Mapping of Women’s Groups and Feminist Organisations in Francophone West Africa
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWDF</td>
<td>African Women’s Development Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELIAF</td>
<td>Women’s Associations’ Information and Liaison Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONGAFEN</td>
<td>Coordination of Niger Women’s NGOs and Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM/C</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting</td>
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<tr>
<td>FJS</td>
<td>Foundation for a Just Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>FWA</td>
<td>Francophone West Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII</td>
<td>Key Informant Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>MEL</td>
<td>Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</td>
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<td>MEWC</td>
<td>Make Every Woman Count</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDI</td>
<td>National Democratic Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
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<td>OSIWA</td>
<td>Open Society Initiative for West Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBF</td>
<td>Peacebuilding Fund</td>
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<td>RAFED</td>
<td>African Network for Women and Development</td>
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<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender-Based Violence</td>
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<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
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<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAWG</td>
<td>Violence Against Women and Girls</td>
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<td>WACSI</td>
<td>West Africa Civil Society Institute</td>
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<td>WILDAF</td>
<td>Women in Law and Development in Africa</td>
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<td>WPS</td>
<td>Women, Peace and Security</td>
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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This landscape analysis was commissioned by African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) and Foundation for a Just Society (FJS).

Our goal was to better understand the context and state of women’s rights and feminist organising in Francophone West Africa (FWA) as a region and with a focus on the countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinée, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

Our hope is that this study can support AWDF, FJS and other philanthropic organisations to identify feminist groups and movements working in the region, better understand their organising strategies, challenges, and plans for the future. This report, which provides a nuanced understanding of the feminist organising and funding landscape in FWA, can be used as a philanthropic advocacy tool to bring more and better funding to feminist organising in the region.

AWDF and FJS want to express our deep gratitude to the study participants who provided their insights and analysis on the state of feminist organising in the FWA region through interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires.

Finally, AWDF and FJS would like to sincerely thank Rainatou Sow and her transnational team of researchers at Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) - Vivian Nilsson - van Iperen, Djelia Diallo, Makalé Soumah, Grace Pattison, Chelsie Loveder, Estrella Chocron, Leysley Nasimyu, Marilyn Saliba, Naomi Ndifon, Adeline Negob, Dieynaba N’Diom and Sylvia Apata - for their work in designing and executing this research study on the state of feminist organising in Francophone West Africa (FWA). We are deeply grateful for their commitment and work on this project.

This report is the embodiment of the idea that, “alone, we each know something, but together we know a lot.”

ABOUT FOUNDATION FOR A JUST SOCIETY

Foundation for a Just Society was founded on the belief that the liberation of women, girls, and LGBTQI people is an essential element of just societies. Change happens when people facing injustice come together to build a mutual understanding of their experiences, identify solutions that can solve a common problem, and collectively advocate for a shared vision. The most effective and enduring solutions are grounded in the lived experience of people who face the greatest injustice. Our work is guided by the principle that supporting organisations and movements that are led by these women, girls, and LGBTQI people is the best way to advance solutions that address root causes and ensure the essential dignity of all.

FJS supports efforts that advance long-term, structural change and meet immediate needs that enable women, girls, and LGBTQI people most affected by injustice to be leaders, strategists, and agents of change. FJS makes grants to local, national, regional, and global
organisations and networks with an emphasis on Francophone West Africa, Mesoamerica, South and Southeast Asia, and the US Southeast. We seek to strengthen movements that create a world where all people are valued and lead self-determined lives.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT FUND (AWDF)

Established in 2000, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is a feminist grantmaking foundation that supports local, national and Africa regional women’s organisations working towards the promotion and realisation of women's rights and recognition of African women's leadership in all spheres of life. As Africa’s first women’s fund, AWDF plays a pioneering role in both feminist movement-building and philanthropy on the continent.

Through specialising in grant making and focused, tailored capacity- and movement-building programmes, AWDF works to strengthen and support the work of African women's organisations, which often have limited access to mainstream funding for a variety of reasons, including size, language, location, and marginalisation. AWDF also amplifies and celebrates African women’s voices and achievements, thus combating harmful stereotypes about African women’s agency and promoting them as active agents of change.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) is an African woman-led organisation that monitors and documents women’s rights in Africa. This is done through focused research and dissemination of published works in the form of reports and policy briefs to support evidence-based advocacy to uphold women’s rights in pursuit of gender equality in Africa.

The contributing MEWC team include:

- **Rainatou Sow, Executive Director**
  Rai holds an MA in Law, International Relations and an Executive Master in Public Policy/Administration. She has many years of experience working with International Organisations, CSOs, and policy-makers focusing on advocacy, research and policy. She has been working with various agencies such as the African Union, United Nations, European Union, INGOs, CSOs, women’s groups on women’s rights, gender equality, peace, development and human rights.

- **Vivian Nilsson - van Iperen, Senior Researcher**
  Vivian has over 10 years of experience as a researcher working with women’s rights organisations, civil society organisations, the private sector, and academic institutions. Her primary research areas include gender equality and women’s empowerment, elections and democracy, the UN and the decolonisation process.

