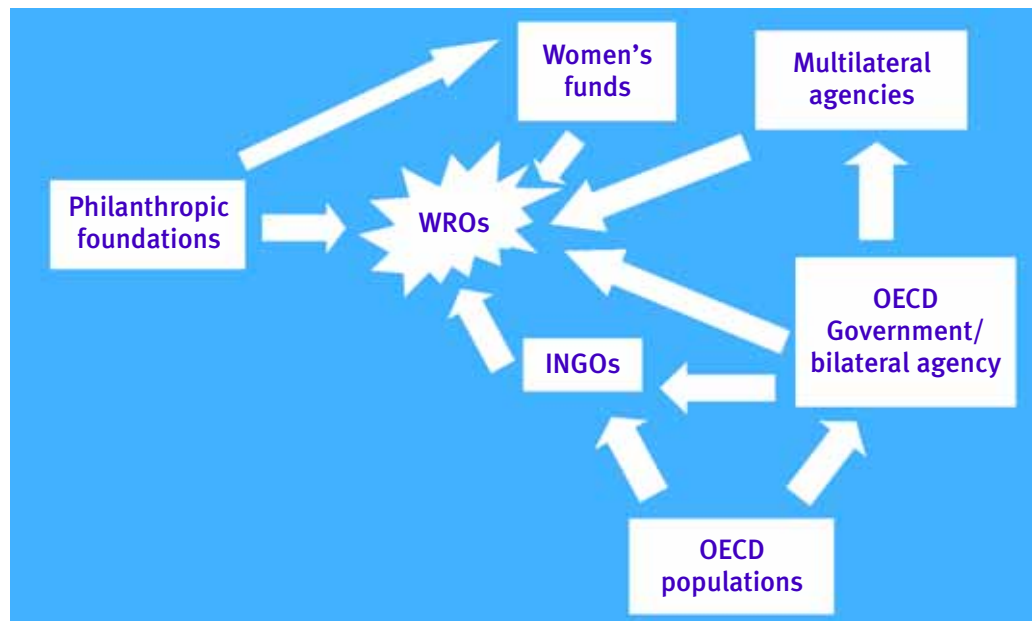
funding for Mama Cash are also separately funding WROs both directly and also indirectly through other channels.

As part of the effort, from the second half of the last decade, to revive donor interest in supporting gender equality (section 2), the DAC Gendernet (composed of gender specialists employed by bilateral agencies) has introduced an additional sector code in its statistical reporting system to track better how much ODA goes to women's equality organisations and institutions (this includes national machineries as well as civil society). It is too difficult in practice to determine what proportion of this could be judged to be supporting rights-based activities and it is therefore impossible to quantify whether support to women's rights is declining.

However, at the Amsterdam conference gender officers from government donor agencies and from INGOs emphasised the struggle they were having to continue to secure funds for women's rights[6]. From our prior interviews with gender officers we learnt that in one agency, efforts by in-house gender specialists to make the funding of WROs an integral part of the agency's gender equality strategy were rebuffed. In this, and another agency, country-based programmes that supported WROs and that had had very positive evaluations have been replaced by mainstreaming gender through government to government support for sector wide programmes. 'I recognise the value of mainstreaming' said one respondent, 'but the [negative] impact on these organisations to carry on their transformative work has been enormous'. On the other hand, financing women's organisations is not the only means by which donors can support the realisation of women's rights. Two INGO interviewees, for example, stressed the importance of working with men's groups on issues of violence while one of these also mentioned how they were encouraging the WROs they were funding to be part of broader rights-based networks.

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6   A conference participant from one of the case study organisations remarked that until then she had not
     appreciated that gender officers in donor agencies were involved in internal political struggles for resources.

At the same time, there is a less positive trend at work in terms of supporting WROs. Firstly, the donor tendency not to stick with anything for very long has had a negative impact on organisations working to change historical inequities that cannot be eradicated within a few years. There is a 'been there, done that' fatigue among donors. Secondly, there has been a marked shift in official development discourse, with less emphasis on a rights-based approach and more on an efficiency approach to gender equality. This is part of a wider tendency to define development in a technical manner of immunisations and delivery of bed nets, an approach of the new large philanthropic organisations and the big accountancy companies which are increasingly influential in setting aid agendas. This tendency has been reinforced by the shift to the political right in many OECD countries with governments reluctant to use aid money for advocacy, opting rather for more technical and tangible quick wins, something also seen as vital to demonstrate at a time when public expenditure cuts puts aid flows at risk, recognised by staff as having a serious distortive effect on the quality and sustainability of their rights-based programming.

One person interviewed had not proposed to Ministers any revision of the agency's ten year old gender equality strategy because of the fear that any revisions would be retrograde. Another noticed the shift that had occurred with a change of Ministers. It was alright to fund women's organisations for 'budget monitoring or training birth attendants' but there was an aversion to the language of 'rights' because it sounded too 'political' and risked rocking the boat with the partner government. This does not mean, she continued, that colleagues in country offices have abandoned a women's rights and social transformation agenda. They use their knowledge of bureaucratic processes and discourse to fund projects under the radar. In contrast, a respondent from another more rights-oriented agency stressed that her agency supports civil society and if this results in a fight with the [developing country] government, then that is what it should be doing.

