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In the AWID survey, bilateral and multilateral agencies were the most frequently mentioned source of revenue in 2005

## Where is the money for women's rights... and how can we tap it?

### Bilateral and Multilateral Development Agencies

#### PROFILE

These agencies deliver development programmes as well as grants. They transfer public monies in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA), mostly in direct funding from donor government to developing country government.

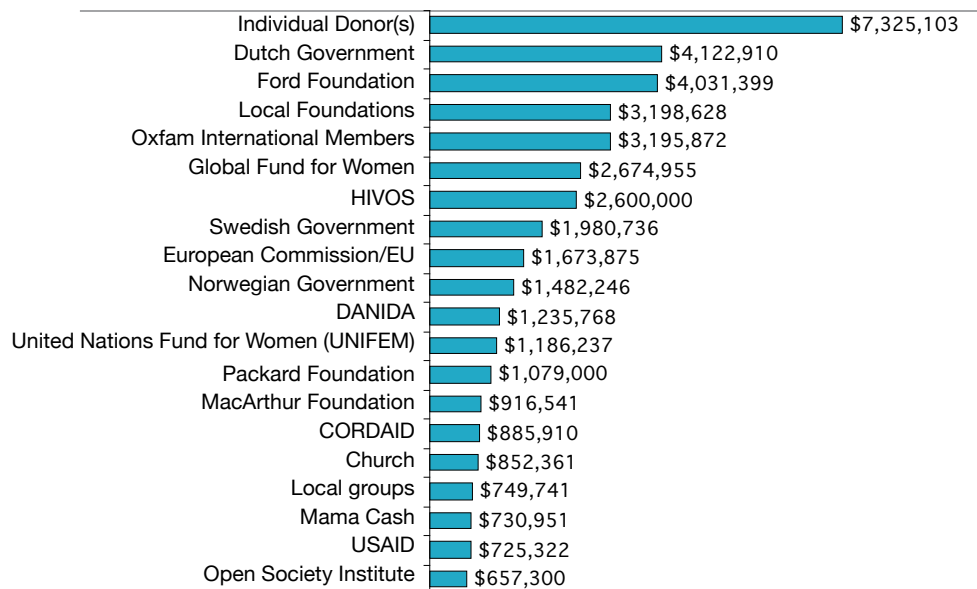
#### ODA is a significant source of funds for gender equality

Although some governments (Belgium, Switzerland and the UK) are reducing their NGO funding, direct ODA support for NGOs is growing in real terms overall. In the AWID survey<sup>1</sup>, bilateral and multilateral agencies were the most frequently mentioned source of revenue in 2005 (by 35% of AWID respondents), and accounted for 23% of total combined revenue. Statistically, the Dutch government was named as the most generous agency, followed by the European Commission. In the survey's top 20 list of donors, other multi- and bilateral agencies appear in positions 8, 12, 13, 15, 17 and 2.

#### Gender equality is still only a tiny proportion of ODA overall

Of ODA funds disbursed between 1999 and 2003, only 0.1% went explicitly to "women in development". Under pressure to track spending with a gender equality marker, agencies reported higher 2004-05 figures (USD 7.5 billion up from USD 3.6 billion), partly as a result of exchange rate swings rather than increases in real terms. Further, this support is not only for women's organizations. Because it also covers any aid programme with gender equality as a significant objective, gender-tagged funding includes the huge sums for post-Tsunami support, sizable "non-military assistance" to Afghanistan and Iraq, and debt relief particularly for Nigeria and Iraq.

#### Top 20 Donors: 2005



Redfern Research

<sup>1</sup> AWID surveyed almost 1,000 women's organizations worldwide; reviewed the literature; interviewed donors; and drew insights and recommendations from 300 women's rights leaders and funding allies from 94 countries at the AWID and Semillas Money and Movements meeting in Querétaro, Mexico, at the end of 2006.