- **Djelia Diallo, Administration and Finance Manager**
  Passionate about African women’s rights, Djelia brings on board her expertise in financial management and the private sector to MEWC’s work.
• **Grace Pattison, Advocacy and Communications Officer**
  Grace is a junior Gender and Development specialist with over five years of experience with INGOs in Australia, Kenya and Tanzania and a particular passion for promoting women and girls’ digital equality.

• **Makalé Soumah, Advocacy Officer**
  A journalist by training, Makalé is a feminist, a member of the Alliance Femme et Média and also a member of Guinean civil society, working for the promotion and defence of women’s rights for over ten years.

• **Chelsie Loveder, Research Fellow**
  With an MA of Human Rights and Global Ethics, Chelsie is a feminist policy analyst with previous experience working with the OECD, the British Embassy in France and the Czech Helsinki Committee.

• **Estrella Chocron, Research Fellow**
  Academically founded in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Estrella has previous experience with the Syrian Emergency Task Force and Earth Law Centre.

• **Leysley Nasimyu, Research Fellow**
  With a background in Education and Development Anthropology, Leysley is experienced in working with the Kenyan Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

• **Marilyn Saliba, Research Fellow**
  Recently graduating with a Master’s in Public Law, Marilyn works towards promoting women’s rights, particularly in the MENA region.

• **Naomi Ndifon, Research Fellow**
  Naomi is a Nigerian Feminist and is passionate about centring women, lived human experiences and the African socio-economic landscape in her work.

• **Adeline Negob, In-country Researcher (Chad)**
  A PHD student at the Pan-African University, Adeline has extensive experience in teaching about and fighting against Gender-Based Violence.

• **Dieynaba N’Diom, In-country Researcher (Mauritania)**
  Dieynaba is a sociology and feminist researcher and PHD student. She has previously produced research publications on the health and legal vulnerability of migrant women sex workers in Mauritania.

• **Sylvia Apata, In-country Researcher (Côte d’Ivoire)**
  With a legal background, Sylvia has over seven years of experience working in feminist movements and research with a focus on GBV-sensitive statistical data and harmful practices.
INTRODUCTION

The beginning of women’s movements in Africa post-independence can be traced back to collective action against colonialist governments. Many pre-independence women’s groups converged on social justice and championed issues such as gender equality in taxation, trade regulations and political representation. For many women, the independence movements offered a way to enter public life. The movements differed as to their engagement with women’s concerns. Some saw their concerns as part of the process. In contrast, others did not address them at all or postponed such discussions until after liberalisation. After independence, various women’s rights actors emerged, ranging from informal and formal movements and organisations to individual activists.

African women’s rights and feminist movements have been at the forefront of the continent’s political, social and economic growth. Through their activism and strategic organising, women’s and feminist groups have advocated on issues affecting their communities at the national, regional, continental and international levels. These efforts have often resulted in significant and systemic changes, such as the adoption of new legislation and policies, enhanced food and human security, better education systems, the mainstreaming of women’s health care and the implementation of climate-smart initiatives.

Many progressive women’s empowerment and gender equality frameworks have been adopted at the national, regional and continental levels in Africa. A total of 43 out of 55 countries have ratified the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Many constitutions across Africa guarantee gender equality and non-discrimination. Many states have adopted quotas, or political parties have adopted them voluntarily. Women’s rights organisations and feminist movements have been critical actors working for gender parity in decision-making and the adoption of quotas.

Activists use gender frameworks to push for legal change and policy and institutional reforms, and to challenge power structures and patriarchal attitudes. They have pressed for reforms that allow constitutional and statutory guarantees of equality to prevail in instances of conflict between women’s rights and customary law and to outlaw practices that violate and discriminate against women or infringe on provisions on gender equality. The lobbying efforts of women’s groups are credited with contributing to the decline in FGM/C and an increase in awareness of the need to abolish the practice. Such groups have also pushed for increased participation of women in peace and security and the adoption of National Action Plans for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

Around 60% of Africa’s population is younger than 25 years, and more than a third are between 15 and 34 years old. Among the growing generations of new activists are young women whose voices and perspectives are increasingly being heard. More activists now refer to themselves as feminists. While feminism is often viewed negatively and as a foreign concept, African activists are redefining the concept from their perspectives. In 2006, the first African Feminist Forum adopted the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists.
The new generations of feminist movements, women’s rights organisations and young activists have taken a more inclusive approach to advocating for their rights. There is also a growing commitment to include marginalised groups, such as women with disabilities, and to work with men, bringing them on board to address gender equality and women’s empowerment. The new generations often use technology and various social media to organise, interact and connect, and use hashtags to call for action and mobilise protests. They often address topics considered taboo, such as sex workers’ rights, and use an intersectoral approach.