These trends are influencing international NGOs and multilateral agencies that are significantly dependent on OECD government financing. The director of women's rights international NGO said 'Anything that can be counted more easily is becoming more popular'. On the other hand, the increased emphasis on impact from the organisation's back donors she also observed to have some positive effects. She gave the example of a WRO in Latin America her organisation had been partnering. Whereas in the past, the partner would simply report that they had trained 20 women, now they and the INGO in its bi-annual visits, go out and speak with ten of the participants and ask them about any change that has occurred in their lives that they can attribute to the training. The partner is finding that by seeking feedback from the women it is working with (something it had not previously done) they are learning more about the women's lives and adjusting their projects accordingly.

Most of those interviewed recognised that in practice the manner and extent to which their county programmes were supporting WROs varied from one country to another and was heavily dependent on the choices made by the staff responsible. 'Gender rhetoric appears in [our country strategies] but in practice there is enormous variety … country programmes want to make their own decisions and gender is one of several countries of contestation'. The country environment also makes a difference. Donors may be more reluctant to fund WROs in countries where the women's movement has close ties with a political party. But there are ways of handling the situation when an activist leader

decides to forward the cause by becoming involved in formal politics. 'If the director becomes a political party candidate we ask them to step down. They become figure heads rather than run the operations'. And when the agency does not have a representative in country? 'We don't know enough to give wisely', one person commented.

An important development in the last five years in the way in which resources for women's rights work is being directly channelled is evident in the strategies of the Dutch government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands set up a fund known as the MDG Fund which was specifically devoted to MDG 3, women's empowerment. This fund was a result of successful lobbying by gender specialists in Dutch INGOs, AWID and gender officers in the Ministry along with political backing by the Minister himself. The money does not go through the embassies but is directly tendered by headquarters. Although there are a number of hurdles for WROs in getting this money including having to tender, being considered eligible according to assessment criteria set up by accounting agencies, having absorption capacity for large amounts considered minimum disbursements, this fund has nevertheless provided strategic help to WROs in several countries. Evaluations by AWID have suggested as much and has also pointed out that more could be made by the Ministry of the implications of this kind funding and what it can achieve. The discussions at the Amsterdam conference raised the difficulties of translating achievements that WROs consider important and meaningful into those recognised by donor formats. The power of the latter lies in the fact that these determine what will get funded. A recent development of this fund seems to be that other bilateral donors are interested in contributing to the fund (which has been renamed because of political changes in The Netherlands).

This trend of directly supporting women's rights work as separate to the gender mainstreaming policies of the bilateral agencies is also evident in the strategies of Danida which reportedly gave money directly to agencies like The Africa Women's Development Fund (AWDF) to support WROs. Likewise the Spanish government provided the core financing of UN Women's Gender Equality Fund established in 2009 to strengthen organisations that promote gender equality and women's rights at the country level — including national machineries for women, women's parliamentary caucuses, and women's NGOs and networks. The Fund is unique in its focus on turning local and national laws and policies into tangible gains for women's rights.

In the changed international funding scenario in which results and effectiveness are prioritised over social transformation it has grown harder to establish the legitimacy of supporting processes of claiming women's rights as integral to the gender and development agenda. At the Amsterdam conference it was mentioned that there was an urgent need to deconstruct and resist the increasing prevalence of the current dichotomy between rights and efficiency in donor speak. These discourses imply that rights are not efficient and that efficiency does not deliver rights. This poses a critical challenge for women's rights activists and WROs in demonstrating the importance of supporting social transformation for sustainable results for gender equality.

Whereas these and other strategies by the donors to channel funding to WROs and for women's rights work are some of the positive developments in the last years, the mechanisms through which the money becomes available to WROs is fraught with difficulties. The Amsterdam conference discussed the implications of the new funding regimes on WROs. They are expected to professionalise, NGOise and increasingly rely on another layer of political actors (the consultants and intermediary organisations) to

access funding, actors who may not understand or be sympathetic to their agendas. The question raised was how intermediaries through whom funding to smaller WROs is being channelled can be made more representative, transparent and democratic in their functioning.

At the country level

Away from the headquarters and at the operational level we see that there have been significant changes in the aid scene in Bangladesh and Ghana in the past decade and to the mission and strategies of donor organisations. The most obvious changes in Bangladesh can be seen in the operations of bilateral organisations whose small grants programmes and civil society grants were often the mainstay of support for women's organisations and small NGOs. Leading up to and consequent to the Paris agreements bilateral organisations have cut down on their presence in-country. Some attribute this to the reorganisation of the aid sector in their own countries. Others clearly attribute the changes to agreements reached as part of the Paris agenda. Either way the outcome is that there is a leaner presence of these agencies on the ground, a greater insistence on donor harmonisation and alignment with the government development priorities and programmes. Governments and multilateral organisations become the main conduits for donor money. Support to the non-governmental sector is being increasingly organised through trust funds set up for this purpose.

Similar to the changes being experienced in Bangladesh, in Ghana too the bilateral agencies have rationalised their operations to minimise transaction costs for themselves and for their main partner, the government. Funding to civil society has also been reorganised and special mechanisms for its disbursement such as pool funding have been set up by these donors. Direct funding to WROs so popular in the early part of the millennium is at an end.

