

The State of Women's Organizations

03.08

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What is the state of women's organizations? Who funds women's rights work? What dynamics are shaping the growth of women's organizations?

To answer these questions, 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.

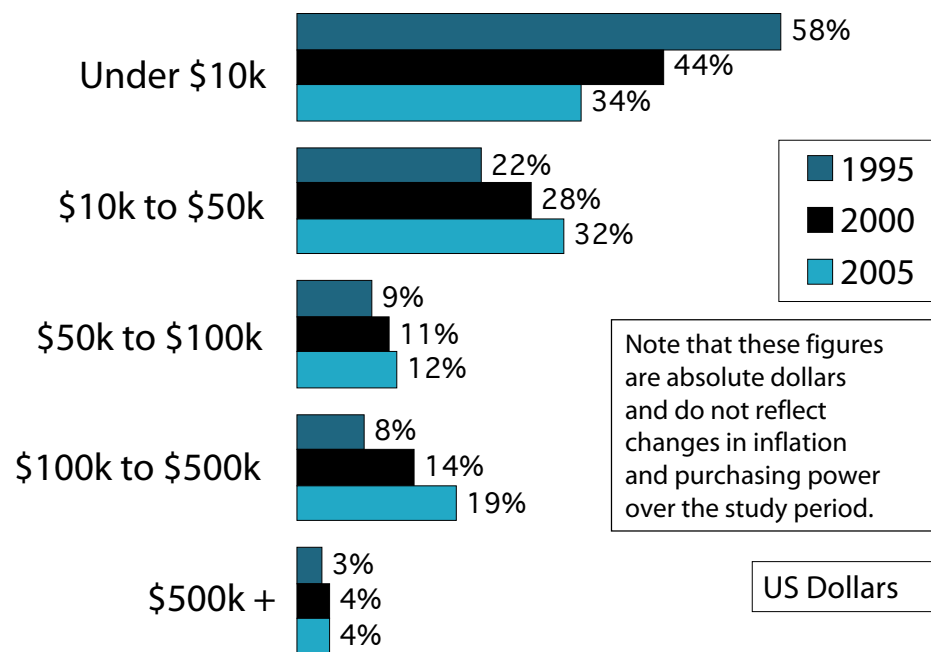
Why should we care?

Women's movements have arguably been leading the most successful social revolution the world has ever seen. Yet gender inequality is still the most pervasive, systemic and universal form of discrimination on the planet. There is much work to be done. Women's rights are not "just another element" – they are fundamental to ending poverty and HIV/AIDS, to the environment and to conflict resolution. Women's rights organizations are indispensable agents of change in communities, nations, and regions.

What is the current state of women's rights organizations?

Most women's organizations are surprisingly small: fully two-thirds of this survey sample have annual budgets of less than USD 50,000

Overall Revenue Ranges 1995-2005



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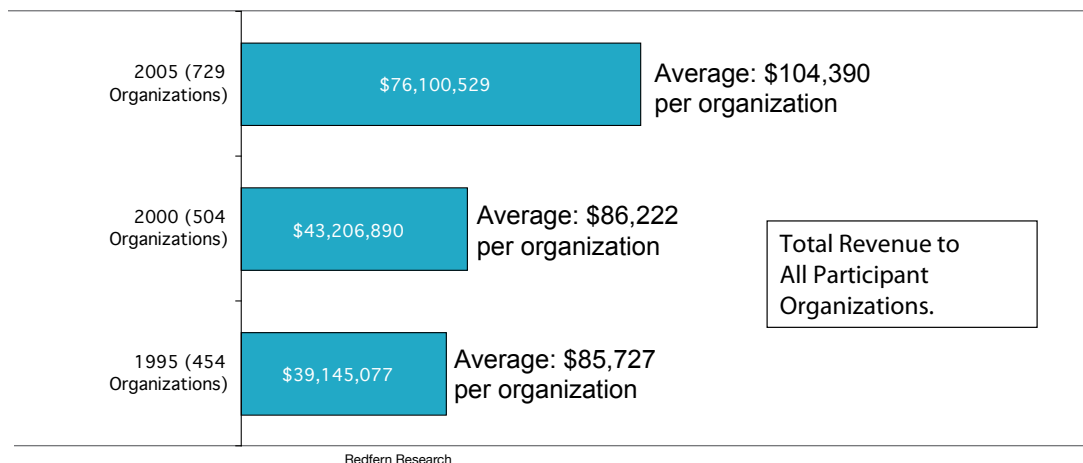
- full FundHer reports
- fact sheets
- aid effectiveness
- resource mobilisation strategies