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In many cases where gender mainstreaming has been embraced, the result has been a shrinking commitment to gender equality as measured by inadequate staff, insufficient resources, policy shifts and inconsistent mechanisms of accountability

There is a yawning gap between support for independent civil society in principle and actual funds from bilateral and multilateral donors for NGOs including women's organizations

### **For the European Commission, NGOs exist primarily to intervene in crises**

EC support to NGOs in 2005 was 9% (USD 877 million) of the Commission's total external aid, of which 50% went to humanitarian aid and relief operations. No information is available on the EC's budget allocation to women's rights NGOs.

### **Bilateral ODA increasingly supports domestic NGOs**

In a significant shift, many governments (in particular, The Netherlands) are choosing to fund domestic NGOs that operate internationally, thus decreasing direct ODA grants to NGOs and civil society in the Global South. Of the 106.8 billion USD total ODA from member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2005, 1.8 billion went to domestic OECD-based NGOs, mostly in the Global North (some of whom then channel funds to organizations in the Global South). Only USD 595 million went directly to NGOs internationally (in other OECD countries or in the Global South).

### **CHALLENGES**

#### **Gender mainstreaming has reduced funding for women's rights**

Over the past ten years, funding for women's organizations has decreased in quality and quantity, especially from such traditional bilateral allies as CIDA, the Dutch government, SIDA and NORAD. A major cause has been the focus on gender mainstreaming. Because it has lacked a women's empowerment focus, mainstreaming became a depoliticized technical instrument with few returns for women on the ground. As specific objectives of gender equality have been diluted across the overall goals of international cooperation programmes, mainstreaming has in fact led to policy "evaporation" — where a good policy goes nowhere due to insufficient funds or mechanisms for implementation. Indeed, in many cases where gender mainstreaming has been embraced, the result has been a shrinking commitment to gender equality as measured by inadequate staff, insufficient resources, policy shifts and inconsistent mechanisms of accountability.

#### **"Not everything that counts can be counted"**

Logframes and three-year project completion timelines are inimical to women's empowerment strategies, according to many organizations. Over the last 15 years, bilateral and multilateral institutions have imposed cumbersome approaches and often apolitical indicators to measure impact and results, ignoring the unpredictable and chaotic forces of change (political movements, natural disasters, financial crises). In reality, success in building stronger movements often means opportunities seized, threats averted, relationships built and

behaviours changed, but donor bureaucracies consider these markers subjective and unverifiable. For many women's rights advocates, success has meant simply holding the line in the face of conservative backlash. "It is time to examine the myths and realities of social change measurement and to question why we measure."<sup>2</sup>

#### **'Aid effectiveness' reduces funding for independent women's organizations**

A separate series of AWID resources<sup>3</sup> outline the implications of the aid effectiveness agenda and The Paris Declaration's focus on government budget support. Key points for women's right organizations include:

- reduced access to ODA funds for independent NGOs critical of their governments;
- recipient governments 'subcontracting' NGOs to deliver services, further undermining government accountability;
- the ineligibility of middle-income countries for ODA funding despite ongoing battles there for women's human rights;
- a significant volume of funding from bilaterals to the World Bank and other multilaterals for their gender equality work, despite the mass of existing WB research on gender and poverty which has yet to be acted upon.

Overall, there is a yawning gap between support for independent civil society in principle and actual funds from bilateral and multilateral donors for NGOs including women's organizations.

#### **Women's emancipation is not a funding priority for international 'security'**

ODA costs are minute in proportion to military spending: the US government alone spent nearly USD 10 billion per month in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2006. Despite western claims to be battling Islamic extremists for "democracy and women's emancipation," women's organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan have to struggle to raise any funding. Most of the available resources are absorbed by international NGOs or multilateral agencies.

#### **Bush-administration conditionalities run counter to proven strategies**

Funds from PEPFAR (the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), established in 2003 by George W. Bush to provide USD 15 billion over five years to 15 of the neediest AIDS-affected countries, are subject to ideologically motivated conditionalities. To qualify for the 20% earmarked for prevention, programmes must advise individuals to be abstinent until marriage, be faithful to a sex partner, and, failing those approaches, use a condom. But this one-size-fits-all ABC approach ignores how little negotiating power women have in sexual relationships. (For

<sup>2</sup> Batiwala, Sripatha, "Measuring Social Change: Assumptions, Myths and Realities", in Alliance, Volume 11, No 1, March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=aid\\_effectiveness](http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=aid_effectiveness)

example, women in steady partnerships and marriages account for the largest increase in new infection rates in Africa).