New actors have arisen in the vortex of changes set forth by the Paris agenda and consequent restructuring of aid by the main players in the aid scene, the bilateral agencies. As for example in Ghana the pool funding mechanisms to support civil society, G-RAP, is one of the new players on the block. In Bangladesh the Trust Fund Manusher Jonno Foundation has been set up to by the donors to disburse money to civil society. The not so old actors such as the Women's Funds, Mama Cash in The Netherlands and Africa Women's Development Fund (founded in 2001) have seen their role strengthened as a result of the aid restructuring. They are the conduit through which the funds to support 'women' is being channelled. Old actors have been given a new lease of life in the new aid scenario. The UN and UNIFEM have seen a resurgence in their role in gender mainstreaming in national processes and in achieving the MDGs. Given their multilateral role and their immense absorption capacity they provide a perfect fit to the new aid scenario.

The INGOs have also restructured and those in our sample have faced different fates. The financial downturn has affected the fundraising capacity of some INGOs and in Ghana some have tried to raise funds locally through the pool funding mechanism. They feel justified in doing so because they see themselves as part facilitator of community based organisations and part civil society organisation in Ghana undertaking policy advocacy for women's rights. Similarly in Bangladesh the large international NGOs are joining the tendering processes and are sometimes competing

with national NGOs. One INGO argued that their participation in tender processes has helped capacity building organisations (CBOs) with whom they had partnered and enabled them to access resources rather than the large national NGOs who have the capacity to respond to tender calls.

The shift that some bilateral agencies have made from supporting WROs to exclusively supporting gender mainstreaming within larger agendas has meant that the INGOs dependant on them, as is the case within mainland European INGOs, have followed suit. Despite claiming a new found interest in supporting gender mainstreaming one INGO that was part of our study in Ghana has actually axed support to three of our case study organisations because their funding for promoting women's political participation was brought to an end by their bilateral aid donor.

Whose agendas?

When asked whether support to women's organisations was a means of shaping the agendas of recipient organisations or whether the level of professionalisation expected by donors changed the very nature of these organisations, all donor representatives interviewed in Bangladesh vehemently denied that this was so. Most saw professionalisation (the regularisation of accounting and management systems) as not only a requirement but a good thing for WROs on the whole. The terms most often used to persuade organisations to align their agendas to the donor requirements or to take up projects that reflect donor priorities or to adopt management and programme tools that donors require were 'guidance' and 'capacity development'. Donors see themselves as bringing order to and developing the capacity of the NGO sector and especially small women's organisations.

In Ghana most donor respondents felt that their organisations gave the grantees a free hand to develop their programmes and do their work but it became clear that the 'free hand' that they said they gave their grantees was conditional. The conditions within which the grantees had to operate included the following. All the donor organisations have specific programme areas for which they give grants. In most cases the grantees are the implementing agency for the donor programmes. This meant that an organisation supporting widows and orphans was not necessarily funded for the programmes and priorities that they had identified but had to fit into the programmes and priorities of the donor. Each donor had their own rules about account keeping and reporting which grantees were expected to abide by in order first to qualify and then to continue to be supported. Each organisation also had assessment, planning and reporting formats that grantees had to use. Most also said they assisted their partners to acquire the skills and capacity to abide by these formalities.

Does this influence or change the agendas of the WROs? Interviewing donors in Ghana we found that the answers to the question as to whether they shape the agendas of the organisations they support are far from straightforward. It is inevitable that donors do influence agendas and mobilisation strategies of their grantees given that they expect that things should be done their way (according to their formats, with their programme planning guidelines and tools) although they all deny doing so. But perhaps the most complicated issue is that donor support to specific thematic areas – and within the formats they specify – reduces WROs'agendas to formulas and inhibits creativity and the search for alternatives that make sense to the WROs rather than to international agencies

supporting them. And this does have some consequences for WROs. While seemingly flexible and dependant on what the organisations would like to see happen, the agenda for working on any issue is more or less fixed by the specific donor. This seeming flexibility on the one hand and restrictions on the other puts WROs constantly in a responsive mode where they are responding to a particular way of 'doing' women and governance (or any other subject for that matter). However, some of the core business of the WROs for which they have legitimacy in society may have been discontinued or neglected because none of the donors see that particular core business as providing a fit to the homogenised, de-contextualised formulas for women's empowerment and rights. This was best illustrated by the lack of donor support for FIDA's core business, legal aid, although there are plenty of other examples in our research.

Interestingly, staff in head offices (particularly those from government agencies) expressed anxiety that WROs were being made to respond to donor objectives rather than being supported to implement their own locally identified aims. A case in point is the current donor enthusiasm to reduce violence against women, 'It's an easy one to get a hook on … It's more tangible than enhancing women's voice'. External resourcing is understood to be damaging when the availability of donor money tempts WROs to fall in line with 'the latest donor fad' of this kind. 'Sophisticated organisations will submit a proposal that responds to how the donor wind blows'. However, what was fashionable one year is out of date by the next and the rapid shifts in donor objectives can leave WROs stranded high and dry. 'Hollowed out', said one person. Interestingly, as discussed in section 6, donors' perceptions that they have a significant and generally unhelpful influence over WROs appears not to be one with which the WROs in our study would concur. They have a stronger perception of their own autonomy and integrity than donors appear to recognise.

