

Equality fund

WHEN WE MOVE
TOGETHER,
WE MOVE
THE WORLD

WEAVING THEMES AND STRATEGIES OF FEMINIST CRISIS RESPONSE

In 2023, the Equality Fund commissioned research on feminist response to crisis to inform its approach to a new grantmaking stream, acknowledging that research from feminist voices from the Global South has been limited.

We focused on crisis responses led by feminist activists, organizations, and movements on the ground, working at the intersections of climate and environment, civic space, human rights, democracy, LGBTQI+ and women's rights, and Indigenous Peoples.

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When the state was still trying to clear up the roads or make new roads, we worked with volunteers and brought donkeys to make the journey walking to provide essential survival elements. Waiting for too long without food, shelter, and water would have killed as many people as the earthquake.

- MOROCCAN FEMINIST

Based on a literature review and interviews with grassroots activists, the research findings will be used to amplify the experiences and perspectives of feminist responders. Here is a summary of what we learned.



Crises are compounded, structural, intersectional, and fundamentally political

These pillars anchor feminist responses to crises, complementing strategies that centre short-term relief. Crises do not materialize in isolation, but are intricately woven into the fabric of structural vulnerabilities- [exacerbating existing inequities](#). Feminist understandings of crises go beyond earthquakes or violent conflicts to recognize non-humanitarian emergencies such as the erosion of civic spaces, endemics of sexual and gender-based violence, and climate degradation. Feminists recognize that those who hold power make political decisions which determine what is recognized as a crisis and what is not- and therefore where resources and attention are paid or ignored.

Women's rights organizations (WROs) and feminist funds already play a complementary role in crisis and humanitarian spaces. Yet limited resources have [strained their capacity](#) to respond strategically and proactively to crises. With around US \$30.9B in annual funding for humanitarian assistance globally, [less than 0.2%](#) is reaching grassroots women's rights organizations (WROs)—those at the forefront of crises. WROs also face the challenge of being seen by donors solely as [implementers](#), rather than as leaders driving strategies and spearheading the response.

A feminist approach to crisis provides an opportunity for grassroots leaders- and funders- to work together on systemic issues while responding to immediate responses.



First and foremost, a crisis never affects just one person. They impact multiple individuals that form a community. So, the response is necessarily community-based

- CONGOLESE FEMINIST

FEMINIST RESPONSE TO CRISIS



In our context, survival is collective, and so is care.

- EGYPTIAN FEMINIST

WHO ARE FEMINIST RESPONDERS?

Crisis responders are typically thought of as individuals or organizations specialized in crisis intervention, often deployed from outside the affected community.

However, everyday grassroots feminists —individuals, organizations, and movements - are at the forefront of crisis intervention long before a crisis is officially declared. When crises unfold, feminist activists and organizations transition from their regular activities to become responders.

They identify and address intersecting issues, whether economic, political, social, or environmental, with a deep understanding of the experiences and needs of their communities.

FOUR BUILDING BLOCKS OF FEMINIST RESPONSE TO CRISIS

Intersectional
Community centric
Visionary and long-term
Care-centred

Eight strategies woven into feminist crisis response

01. ADDRESSING HOLISTIC NEEDS

Supporting basic survival needs which extend beyond life-saving responses to encompass unaddressed needs, such as access to culturally appropriate sanitation products or psychosocial support for survivors of sexual violence.

02. RESPONDING RAPIDLY

Intervening swiftly and providing support, leveraging close connections to communities to identify immediate needs and access local resources. This is not, however, meant to absolve the state of its roles and responsibilities in crisis response.

03. PRIORITIZING INCLUSIVITY IN RELIEF AND EVACUATION

Using a multi-dimensional approach to ensure inclusion and accessibility, such as assisting individuals with disabilities or tapping into local networks to establish evacuation plans for women and gender-diverse people in rural areas.

04. SAFE SPACES

Creating spaces specifically for the physical and emotional safety of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, including spaces for LGBTQI+ people, and displaced people and refugees. These spaces are also used for training and education, such as rights awareness and capacity-strengthening and women's leadership development.



For instance, during the Turkey and Syria earthquake, feminist organizations in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon unified their efforts, providing temporary shelter and fundraising, surpassing limitations imposed by the Syrian ongoing conflict and financial regulatory restrictions. These organizations and Syrian refugee grassroots feminist living in neighbouring countries mobilized their regional networks and social justice collectives to support feminist grassroots responders.