- funding for women's rights:
 - international NGOs
 - women's funds
 - large private foundations

- individual donors
- small foundations
- corporate philanthropy

In 2005, 729 women's rights organizations worldwide had a collective income of only USD 79 million. This is less than 4% of World Vision International's 2005 budget of almost USD 2 billion.

Total Revenue 1995-2005



The most significant change in the funding landscape since 1995 is the overall increase in the number of organizations receiving money from women's funds.

Many women's rights organizations are relatively young. Half among the sample were founded in the 1990s, while 39% were founded after the year 2000. Many organizations burgeoned before and after the 1995 Beijing Conference, alongside a general growth in the non-profit sector.

The majority – 80% in fact – of these women's organizations worldwide self-identify as feminist organizations.

Who funds women's rights work?

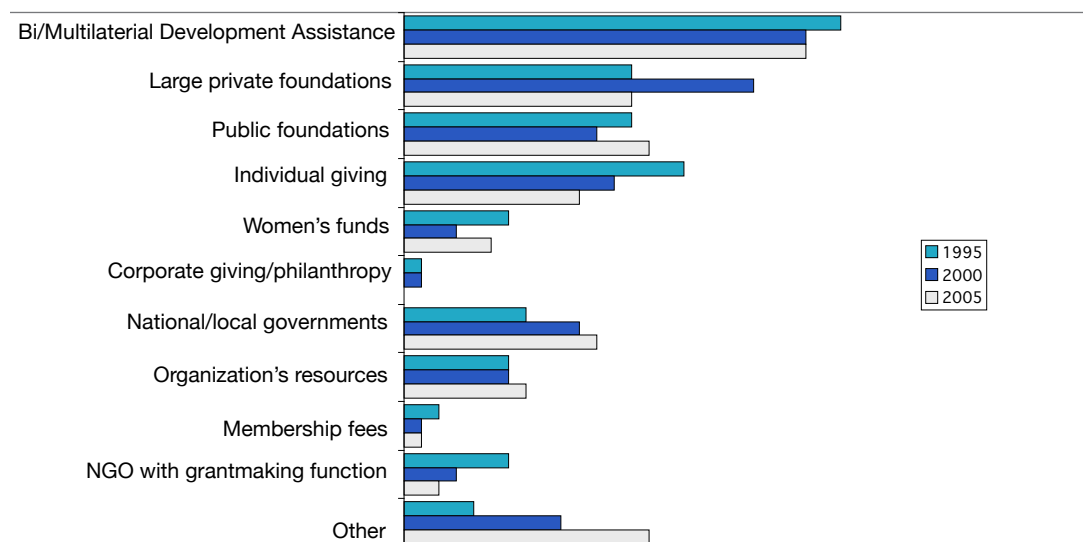
The most significant change in the funding landscape since 1995 is the overall increase in the number of organizations receiving money from women's funds. While women's funds control a relatively small amount of resources, when compared to other major donors, they nevertheless have a tremendous reach.

In 2005, the most common sources of funding (reaching the most organizations, though not necessarily the largest amounts of funding) were women's funds, bilateral/multilateral assistance, membership fees, and income generation activities.

The majority of organizations have been getting their biggest funding since 1995 from bilateral/multilateral agencies, large private foundations, international NGOs, individuals, and local governments.