Furthermore, Bangladeshi staff in some INGOs and in umbrella funds are clear that they have been influenced by and are learning from the strategies and practice of women's organisations in Bangladesh. As explained by one respondent, 'We brought some people from the women's movement into our [planning] and we told them that the more you can influence us, the more it will be beneficial to you. We ask them what they want in our programmes that are being planned'. In Ghana when asked this question as whether their work is influenced by lessons from the women's movement the representative of a multilateral organisation said:

> … the women's manifesto in Ghana, that's a typical example. Women groups coming together form a movement, produce a document that sets out the vision of the ordinary Ghanaian woman. And you take that and you can tell at the areas they are looking at and what they want to do. Again domestic violence, that was a movement that came together to push for the passing of the domestic violence bill and then we have the act so now we have to work with them to prepare the plan of action to implement the act, and we're helping them to implement it. So I think that agenda even though it was a global agenda, it was the push from the country, the movement in the country that helped us to focus on those areas. So I think sometimes they can, they can also help us shape what the agenda should be like.

Gender specialists in head offices observed that because their agencies are most often funding intermediaries these days, such intermediaries may be more conservative than they are. In donor countries where domestic civil society's involvement in development aid is heavily influenced by church groups, the government may find itself promoting a

women's rights based approach to a reluctant constituency. NGOs formally adopt the government position, recruit women's rights specialists and then block their new staff's efforts to promote women's rights. 'They know they have to work on this issue to sell their products to the Ministry, to get their funding but there is no ownership … and it makes things difficult'. Another commented, 'We are more radical than our civil society. It's weird'. For this person, recent decentralisation of decision-making to the bilateral agency's country offices was seen as an opportunity to by pass this domestic civil society and provide better quality direct support to WROs.

Even a large international NGO with a strong policy commitment to women's rights may be viewed by its own women's rights officers as being less than enthusiastic in practice than in principle. For example, the organisation's management information system was unable to track the amount of support going to WROs. On the other hand, when INGO senior management decides to take women's rights seriously, a rapid shift can take place. In one instance the organisation's new gender equality strategy includes an explicit approach to WROs. Conversely, another INGO felt it had much less freedom to change, constrained by its government donor that was not prepared to support the funding of cross-sector rights advocacy groups. Thus local WROs could only get support from the INGO by framing their activities in relation to sectoral themes such as women's economic empowerment or women's sexual health.

The quality of relations

What donors need to do, said one government agency gender specialist, is make a ten year commitment to an organisation, pay the money regularly and build up a relationship of trust so that when problems arise these can be managed with flexibility and understanding. But this good quality relationship between donors and WROs is perceived from the donor perspective as something difficult to achieve both because of the rapid turnover of donor staff so that personal relations cannot be established and because of donor agencies' other organisational constraints that prevent them from providing the flexible, long-term support that they believe would be in the best interests of the WROs. There is frustration that more support cannot be provided through core funding, rather than earmark funds in relation to specific targets and thematic programmes that are too often designed by the donor and WROs invited to participate in them. 'Why cannot our partners help us co-design our country strategy?' asked one INGO staff member.

Others, however, see a problem with such an approach because donors do not want to keep the same partners for ever; moreover, many WROs have a multitude of donors so asking them to be involved so intensely with each of them would not be practical. What is important is for there to be real clarity about mutual expectations, including the WROs knowing what they are signing up for in terms of back donors'[7] reporting requirements. 'We offer opportunities for cross-organisational learning between countries – also when we do policy advocacy documents we ask them to feed into these. We take our partners to CSW and other international events. And also we go take them to see our back donors with them, and also get them to have access [to our back donors] in their own country'.

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7   'Back donor' is a term used to describe the donor at the top of the aid chain, e.g. a government bilateral agency that funds an international NGO that funds a local WRO.

Not all accept the view that core funding is always a good idea because it means they have less control over how their money is spent – 'There are some activities we might not be comfortable with which is why we are not always keen to support the organisation rather than a specific earmarked project. There are brand risk problems … our income is as vulnerable as anyone else's'. One government official was definitely against core funding, 'We don't fund organisations. We fund activities that need to be done'.

Those we spoke with did not always look favourably on the style and behaviour of the other donor organisations involved in supporting WROs. One government official commented on international NGOs thinking unreasonably that they have a right to be funded. Another compared and contrasted those INGOs that always brought Southern partners with them when they were lobbying the government agency with those that 'claimed to speak for Southern women' without involving them. She also commented disparagingly over competition among INGOs for donor government resources.

Some NGO respondents expressed concern about the effects of government donors creating basket funds. The organisation chosen to manage the fund, they alleged, may not pass it on to women's organisations but rather use the money to promote their own advocacy agenda and projects and hiring all the best people from the women's movement in the process. An INGO without country offices commented on how both multilaterals and INGOs have grabbed the best people because they pay more. 'So partners definitely said they wouldn't want us to decentralise'. Other INGOs with country offices are conscious of this risk and try to minimise it.