- SYRIAN FEMINIST



We, as indigenous women farmers, embarked on participatory action research to understand the chronic violence women experience across various spheres of life and the looming environmental crisis. It expanded our perspective beyond our village, all of a sudden, we started to understand the nature of this violence and how it is connected.

- INDONESIAN FEMINIST

05. MOBILIZING SOLIDARITY

Activating networks for intersectional solidarity to advocate and create protective measures across geographies, such as joint fundraising or addressing financial restrictions to aid money.

06. VISIONING ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY HUBS

Creating communal spaces to foster collective care and alternative relationships with land and economy, while reimagining sustainable ways of living. Examples include communal homes, villages, and farms and ecological spaces.

07. ENABLING RESEARCH AND COMMUNITY DIAGNOSIS

Supporting movements to do local analysis and assessments, especially related to marginalized groups, to identify risks that exacerbate structural injustices during crises, and bridge gaps in understanding about community needs.

08. VISIONING POLITICAL AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIZING

Establishing clear political priorities to create a shared understanding of potential solutions to structural problems, and defining action towards a shared agenda.

THE ROLE OF FEMINIST FUNDS IN CRISIS

A key priority for feminist funds is to develop a more robust infrastructure for swift and prepared grantmaking, with proactive crisis grants that address structural and systemic issues, moving beyond small, one-time grants for immediate responses only. This infrastructure is focused on collective action and strengthening an ecosystem of response, rather than focusing on capacity building of individual organizations to respond.

Feminist funders recognize the need to develop channels to actively engage with grassroots voices, establishing a responsive system that heeds early alerts to crises. Coordination among feminist funders doing crisis work is crucial, such as shared grantmaking applications or reporting formats, shared systems for references and due diligence, and open communication channels for mutual understanding of diverse contexts.

Feminist funders also activate philanthropic advocacy, leveraging their collective strengths and positions within the philanthropic landscape to push for more and better quality funding.



The feminist funding ecosystem contains crucial infrastructure to orchestrate and enact a feminist approach to crisis response.

- EXCERPT FROM RESEARCH

THE EQUALITY FUND'S APPROACH

The Equality Fund has a multilayered grantmaking approach that provides financial support to feminist organizations and women's funds responding to crises at different levels, including recovery and rebuilding in the medium and long term.

To date, it has funded approximately CAD \$6 million to emerging and evolving responses globally, through 27 grants addressing [disasters](#), armed conflict, and war, as well as other [crises in fragile contexts](#).

In addition, as part of its organizational model, the Equality Fund works in solidarity with feminist funds and organizations calling for political attention to crises, and advocates for increased funding to feminist organizations and movements to be able to respond immediately when a crisis hits, and address root causes in the long term.



CREDIT AFEDES

Four ways for government and institutional funders to collaborate with feminist responders and women's funds

01. INCREASE DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION

Increase dialogue and collaboration to support greater understanding of the disproportionate impact of crises on women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

02. CENTRE THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMINIST RESPONDERS

Centre the experiences of feminist responders on what works, what doesn't and what needs to shift in terms of traditional approaches to crises support and access to funding.

03. LIFT UP EXISTING PRACTICES AND PROMISING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION.

Share examples of what responders are piloting and how they are nurturing new visions of feminist responses that build on alternative understandings of crisis and solutions.

04. EXAMINE THE BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Examine the barriers and challenges that are preventing action on continued calls to increase funding to feminist responses to crisis. [Increase flows of resources to feminist responders](#) with a focus on moving money explicitly through mechanisms already in place, such as women's funds.

CONCLUSION

This feminist approach to crisis response operates across various realms—public and private, national and global—while considering short, medium, and long-term timelines. From mobilizing solidarity to nurturing safe spaces, feminist movements are a critical component of response and regeneration, laying the groundwork for communities to rebuild from crisis and thrive.

READ THE FULL REPORT

[Unfolding the Tapestry: Weaving Themes and Strategies of Feminist Crisis Response](#)



It is more liberating to take that long-term lens, more liberating than being buffeted by short-term challenges. Long-term thinking shifts our mindset from spotting threats to seeing the opportunities and envisioning different scenarios about how you could pivot to capitalize on certain opportunities.

- HONG KONG GRASSROOTS ACTIVIST