Across Africa, activists are fighting to improve the lives and well-being of LGBTQIA+ persons, and to raise awareness on and advance their rights. In 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights adopted an important resolution condemning violence and discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. This marked the first time the Commission had addressed such rights. In many countries, however, these rights are a taboo issue, and LGBTQIA+ persons and activists face hostility and threats.

New funding opportunities for gender-related activities from bilateral, multilateral, continental and international donors are allowing women’s groups to mobilise in new ways, to finance their activities and to advance the women’s rights and feminist agenda. African philanthropy has been growing in recent years. The African Philanthropy Forum, founded in 2014, is building a community of partners and supporting actors who are making a difference across the continent. These opportunities have also allowed women’s groups to break with party or state patronage and to become independent actors. However, while the new funding landscape offers opportunities, critics say it also means donors drive the agenda rather than local actors, and has contributed to an increase in the presence of formal associations such as NGOs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has particularly affected the lives of women, girls, LGBTQIA+ persons and other marginalised groups by increasing existing inequalities across Africa. Under the pandemic, many states issued declarations of emergency, prohibited public gatherings and imposed lockdowns. The measures reduced economic and educational opportunities and access to health care, particularly reproductive health care for women and girls. They also increased incidence of VAWG and SGBV, FGM/C and child marriage. For women’s rights groups and activists, the measures had significant impacts on their operations and funding. Many groups and activists responded to the pandemic by organising campaigns focusing on the prevention of Covid-19 and educating their communities. Others adapted their business to meet the changing needs and advocated for policies that addressed the gendered impacts of the pandemic and provided solutions, such as funding opportunities for women.

Despite these laudable achievements, women’s rights and feminist groups across the continent face persistent external intersectional challenges, such as neo-colonialism, poverty, violence, conflict, discrimination, patriarchal attitudes, limited resources and weak representation in decision-making positions. These challenges are even more profound in Francophone West Africa (FWA). Most countries in FWA have experienced insecurity and political instability, which have had consequences for the entire region. In addition, women’s groups and feminists in FWA face language barriers, and a lack of capacity and resources, impeding the attainment of their visions and agendas.
Despite the challenges face by women’s groups and feminist groups across the continent, they continue to play a critical role by monitoring governments and holding them accountable with regard to turning their promises into actions.

To be able to better support these communities and understand their priorities and funding needs, the Foundation for a Just Society (FJS) and the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF) commissioned a mapping of FWA feminist movements and women’s rights organisations in eight countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, carried out by Make Every Woman Count (MEWC). The aim of this was to enable FJS and AWDF “to engage in philanthropic advocacy to bring the philanthropic community to a more nuanced understanding of feminist organising in FWA and efficiently allocate funding to the organisations identified in this study”.

MEWC presents here:

- An analysis of the FWA region and regional organisations, movements, networks and funders. This explores shared experiences, challenges, opportunities and factors informing cross-border and inter-country initiatives;
- Country analyses that explore the dynamics and relationships of women’s rights organisations, feminist movements, activists and collectives in the eight countries examined.

**SCOPE AND OBJECTIVE**

The scope of this mapping was feminist organisations and movements in FWA regionally and with a focus on eight countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

The project was guided by questions covering the following key areas:

- The context;
- The landscape of women’s rights and feminist organisations:
  - Alliance and movement-building;
  - Areas of work, strategies and approaches;
  - “Non-governmental organisation (NGO)-isation” and its impact on women’s groups;
- Main achievements and gains;
- The impact of Covid-19;
- The funding landscape;
- Challenges;
- Opportunities;
- Recommendations for funders.
Map of countries covered in this project
As a primary objective, the mapping sought to better understand the context and state of women’s rights and feminist organising in FWA. Among other areas of priority, the goal was to bring to light how movements are organised; the change towards which they are working and their related priority areas; organising models, approaches and strategies (rights-based, gender-transformative and empowering); and the main differences and points of convergence and solidarity between organisations and movements working with women and girls and gender-nonconforming people in the region.

The sub-objectives were to:

- Identify groups and movements working in the eight countries;
- Strengthen capacity-building and movement-building work in service of women’s rights and feminist groups in FWA; and
- Enable a more nuanced understanding of feminist organising in FWA and more efficient allocation of funding to the organisations identified in this study.

**METHODOLOGY**

To map the landscape, MEWC’s approach to collecting data used a combination of desk research and key informant interviews (KIIs)/questionnaires (regional and in country), and in-country focus group discussions (FGDs).
DESK REVIEW

Desk-based research for the **regional analysis** was carried out by MEWC staff and covered existing studies, books, funders’ reports, regional organisations and networks’ blogs, conference reports and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) reports. The desk review helped in constructing a preliminary understanding of the enquiry themes. Simultaneously, in addition to relevant contacts shared by FJS and AWDF, MEWC compiled a list of regional organisations, funders and networks and their online spaces through internet searches, recommendations from women’s groups, international organisations’ lists of relevant partners and social media searches in both French and English.