In Bangladesh nationals and especially women working within funding bodies have played a remarkable role in legitimising gender issues and especially the role of women's organisations by supporting the issue in donor forums and channelising donor support to these organisations. Bangladeshi staff in bilateral organisations, for example, cited their experience in trying to develop gender issues in donor coordination forums especially through the Local Consultative Group (LCG) on Women and Gender Equality, and also highlighting issues raised by women's organisations in donor bodies as fundable projects. In other cases where the WRO founder's backgrounds were different from their urban, educated, middle-class backgrounds they were nevertheless able to bridge the personal differences in background between themselves and the WRO leaders and develop solidarity for the cause being promoted. However, this kind of solidarity and understanding may come with a heavy price tag when donor staff who often have come from women's movements find themselves having to criticise a WRO's work or refuse funding. However, in many instances Bangladeshi staff have gone out of their way to provide support and advice to organisations who were unfamiliar with the funding rules of the game.

In Ghana the INGOs with partners that are community based organisations claim that their relationship with their partners is one of solidarity rather than that of a donor-grantee relationship. For some bilateral agencies, however, the era of solidarity between donors and women's organisations is over and is seen as irrelevant since gender mainstreaming achieves far more than solidarity based funding could.

Two donor organisations in our study, one in Bangladesh and the other based in Ghana (but with Africa-wide operations), have a different quality of relationship with WROs, relations that are somewhat unique and to a great extent dependant on solidarity for the cause of women's rights. However, their identities could not be more

different. Whereas Manusher Jonno Foundation in Bangladesh is a Trust fund set up by the bilateral donors to pool their money to support civil society, the Africa Women's Development fund (AWDF) is a women's fund for Africa to which many OECD countries have donated to support their organisational objective of focusing on women (besides mainstreaming gender).

Since Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has become a very important conduit for funds to smaller NGOs and especially WROs, it is important to look closely at commitment and strategy in supporting WROs. According to the MJF gender equality is a core value in all their work. Manusher Jonno Foundation has tried to actualise its commitment to gender equality in several ways. First, it has tried to correct gender imbalances in their own staff structure and provide opportunities to women professionals to develop and flourish. Second, they have a policy to promote gender equality in all the organisations receiving support. Gender is a criterion for selection. The capacity building unit of MJF helps train staff in funded organisations and develops gender policies with them. Finally, and after a long process of discussion MJF formalised its commitment to supporting WROs while formalising the themes that they would work with. All this sounds similar to other INGOs with a rights and solidarity mandate. However, there is a difference. Both work on specific themes and organisations are funded on the basis that their profile and project objectives roughly fit the areas that are supported by MJF and INGOs. However, whereas MJF helps women's organisations to develop their own priorities into a programme to be supported, INGOs invite implementation partners (who may be women's organisations) to work on the programmes that they support. For the latter it has meant that WROs have been supported to undertake projects that may not immediately lie within their mandate and because the organisation has had a long and trustful partnership with them. MJF too has sometimes persuaded women's rights organisations to take on roles that they themselves may not have come up with. However, these roles are directly related to the issues and expertise that that particular organisation has and prioritises. What really makes the difference, however, is the quality and commitment of the staff to the cause of gender equality, attributes that cannot be easily replicated. For many women staff members in the MJF the way they go about their job is greatly influenced by the understanding, commitment and strategic thinking developed through their prior association with the women's movement in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, despite internal conflicts over 'women's rights', the fact that the leadership of MJF allows this strategic thinking to shape organisational behaviour and strategy speaks highly of their commitment.

There is also a difference between the strategies developed by AWDF to support grantees and the other donors interviewed. All work on specific themes and organisations are funded on the basis that their profile and project objectives roughly fit the areas that are supported by the donors. However, whereas AWDF helps women's organisations to develop their own priorities into a programme to be supported, the others invite implementation partners (who may be women's organisations) to work on the programmes that they support. Like the others AWDF also restricts their funding to the thematic areas that they have prioritised and will probably have persuaded WROs to take on roles that they themselves may not have come up with. However, these roles are directly related to the issues and expertise that that particular organisation has and prioritises. As for example the AWDF representative said in the interview:

> [AWDF has] developed goals for each of the thematic areas. For example in political participation, at the end of 5 years, the grant making we have done under political participation we would hope that we would have more women entering politics. So each of those thematic areas has a set of goals, so if somebody comes to us to say I want a grant to be able to build a shelter for women, for victims of violence, that's one of the key considerations under the women's human rights thematic areas. So we would say fine, this is what you want to do, show us how you want to do it and show us how we can help'.

AWDF was the only donor organisation interviewed that made an unapologetic stand for women's rights and as well clarified why WROs should be supported in this day and age when women's rights was being put in a dichotomous (read negative) relationship to gender mainstreaming by most donors. Some INGOs too have come out on the side of women's rights but fall short in explaining why women's rights should be supported. The representative of AWDF interviewed gave the example of the role FIDA in Uganda played in the real world of societal relations and gender politics:

> You go to a place like Uganda, you go to the rural areas, the men there the first thing they ask you is that are you from FIDA, because they will tell you that if I get a letter from FIDA I don't sleep. If the police come I don't care, a letter from FIDA I don't sleep because of the strength of its legal services.

And yet FIDA was having to close its rural offices because they could not get funding to run these rural legal clinics.