The Bush administration's 'Global Gag Rule' prevents funding to NGOs that include abortion or abortion counselling in even a fraction of their activities. USAID also requires recipients to oppose prostitution and sex trafficking, causing profound impact on the sex-worker health and rights organizations that have been at the forefront of the most successful prevention strategies in recent years. The gag rule extends beyond individual NGOs: in 2007, US government interference forced the World Health Organization to readjust maternal and reproductive health programmes.

Because they would not qualify without changing the focus of their work, many women's organizations refuse to take US funding and in 2006-07 the Brazilian government rejected further USAID funding.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Agencies reassess their gender equality policies

Recognising the pitiful achievements of the mainstreaming agenda to date, feminist advocates in many bilateral agencies are making efforts to influence policy frameworks and to create funds for women's NGOs. A new commitment is emerging within this sector to independent women's movements as a central driver of real aid effectiveness and of more sustainable global governance.

- The UK Department for International Development (DFID)'s 2006 study revealed that the new aid mechanisms were hindering its gender equality goals. So, in February 2007, DFID launched an ambitious Gender Equality Action Plan.
- Women's organizations' largest funder, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DMFA) has assessed the role of gender mainstreaming in action, in the context of the shrinking and final dismantling of its once-significant fund for women's organizations in the Global South and for its own gender and development initiatives. DMFA gender advocates are now seeking ways to increase funding for women's rights.
- A 2005 evaluation of Norwegian government efforts to promote gender equality spring boarded a bold action plan to revitalize a two-track strategy of mainstreaming and women's empowerment. A new women's rights budget line (USD 33 million for 2007) has four thematic priorities (political participation, economic participation, sexual and reproductive rights and violence against women). NGOs are not excluded from the scope, particularly if they deliver "catalytic and innovative activities." The only country with an Ambassador for

Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Norway uses its high-level influence to push for visibility and action on gender equality within the UN system, the World Bank and even the Norwegian corporate sector.

- The Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation (AECI), led by a feminist and committed to gender equality, has significantly increased the amount of funding available for ODA.
- AusAid's new gender equality policy emerged from a 2006 review and ensures gender as a mandatory priority of all of the Australian agency's work.

### ODA is on the rise

From USD 79 billion in 2004 and 106 billion in 2005, ODA could reach USD 130 billion by 2010, based on government commitments to date.<sup>4</sup> Some fresh methods to keep levels rising include France, followed by Norway, taxing commercial airfares to generate foreign aid funds.

- The Civil Society Fund within Irish Aid's growing ODA budget (USD 180 million to NGOs in 2005) invites proposals from both Irish and non-Irish NGOs. It supports multi-year proposals, including core funding averaging Euros 200,000 to 300,000 per year. While this fund is not women's rights specific, cross-cutting issues including gender are emphasised and Irish Aid recently adopted a progressive gender equality policy.
- Other countries that are increasingly committed to gender equality and support for women's movements include Spain, Sweden, New Zealand, Australia, and Italy.
- Of the first 125 projects supported by the UN Democracy Fund (created in 2006), 47 had a strong focus on gender equality and women's rights. In 2007, the fund's grant-making capacity grew to USD 65 million.
- The EC renewed its commitment to sexual and reproductive rights in 2004 and again in its new policy framework (2007-2010), in part in response to the US' conservative Global Gag Rule and denial of funds to UNFPA. This strong progressive voice remains important, but implementation is still weak and procedures for accessing EC funding are complex, bureaucratic and slow.

### The UN seeks to create a more powerful agency for women

A new agency that consolidates existing UN gender-equality bodies (UNIFEM, the Division for the Advancement of Women, and the Office of the Special Advisor for Gender Issues) would depend for its budget on voluntary contributions from governments. However, the new agency would lead in ensuring an explicit agenda of women's empowerment and gender equality at country and regional levels. ▶

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<sup>4</sup> According to the OECD's 2006 Development Co-operation Report