**At country level**, the MEWC team used the desk review, especially regarding information gaps, to identify existing organisations, movements and activists and preliminary information regarding the key areas of investigation. The review examined documents relevant to the study, including literature reviews, existing FJS/AWDF research, FWA women’s rights and feminist organisations’ websites, other research reports, books and monitoring reports submitted for international reporting processes (e.g. to the UN, the AU) etc.

To record this research clearly, MEWC used internal data collection tools and was guided by the themes and questions outlined by FJS/AWDF (Annex A). A sample of this tool can be seen in Annex B.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key informants included FJS/AWDF staff representatives and partner organisations, existing MEWC contacts and partners, those recommended by the in-country researchers and those identified through the desk research. The participants ranged from multiple staff/team members to individual activists to founders and executive directors.

The criteria used to select these activists and organisations included whether they were from women’s right organisations and/or movements; whether their staff and leaders were women, transgender and/or gender-nonconforming or expansive; how active they currently were; whether they worked on any issues relating to women and/or the LGBTQIA+ community (this was used as a very general factor; the specific area of work within this was not taken into account as a filter); and, originally, whether they were based in one of the eight countries or the FWA region; for the regional analysis, following instruction from AWDF and FJS, this was expanded to whether they worked in the region but are not necessarily based there.

Two KII questionnaires, one for the regional analysis and one for the country analyses, were designed to address each enquiry theme and consisted of open and closed questions.

All key informants were told the purpose of the interviews and the project as a whole and had a chance to consent or revoke their consent to being recorded for data collection. All key informants agreed to the various forms of recording (written and/or audio). Most of the interviews were conducted in French, and the responses were used to fill in gaps in a table created during the desk review phase.

Please note that the regional and country analyses, except for the respective background sections, which include desk research information, present only the answers captured through the KIIIs and the
FGDs; no judgement statements have been made by the in-country researchers or the MEWC team.

Development of the regional KII questionnaire was guided by the desk research and outstanding points for clarification, gaps in knowledge and the enquiry themes. Organisations from the list were contacted and either filled out the questionnaire virtually or were interviewed via Zoom. The guiding questions remained consistent throughout but those interviewed were also asked additional questions corresponding to the diversity of roles and themes. These questionnaires and interviews were the main sources of information to substantiate the analysis.

At the country level, the aim was to recruit a consultant in each of the eight countries to support the KII and FGD processes and enhance collaboration with the key information actors. In this pursuit, a call for applications was published to attract potential candidates. However, we could recruit only three in-country field researchers (Chad, Côte d’Ivoire and Mauritania); in the remaining five countries, MEWC’s team carried out the work.

The in-country researchers helped identify and mobilise women’s and feminist organisations/movements, supported the questionnaire and interview processes and provided supplementary country context. They were collaboratively engaged in creating, conducting and recording the KIIs/questionnaires and informing and conducting some of the FGDs.

The key questions outlined by FJS/AWDF and the desk research were used to inform the KII questionnaires in country. The questionnaires were sent virtually to organisations that were unable to meet. Throughout this process, MEWC collaborated with the in-country researchers and FJS/AWDF to add and refine the questions and leverage in-country knowledge. It also added value by identifying other relevant women's rights and feminist movements/groups on the ground not captured through the desk review. Information generated informed the draft analysis, highlighting any knowledge gaps or uncertainties for the country FGDs.

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

Following the KIIs and the initial analysis, MEWC organised eight country FGDs, which were conducted virtually. The same organisations and persons contacted for the KIIs were invited to the FGDs.

These served as opportunities to discuss, verify and expand the preliminary findings, significantly enriching the analysis. Triangulating these forms of participatory research has been invaluable in producing the answers that FJS/AWDF is seeking, reinforcing the notion that “participatory research may have a better chance of leading to solutions than problems, because it actively involves those who best understand, and have the greatest stake in, the issues – community members themselves… taking a facilitative approach to respondents, rather than aiming to extract information from them”.

MEWC collaborated with the respective in-country researchers to coordinate and run the discussions, with a predetermined list of clarifying questions unique to each country and fostering open-ended dialogue.
## Total number of organisations/activists/funders interviewed (in person and online)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
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<td>Guinea</td>
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<td>Mali</td>
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<td>Mauritania</td>
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<td>Niger</td>
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<td>Senegal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>287</strong></td>
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</table>

## LIMITATIONS

During the process of mapping women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in the eight countries, and regional organisations, actors and funders, MEWC encountered several notable challenges and limitations, namely:

- The time constraint was a great challenge in the realisation of the study. The six months allocated to collect data and write up the analysis proved insufficient given the project’s scope.
- There was limited comprehensive and up-to-date contact information on organisations.
- With limited time and resources, organisations responded in a slow and somewhat staggered manner.
- Organisations chose not to answer some questions (in the Word format of the questionnaire and/or in-person interviews). Some answers were ambiguous, especially around topics relating to feminism.
- It took considerable time to recruit in-country researchers.
- Ramadhan (in April) delayed the planned interviews considerably.
- Some organisations in Mauritania avoided MEWC’s request for KII/FGDs after a rumour of the mapping being associated with the LGBTQIA+ community was spread.
- It was not possible to contact many rural organisations, movements and/or activists given limited access to the internet and inability to travel outside the capitals owing to cost and time constraints.
- Unreliable internet connections prevented some organisations from participating for the duration of the FGDs or actors from responding to all questions during the KII.