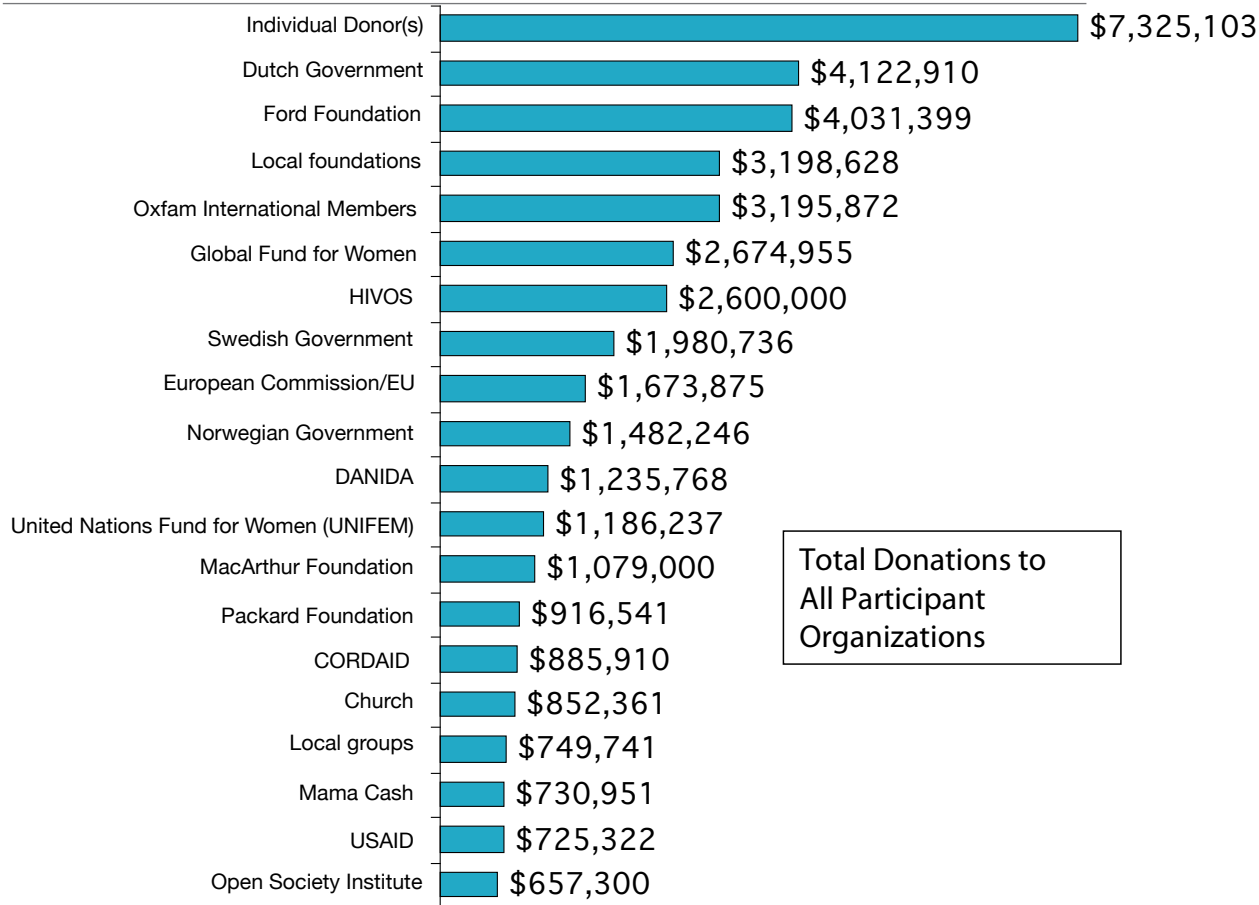
In financial terms, the most important overall donors for survey respondents worldwide (in 1995, 2000 and 2005) were individual donors, the Dutch Government, the Ford Foundation, and Oxfam International member agencies

Income Sources: Percent of Income 1995-2005



1 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.
 2 Batliwala, Sriatha, "Measuring Social Change: Assumptions, Myths and Realities", in Alliance, Volume 11, No 1, March 2006.