AWDF admitted that although one of the criteria for funding women's organisations was that these were led by women, they found that in many small, rural organisations the women themselves wanted men's backing because they had better education and exposure. The representative said that whereas in most areas of work, especially in promoting women's political participation, men's backing and collaboration was essential and is there, for WROs it is important to remember the terms on which men are brought into these spaces that may be the only ones that women as a subordinated group in society have access to in and for themselves:

> … but the way we engage men is very important for us. If we remember why we set up these organisations and these different spaces for women in the first place, it was about us being able to support one another, it was us being able to develop an agenda that is ours, it was about us being able to develop our leadership capacities. To now say let's bring men into this space because we can't do without men is to me something. What we're saying is that if we want to engage men, let men convince one another, and talk to them about these issues. Let us come together strategically as generic organisations to address these issues but let us not, we're nowhere near getting rid of the reasons that brought us together in the first place as women so let us not compound the problem. And let us not divert our resources.

Life beyond Funding

The study explored the plans and strategies that WROs in Bangladesh and Ghana had to sustain their activities, build on their strengths and work to fulfil their mission in life beyond funding.

Changing mobilisation strategies

A number of strategies that can be understood as reorienting mobilising strategies of the organisations so that they are not so dependent on large external funding were mentioned both by WROs in Bangladesh and Ghana. Often these were strategies that these organisations had relied on in the life before funding although this did not entail reverting to how they worked before. Rather these were likely to consist of the development and effectiveness of organisations in ways where the aid relationship is not so defining.

In Bangladesh many WROs propose a move away from relying solely on advocacy styles that privilege visibility and whose success is counted not in terms of the impacts it has on the ground but rather on being publicly seen towards making a difference at those levels where decisions regarding women's entitlements get made. This would include continuing strategies to influence key people on a one-to-one basis, gaining access to local government or political leaders to get a hearing and influence their decisions in the favour of women, taking on religious or conservative community leaders and challenging their interpretation of rights, or making sure that during local level dispute resolution the women involved get the opportunity to make themselves heard. This combined with alliances and movement building with other social movements for wider outreach on specific issues was seen as a way forward and could be done without large infusions of cash.

Similarly in Ghana there is a move to minimise the cost of organising through networking, collaboration and alliance building. A key strategy that WROs see as a way forward is networking, a strategy that funding has made possible and from which the WROs have benefited. More WROs were using their networks to realise some of their goals and these have become important platforms for collectively mobilising to influence policy. Like in Bangladesh many of the WROs in Ghana felt that movement building which is often their main mission is possible without too much funding. As the representative of ARF Foundation interviewed reported:

> When we have committed to movement building and with our own commitment, we have been successful. Take sisters keepers for examples. We mobilised women without donor funds, dealt with the police, parliament etc and we achieved a lot in terms of process. NETRIGHT for a long time had nothing. The fact that it gave us a platform to think and act was very helpful. Those times we have concentrated on movement building and just doing it out of the heart, we were effective.

Sustainability and leadership

An important aspect of life beyond funding and therefore the ability to sustain movements and organisations is the quality of leadership available to the WRO. Some organisations in Bangladesh discussed how those who provided leadership in the

formative years of the organisation have grown older and a new generation is yet to replace them. Second, by relying on paid staff the capacity to lead movements and generate goodwill has somewhat eroded because paid staff often did not have the legitimacy to lead movements (as opposed to running the activities of the organisation). Therefore more attention will now need to be paid to nurturing leadership. Among the factors that WROs in Ghana identified as having contributed to the achievements of women's organisations included effective leaders.

Resource mobilisation

In Bangladesh there was discussion among the WROs that there is a need to challenge resource allocation by government and donors for gender equality and women's empowerment. The suggestion was to organise platforms of WROs and represent their interests in different forums where government and donors make decisions regarding the support for Bangladesh. In the meantime, however, WROs are discussing how to take part in competitive bidding and tendering in collaboration with other WROs and not in competition against each other as other NGOs in Bangladesh are doing. They have also started identifying commercial companies with female leadership and which have an interest in supporting women's rights work as part of their corporate social responsibility activities. Some WROs have been actively working with government and using governmental resources although this has its limitations and can restrict civil society activities. And finally, they see the legitimacy and standing that WROs enjoy in Bangladesh society as a key resource that will sustain them in the future.

In Ghana many of the resource mobilisation strategies were similar to those mentioned for Bangladesh but some are unique given the different contexts. Some WROs that have this possibility are into direct investments and building up commercial establishments that they hope will be able to support if not all but some of their work. Accessing government funding is another resource mobilisation strategy that in the future will become more important. Some WROs mentioned that they have to go back to strategies to enhance their membership not only to raise donations and membership fees but because this also helps in generating goodwill from a wide variety of people which is a main resource of social movements like women's movements. Finally WROs are also drawing on their networks and shared platforms to build bilateral, trilateral and multilateral partnerships to implement their individual programmes. This is especially so for the large organisations in Accra, which have established focal relations with smaller organisations in the regions. ABANTU and The Ark have worked with 6th March and ATWWAR, among others, to implement programmes in the regions. Sometimes such partnerships have been used even among larger organisations to access substantial funds, which individual organisations are unable to carry.

Conclusion

Here we pull together the findings from the study and indicate possible areas for future research.