## APPENDIX

The appendix to this mapping study contains:

- FJS/AWDF Themes and Questions to Guide the Desk Research (Annex A)
- Example Desk Review Data Collection Internal Tool per country (Annex A)
SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS

THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Most organisations interviewed in the eight countries have been created and are run by women. In some groups, young women lead. In others, young women are part of the leadership. A few organisations are led by women with disabilities or LGBTQIA+ actors. All organisations engage at the national level. Some also work at the regional level. Some also engage at the continental or international levels.

The organisations interviewed vary in terms of age. Some organisations have been operating for decades; others were created less than 10 years ago and a few emerged only recently.

When asked about alliance- and movement-building, their participation and the dynamics around networks, the participants differed in their views. Some of the groups interviewed said they belonged to a network; others do not.

- Some associated alliance- and movement-building with difficulties such as funding, governance, competition between organisations, differences in views or politics, and lack of leadership and agreement on common goals and objectives. Others saw it as essential, and without many difficulties. Although the participants spoke of networks within their countries, they often described them as not strong enough.

- The participation of girls and young women varies in women’s rights organisations and feminist movements. Moreover, they are not well represented in positions of leadership. Many participants highlighted the need for older generations to include girls and young women and take an intergenerational approach. Conflicting obligations and a reliance on volunteer work are among the reasons girls and young women do not participate as much.

- The organisations shared that they had overcome obstacles in alliance- and movement-building by strengthening the synergy of action with partner organisations and improving communication.

- The groups interviewed work or collaborate with, among others, domestic workers, sex workers, young girls and young women, women in the private and public sectors, rural women, women in academia, women and groups with disabilities, female religious and/or cultural leaders and women from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups. A few organisations engage with LGBTQIA+/gender-nonconforming individuals and/or groups.

- The organisations surveyed differ in their interest in collaborating with groups outside of FWA. Some saw it as desirable, believing these partnerships would be beneficial in finding solutions in common areas of interest. Such partnerships were also seen as being able to facilitate synergy of action, sharing of experiences and the coordination of financial resources.
Some of the organisations interviewed said they engaged in **cross-sectoral/border movements**, whereas others had not. Some expressed an interest but said they had not yet had the opportunity to do so. Those who build cross-sectoral/border movements work with actors in neighbouring countries and other regions.

The survey of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in the eight countries also revealed key areas of work, strategies and approaches, as well as perceptions of feminism:

- The **areas of work** of the organisations and movements interviewed range from addressing women and girls’ rights, gender equality and women’s empowerment broadly to focusing on specific areas. Among the priority areas are gender-based violence (GBV), child marriage, domestic violence, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), abortion, climate change, agriculture, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and women’s political participation.

- When asked if there were **areas of work in which they did not engage**, most pointed to abortion and/or LGBTQIA+ rights. Legal prohibitions and societal views were cited as reasons for this. In contrast, a few organisations said they worked on human rights issues without distinction.

- Some of the organisations **identified as feminist**, whereas others did not. A few did not answer the question. Those presenting themselves as feminists said this had affected their work in positive and negative ways. Participants cited fear, lack of understanding and acceptance of what feminism means, adverse reactions and societal backlash as reasons why they did not identify as feminist.

- The most used **approaches and strategies** include advocacy, online activism, awareness-raising, community development, direct action and social mobilisation.

- The women’s rights organisations and feminist movements use **several spaces** in their work. They meet at other organisations’ headquarters, conference rooms, arenas, schools and international commemorative events like International Women’s Day. Some participants said there were no spaces to meet; others were unaware of opportunities.

- The organisations interviewed agreed that **NGO-isation** had an impact on the work and activities of women’s rights and feminist movements in their respective countries. Many interviewees said that becoming a legal entity – an NGO – was necessary to access funding as required by donors. The groups interviewed differed on whether NGO-isation was a positive or negative thing. The process of becoming an NGO is challenging in most countries.

Over the past 10 years, the work of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements has resulted in significant **achievements and gains**. These include:

- Law 061/CNT of 2015, known as the Burkinabe Women’s Protection Law, which cracks down on all kinds of violence, even the intention of violence (Burkina Faso);

- The fight against excision through Law 006/PR/2002 on the promotion of sexual and reproductive health (Chad);

- The push for a legal reform to the Penal Code (Côte d’Ivoire);
- Repressive measures with prison sentences against the perpetrators of FGM, for example, included in the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure (Guinea);
- Successful lobbying for a gender quota (Mali);
- Advocacy for the lifting of reservations on Article 16 (marriage and family life) and Article 13(a) (the right to family benefits) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Mauritania);
- The criminalisation of rape (Niger);
- National laws harmonised with CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol (Senegal).