Top 20 Donors: 2005



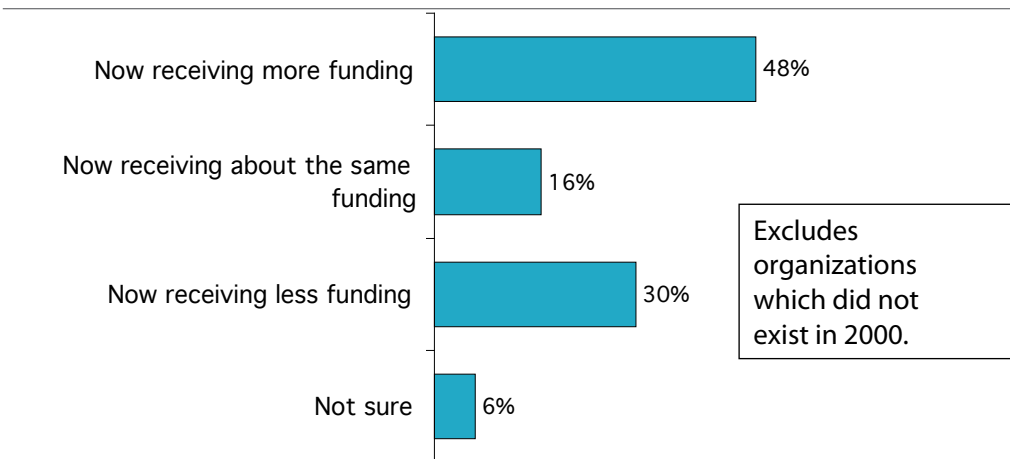
Total Donations to All Participant Organizations

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How are women's organizations growing?

Nearly half of the organizations reported increased funding, but much of this 'growth' is very small scale: budgets increased by a measly USD 10,000 or 20,000 annually, pushing them above the USD 10,000 annual budget category. It's important to note too, that the survey did not take into account changes in purchasing power and inflation. There is very little growth in terms of organizations moving into the USD 500,000 category – a size at which they could make more significant impact, with bigger programmes and more human resources.

Five-year Trend in Organization Funding



Excludes organizations which did not exist in 2000.

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Nearly half of the survey respondents are receiving less funding or about the same since 2000. For 67% of the survey respondents, it is more difficult to raise funds than five years ago (only 16% find it easier). Over half of the organizations use more staff and resources for fundraising efforts than five years ago.

By August 2006 when the survey was carried out, only 13% of organizations had secured all the funding they needed for that year. In fact, 61% had raised only half or less of their budget for the year. Most depend on small project-based funding because that is what is available, although rarely when groups really need it.

On average, organizations said they would need twice their current budget to do all they wanted to do. If they could grow, they would strengthen existing programmes, pay and expand the staff, expand their reach to more constituencies or communities, and take on new issues. Many remain small so that they can control the quality of the work, not raise expectations of the staff, or spend funds on infrastructure improvements at the expense of the programme work when funding is unsure. Unfortunately, many funders then see these organizations as “small and vulnerable”.

When organizations assessed their own potential for growth and “success”, most give themselves high marks for clarity of mission, networking, leadership, decision-making, internal coherence, and self-evaluation. They are less positive about their planning performance, staff development, and communications. They are generally negative about financial issues including their financial stability, their fundraising ability, and the diversity of their income sources. Ironically, support to address planning and other identified weaknesses would no doubt lead to more funding, yet without those skills, donors are often reluctant to invest. Donor communities and women's organizations need to break the cycle that keeps these organizations so small and under-funded.

More positively, donor practice is beginning to shift, in recognition both that gender mainstreaming went awry and that too little funding exists.

Why fund women's rights work?

As activist and researcher Srilatha Batliwala has succinctly noted, women's movements have:

- Raised the visibility and voice of women around the world and broken the culture of silence around rape and violence;
- Unearthed the nature of gender discrimination through detailed research, gender-specific data, scholarly analysis, new concepts;
- Increased formal equality by changing and creating laws, demanding affirmative action, increasing the representation of women in public and private sectors;
- Created and engendered international normative structures (including the Beijing Platform of Action, Security Council Resolution 1325, rape as a war crime, CEDAW);
- Constructed new institutional arrangements and mechanisms to advance equality (such as gender budgets, police stations for women, women's commissions);
- Built a vast diversity of organizations, networks and movements (networks like DAWN for example, and movements of sex workers, slum dwellers, indigenous women, maquiladora workers, farm women etc);
- Mobilized and empowered women in communities through broad-based constituency building.

Women's organizations achieved these successes with very few resources, within a constantly changing political and economic terrain with increasing backlash. Going forward, the push and leadership for change continues to come from independent, diverse, and strategic women's rights movements and organizations.

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