Both Bangladesh and Ghana have experienced long periods of military rule, dictatorship and repression since their independence in 1971 and 1957 respectively. Despite this similarity there are many differences which have led to the rise of WROs at different moments in the history of these countries. Thus while the history of Bangladesh is interspersed with periods of military rule followed by civilian, NGOs developed because foreign development aid that supported both government and NGO programmes was permitted. Women's Rights Organisations that formed in the 1980s and are part of our case study flourished by aligning themselves to NGOs and to pro-democracy movements. The majority in our sample are founded in the early 1990s when the country was returned to civilian rule. In Ghana whereas the growth in numbers and effectiveness of WROs dates to the 1980s, it was not till the return to multi-party politics in the 1990s that women's organisations developed. With the change of government in 2000 the stage was set for a public consolidation of years of quiet activism when several organisations were formalised through registration. In both places the international activism on women's rights and development in the run up to and following from Beijing was critical.

The founding stories of the WROs in both countries are similar. They were founded by highly committed persons who felt that their cause was a just one and that the struggle for women's rights was part of the wider struggle for rights. Founders and members contributed their income, often provided office space in their own homes and did all the work voluntarily. The period between the WRO founding and their discovery by the international aid community as suitable clients for development aid varies. In Ghana the period after the Beijing Women's Conference is the decade when this discovery and relationship develops whereas in Bangladesh the WROs were part of the expansion of NGOs which began ten years previously in the mid 1980s. At the same time, the pre-funding era was quite lengthy in Bangladesh and is remembered by the case study organisations with pride because of its voluntarism and the movement-like activities that they undertook. In Ghana the pre-funding period was only a few years and is rendered almost invisible in the WRO accounts of their history despite the fact that some achieved a great deal before external financing.

Life with funding is characterised both by the case study organisations in Bangladesh and Ghana as institutionalisation when formal structures were put in, staff hired to do the regular work, financial reporting regularised, and monitoring and reporting structures established. In both countries institutionalisation aided by donors was credited as having brought order and systems, extended outreach and exposed the organisations to new ways of working and networking. In both countries the organisations became more expensive to run as voluntarism declined, programmes expanded and hired staff had to be paid. However, WROs say that funding has not changed their core agendas significantly although they accede that some changes have been necessary for them to be able to access funding to focus on fulfilling their mission. Despite this however the changes and impact are undeniable. In Bangladesh, for example, there is a growing homogeneity in agendas and strategies of the WROs as

the international gender and development discourse made normative by the power of funding impacts on civil society. The outcome is that ways of working and agendas of particular relevance to the context are sidelined. Similarly in Ghana these changes are apparent and inflected in somewhat different ways. Of particular importance for the Ghana WROs are the difficulties of retaining their women's rights agendas and their own definitions of what it is that they stand for when they say they are feminist in a context where there is a growing hegemony of the concept of gender where gender is meant to signify men plus women and not the relations between them. The shift from women's only programming to gender mainstreaming with renewed emphasis by donors in the forms that exclude targeted programmes for women and the blind inclusion of men denies the history of discrimination and limits affirmative action and alienates WROs. In both countries, Ghana and Bangladesh, the search for financial sustainability in a context where donors are unable and unwilling to give institutional grants for the development of the organisation has driven organisations to taking on more and more short-term projects while at the same time having to neglect pursuing strategic directions.

The Paris agenda and the rationalisation of aid to civil society have changed the terms of the relationship between WROs and donors. The direct funding from bi-lateral agencies is a thing of the past in both countries. Instead WROs find themselves in unfair competition with often larger organisations to access funding disbursed through modalities that simply have not been designed to take their agendas, ways of working and perspectives into account. Funding from INGOs has also shrunk because they themselves have had to come to terms with so-called rationalisation of aid. In this emerging scenario the WROs in both countries are preparing for their life beyond funding. Three key areas are discernible in the way they prepare for this. First, the reorientation of mobilising strategies in ways where the aid relationship is not so defining. This includes changes in advocacy styles, movement building with others social movements for wider outreach, organising through networking, collaboration and alliance building, all of which can be done without large infusions of cash. Second, an important aspect of life beyond funding and therefore the ability to sustain movements and organisations is the quality of leadership available to the WRO which was greatly undermined as voluntarism took a back seat. There is therefore more attention being paid to developing leadership. Third, resource mobilisation in the future would include (and in some cases already does) commercial ventures and/or partnerships; accessing government funding; enhancing membership not only to raise donations and membership fees but to generate goodwill from a wide variety of people which is a major resource of social movements like women's movements; and drawing on their networks and shared platforms to build bilateral, trilateral and multilateral partnerships to implement their individual programmes. This is especially so for the large organisations in both Bangladesh and Ghana, which have established focal relations with smaller organisations in the regions. Sometimes such partnerships have been used even among larger organisations to access substantial funds, which individual organisations are unable to carry.

However, the most important capability that WROs have and that which is likely to sustain them in the future (in a different form perhaps) is their social legitimacy. In both countries despite the widespread cynicism about and criticism of foreign funded NGOs, this does not seamlessly extend to the WROs. In both the Bangladesh and Ghana reports an interesting difference is made between the NGO cultures in aid dependant countries like Ghana/Bangladesh on the one hand and the WROs on the

other. There is a distinction drawn between what the case study organisations perceive as their identity i.e. women's rights and the NGO form that became predominant and to which the case study organisations tried to fit in order to access resources. It is important to note that the case study organisations also have an identity in *society* as autonomous organisations defending and promoting rights which is different from how mainstream NGOs are perceived. The NGOs who do gender and development are not seen as anything more than NGOs funded by donors. They are not seen as defending a cause in society. Despite the opposition that WROs may face from the public for the unpopular causes (read women's issues and anti-patriarchal stance) that they support, they are nevertheless recognised as doing "good work", working for "women's emancipation", and dealing with problems in society. So the tension is how WROs can keep their distinctiveness and legitimacy in 'society' while also being able to access funding. A further question that arises is how should aid modalities be structured in order to accommodate this tension.