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Covid-19 affected all eight countries covered in this study. The governments responded by imposing states of emergency and various restrictions, such as curfews, lockdowns and mask mandates. The restrictions set affected the women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in multiple ways:

- The inflow of funds reduced and money was redirected to other activities.
- Almost all activities were reduced, suspended or cancelled.
- Organisations had to close and activists had to turn to other activities.

Many women’s rights and feminist movements surveyed responded to the pandemic by:

- Working remotely and moving activities from in person to online;
- Adapting their activities and strategies. Some organisations began producing masks, distributing protection and prevention materials, and focusing their outreach on vulnerable populations;
- Increasing the use of social media to raise awareness and continue advocacy efforts.

**THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in the eight countries said they funded their activities most commonly through grants, donations, volunteer work and membership contributions. Concerning donors and funding sources, the survey revealed that:

- The most common donors include national embassies, UN agencies (UN Women, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA)), and funders such as AWDF, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Urgent Action Fund, FJS, etc.
- Some actors interviewed do not feel that the funding received matches their needs. Other organisations said it did. A few had never received funding.
• The organisations differed on their **perception of donors**. Some had a favourable view, saying donors played an essential role in supporting organisations and movements. Others had a negative view, feeling that donors lacked seriousness and respect. A few took a neutral opinion.

• The participants described their **relationship with funders** differently. Some organisations said their relationship was good and mutually beneficial. Others did not feel respected by the donor and said they were reduced to an implementing role rather than being an equal partner.

• The interviewees described the **ideal relationship with donors** as one based on collaboration, mutual respect, and shared goals and visions. Such a relationship would also be based on a long-term partnership.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The participating women’s rights organisations and feminist movements also shared challenges they faced and opportunities going forward.

**CHALLENGES**

• **Limited financial resources** and difficulties accessing resources prevent organisations and movements from strengthening their organisational capacity and maintaining staff. Many actors cited the requirement to be an NGO or a professional organisation as a barrier to applying for funding.

• The organisations and movements interviewed cited the **language barrier** as a significant challenge. This barrier affects their access to information and funding, and their ability to participate in meetings and conferences and to build networks with English-speaking actors.

• **Social and cultural barriers**, such as patriarchal attitudes, pervasive conservatism and active opposition, were also cited as factors preventing the work of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in the eight countries.

• **Generational succession and the participation of young girls and women** were also highlighted as significant challenges. Girls and young women often do not hold positions of responsibility and are not fully integrated within organisations and movements. Further, girls and young women often lack opportunities for leadership training, and other commitments and responsibilities limit their ability to participate.

• Although **alliance- and movement-building** are seen as important and beneficial, they also represent a significant challenge. This is related to difficulties related to obtaining funding, leadership, access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), and synergy of action.

• Organisations and movements also shared that **they felt unheard by donors**. They felt funders were unaware of the realities on the ground and did not consult or listen to local organisations and movements. As a result, interventions often do not correspond to critical needs and are not well targeted.
OPPORTUNITIES

The organisations surveyed shared several opportunities in the future to strengthen the work and activities of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in the eight countries:

- Provide funding for priority areas, such as violence against women and girls (VAWG)/sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), abortion, SRHR and access to health, FGM/C and child marriage, education, economic empowerment, political participation and representation, and women, peace and security (WPS).
- Increase lobbying and advocacy efforts to ensure that governments adopt, codify and implement pending legislation on women’s rights and gender equality. These efforts should focus on integrating women’s rights into the constitution and addressing gaps in legislation and policies.
- Adopt an intergenerational approach to include more girls and young women in organisations and movements. There should also be increased opportunities for girls and young women to participate in leadership training and mentoring.
- Strengthen and facilitate alliance- and movement-building by creating horizontal, participative and inclusive leadership and coordinating actions and strategies.
- Create spaces for women’s rights organisations and movements to meet, exchange knowledge and practices, and develop cross-sectoral networks and partnerships.
- Transform the relationship between funders, organisations and movements and build collaborative partnerships with funders. The new relationship would be equitable, focus on long-term programming and measure the impact of activities on the ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The organisations and movements surveyed in the eight countries shared recommendations for international and continental funders. Among the key recommendations for donors are the following:

- Provide long-term and flexible funding opportunities and application processes based on realistic expectations to allow for a more significant impact. Also increase the use of French and other local languages at all funding stages. For example, it was mentioned that some groups in Chad speak neither English nor French.
- Base grants and other funding opportunities on local needs and consider the realities on the ground as defined by women’s rights organisations and feminist movements active in the respective countries.
- Create emergency funds and ease the criteria for such funding to accommodate the increased and changing needs of organisations to continue to operate.
- Strengthen organisations’ institutional and technical capacities by offering training in financial administration, project management and ways to apply for funding. This includes providing support to organisations to use ICTs and covering travel and translation costs.
- Consider actors without legal identity and those who are not professionalised for funding opportunities. The interviewees often mentioned the need for support for such organisations in rural areas.