This study also investigated how donors have changed in the way they fund, for what they fund, their relationships with WROs and their approach to funding for gender equality. Led by the bilateral agencies the aid scene has undergone profound changes in the last ten years in both Bangladesh and Ghana. Bilateral agencies have rationalised their operations to minimise transaction costs for themselves and for their main partner, the government. Funding to civil society has also been reorganised and special mechanisms for its disbursement such as pool funding, trust funds and competitive bidding have been set up by these donors. Direct funding to WROs so popular in the early part of the millennium is at an end. Thus new actors including those organisations that manage these arrangements have arisen in the vortex of changes set forth by the Paris agenda. The INGOs, an important source of funding for NGOs and WROs, have also restructured and those in our sample have faced different fates. Some old and not so old actors have gained a new lease of life. The multilateral agencies and especially the UN bodies have seen a resurgence in their role in gender mainstreaming in national processes and in achieving the MDGs. Given their multilateral role and their immense absorption capacity they provide a perfect fit to the new aid scenario. The regional and global women's funds are also doing well since they have become the conduit through which the funds to support 'women' is being channelled by bilateral agencies.

In all this, the reality for our case study organisations is much starker. They are losing funding sources and their funding is becoming much more project oriented as the support from bilaterals and INGOs for WRO initiatives are axed. This is despite the fact that all donor representatives interviewed profess to gender equality as being a central issue in their funding. Many would perhaps also suggest that their funding for gender equality and women's rights has remained at the same level as before but disbursed in a different manner and for different objectives. The question as to whether the amount of aid available to WROs in quantitative terms has grown or shrunk is not immediately relevant for the survival and sustenance of WROs. Rather the relevant issue is whether the changed architecture of aid makes it more difficult for women's organisations to access funding in their own right and for the concerns and issues that they have worked for.

The funding of gender equality and WROs has had profound effects not only on the organisations themselves but also on the meaning of gender equality and how this is to be achieved through development. First, there is a discernible shift to supporting

gender mainstreaming which in donor speak means not supporting programmes targeting women's interests. This shift denies the history of discrimination, leads to the blind inclusion of men and has put paid to affirmative action leading to a devaluation of what the WROs do. It has also led to the devaluation and downgrading of the departments and teams in INGOs that worked on gender. Second, the role that donors played in supporting homespun methods of 'doing' gender equality work has been over for some time. This has been replaced by and large by programme funding on themes which are internationally being promoted and frameworks that come from these quarters. The immediate fall out is the homogenisation of discourse on how development, and specifically gender and development, should be done which is further disempowering WROs and empowering those international agencies that frame these discourses. Finally, the post-Paris aid modalities have restructured aid in ways that represent an idealised version of state–society relations and one that does not prevail even in donor countries. The state is projected as guarantor of rights and the institution that provides policy, programmes and services. Civil society is everybody else (mainly NGOs) and their role is to advocate for policy. In this unreal scenario WROs working on, for example, the rights of widows which in every single post-colonial African and South Asian state is an issue, is simply not seen as being relevant or important. It is not recognised because working on these issues involves more than advocacy and may involve alleviating the immediate suffering of these excluded groups. And yet if WROs do not work for these 'unpopular' issues that international development discourses are unable to take up and in ways that are not considered legitimate in these quarters they stand to lose their social and political legitimacy.

The future pathways to meaningful and relevant funding for WROs organisations may lie in strengthening the role of women-specific multilateral organisations and regional women's funds. However, all those operating at the international and de-contextualised level have to learn that WROs have an agenda of their own as legitimate 'social organisations' and not just as fits to their idea of what a civil society organisation is and should be doing. Mobilising for women's rights by WROs as a pathway of women's empowerment will have to be funded differently.

Areas for future research

The Amsterdam conference noted that the study had global resonance and that it would be useful to undertake similar studies in other countries, as well as explore in depth some of the specific themes and issues that the study has highlighted, particularly in connection to WROs' relations with donors. Already in that respect it is worth noting that fairly similar findings and recommendations concerning donor practices emerged from a study by another Pathways researcher of women's coalitions in Jordan and Egypt (Tadros 2011) and there may be a case for a more systematic review of such practices in relation to WROs.

The conference also emphasised how the current funding landscape is changing with the growing significance of women's funds and multilateral trust funds for women – and that these need to be studied carefully as they continue to evolve and influence agendas.

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Annex A

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This is a synthesis report of a study to clarify the conditions under which external financial support to women's rights organisations has a positive impact on women's empowerment, as well as the conditions in which successful women's organising is achievable without such support. Participatory methods of critical reflection involved both donor staff and representatives of women's rights organisations and networks in Bangladesh and Ghana as well as at global levels. The report also reflects debates from an international conference held in Amsterdam in March 2011 which brought together representatives from case study and donor organisations, as well as international activists and researchers, to discuss the research findings and its implications.

pathways
of women's
empowerment