- Develop collaborative relationships and partnerships with local NGOs and support opportunities to strengthen alliance- and movement-building.
BACKGROUND OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINISTS MOVEMENTS IN FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA

EARLY ORGANISING

From networking to protect their trade interests, to forming groups to lead military strategies to protest exclusive decision-making, FWA women’s strategic organising, innovating and challenging of oppressive systems predates colonialism. However, colonialism systems brought external patriarchies and “calcified existing ones”. Throughout the periods of colonial exploitation in the region, predominantly by the French and the British, women were involved in resistance movements. For example, in 1958–1959, Kom women, who were matrilineal agriculturalists in Bamenda province of present-day Cameroon, invoked the traditional disciplinary practice of anlu as a rebellion against a proposed British plan to dispossess them of their land and create horizontal farming ridges. By the end of this nearly year-long uprising, “the women had established their own court as well as a ‘shadow government’ which remained in place for another year”. The British policy was suspended, and one of the anlu leaders was invited to sit on the local council.

“POST” COLONIAL ORGANISING

Women’s activism and movements were in many cases formalised during and after independence. Despite this, and despite women’s contribution to nationalist efforts, as discussed in the eight country overviews below, women’s fight to be included in new post-colonial governance and political systems was largely unfulfilled. Some one-party systems also made this difficult in the 1980s and 1990s. However, women’s groups persisted, tending to focus on women’s socioeconomic rights, “with attention paid to issues such as land tenure, education and employment”. Despite successful lobbying to legalise quotas and even political funding, the region’s low rate of women’s political inclusion continues as a colonial legacy, with politics characterised as a “man’s sphere”.

Regional and domestic women’s movements and organisations have worked on and continue to grapple with chronic under-resourcing. This was raised during a West African women’s dialogue organised by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), at which:

Over 40 participants argued that over-dependence of feminist organisations and associations on donors and international organisations in the region affect their advocacy activities and has a negative impact on their development. This, they said, is because the donors determine the agenda(s) to be pursued by these activists or movements, and some of these may not align with the priorities of the feminists nor the contextual needs.

19 This was a traditional disciplinary practice among the Kom women to punish and chastise a man for any offences committed against a woman, such as insulting a parent or an old woman or beating a pregnant woman. Women within the community and sometimes those in the neighbouring community would be enlisted and dress in leafy vines and articles of men’s clothing and parade to the culprit’s compound around 5 am. There they danced, sang mocking and usually obscene songs composed for the occasion and defiled the compound by defecating or by urinating in the water storage vessels. If the culprit was seen, he would be pelted with stones or a type of wild fruit called “garden eggs”. Then the women shed their vines and garden eggs in the compound, leaving some of each hanging on the threshold as the anlu sign that its use had been banned (Ardener and Ritzenthaler, in S. Tamale (1996) “Taking the Beast by Its Horns: Formal Resistance to Women’s Oppression in Africa”, Africa Development/Afrique et Développement 21(4): 5-21.)
Without direct access to existing power structures and the capacity to change them, many women’s organisations and movements have limited options but to continue to treat the symptoms of the root problems.

Civil wars and political insecurity are a growing concern in the region, and are exacerbating these issues, with the existence of relatively large populations of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, who are disproportionately women and children. As a result, some women’s organisations and fundraising support these populations exclusively.

Despite these significant and enduring challenges, many gains have been won by FWA women’s organisations and feminist movements. For example, all West African countries, bar Chad and Niger, have ratified the Maputo Protocol, and the Mano River Women Union Peace Network has successfully pressured the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to address the violence and human insecurity in the Mano River countries. These gains are a direct output of women’s effective cross-border mobilisation.

**GENERATIONS OF FEMINISTS AND LGBTQIA+ MOVEMENTS ACROSS AFRICA**

As discussed in Equipop’s 2020 exploration of “feminist generations in West Africa”, “Young voices are emerging with new energy to build a more just society,” with a particular focus on SRHR, especially the right to safe abortion, as well as on strengthening more inclusive movements, involving more expansive concepts of womanhood, gender, empowerment and feminism. These younger organisers are also utilising technology to advocate from regional alliances, advance their agendas and secure funding, both traditional and alternative, particularly employing social media and newer fundraising tools. Additionally, more national organisations in FWA are explicitly identifying as feminist, particularly the younger ones; however, it is reported that there are few such effective regional networks for cross-border collaboration.

Several laws hostile to LGBTQIA+ persons have placed livelihoods and organising at risk for these groups, threatening tens of years of imprisonment for same-sex marriage, “cross-dressing” and advocacy. However, embodying generational resilience, groups like the Queer African Youth Network and the Queer Alliance have incorporated feminism and LGBTQIA+ issues into the scope of their advocacy, establishing feminist-queer perspectives that have been pivotal to community-building and advancement in more marginalised groups. Such groups have spearheaded the contemporary African LGBTQIA+ movement and communities, bravely taking to the streets to protest homophobic and transphobic laws and creating safe spaces for queer persons.

Together, these transnational queer collaborations have created support funds, distributed health and food packages at the peak of the pandemic, supported transgender individuals across several African countries and promoted their visibility through empowerment interventions and advocacy.

**CONCEPTUALISING FWA FEMINISM**

WACSI and its conference of feminists within the region highlighted that a “lack of a common definition of feminism to which all feminists can identify with” is an ongoing challenge. Further, as in an example given by activist Ndèye Fatou Kane, feminism is often mischaracterised:

“In Senegal, the word ‘feminism’ is often associated with a French legacy, and therefore is perceived as a western idea. We need to deconstruct the negativity that has built up around the term and dig
deeper into our history. Feminism did not start with Simone de Beauvoir: instead, we had queen mothers and women warriors in Senegal, and I think they, too, were feminists. Unfortunately, for many, a feminist is a woman who went to university. There is historicization to be done.”

While arguably all organisations and movements discussed here contribute in some way to a feminist agenda, the label itself, with its various associations (accurate or otherwise), is reported to inhibit some organisations’ reach and community–government relationships. Ironically, foreign funders who insist on the explicit use of the term sometimes exclude and/or jeopardise those doing the feminist work on the ground.

THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS IN FWA

Some women’s group and feminist organisation interviewees have been engaged at the regional level for more than 10 years, while others groups were formed more recently. In most organisations, young women and women form part of the leadership. The participating actors work with girls and women, LGBTQIA+ / gender-nonconforming individuals/groups, indigenous women and people, nomadic peoples, and domestic and sex workers. In addition to advancing the rights of these groups, their work areas include environmental and land rights, economic empowerment, political participation, SRHR and GBV. A few of the actors interviewed also provide financial and technical support or grant opportunities to women’s rights organisations, human rights defenders and feminist movements.

The funders interviewed work with their partners to advance human rights, focusing on women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights in both French- and English-speaking parts of West Africa. Many of them said they used a feminist approach in their work. The funders provide financial support, capacity-building (technical and organisational) and accompaniment. They also support their partner groups and activists to ensure their safety and well-being. The emphasis on mental health is in response to the interest and needs of the women with whom they work. The areas of work to which funders provide financial support include GBV, economic empowerment, VAWG, political participation and women’s leadership training.

DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS IN THE REGION

PERSPECTIVES FROM REGIONAL WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

When discussing developments in the region, the interviewees noted insecurity in the Sahel. Political crises, conflicts and terrorism are causing serious setbacks to human rights, mainly for women and girls, resulting in increased violations of rights and greater incidence of SGBV. Interviewees pointed to a regression of women’s rights and lack of prioritisation of women’s issues by their respective governments. The changing environment is affecting women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and human rights actors and their work areas significantly. There has been a shrinking of the civic space. Human rights actors face considerable risks, with targeted attacks arising against feminists and LGBTQIA+ individuals and groups.

Regional organisations, movements and activists described alliance- and movement-building as unstructured, fragmented and in need of technical support. Some believe it is driven by independent feminist activists who come in and out depending on the initiatives on which they are working and their access to resources. Non-participation in alliance- and movement-building is generally related
to culture, the perceived role of women, and lack of resources and awareness of rights and human rights laws and frameworks. Many are also unaware of spaces to advance and advocate for their rights.

Concerning spaces, the actors interviewed said that these were often ad hoc or organised by donors. Others mentioned attending the Feminist Institute for Women and the African Feminist Forum, and using community rooms in villages and schools. Others use international gatherings such as International Women’s Day, the 16 Days of Activism campaign, the Committee on the Statue of Women and the Association of Women’s Rights in Development Forum. Organisations that reported being part of several networks and coalitions benefited from this by having multiple spaces.

The advent of Covid-19 slowed work and activities at the regional level. As gatherings were banned, in-person meetings stopped. Some adapted by moving conferences online and working remotely. Others struggled owing to poor connectivity in many parts of FWA and could not access online spaces.

**PERSPECTIVES FROM FUNDERS/DONORS WORKING IN THE REGION**

The funders interviewed noted the constantly changing context in West Africa, in particular with regard to instability, insecurity, political crises and conflicts, extremism and terrorism. There is also a growing pushback from the anti-gender movement in FWA. Actors working on women’s rights and the rights of LGBTQIA+ and other excluded groups are facing attacks and significant challenges in carrying out their work.

Concerning alliance- and movement-building, funders said that FWA’s development was not like that of other parts of West Africa. They described it as fragmented and lacking in unity, with organisations unable to work together or to connect. FWA also lacks funding and resources. Some funders had observed movements grow only to die; without documentation, new groups cannot learn from previous actors.

As for other regional actors, the Covid-19 pandemic forced funders to alter their work and prevented them from holding regional meetings. Many funders saw a reduction in financing at all levels. They adapted to the pandemic by reallocating funding and securing projects. They used ICTs and other tools to connect with their partners and put financial and psychological support in place. Several funders published reports on the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls and the LGBTQIA+ community, for example.

**FUNDING LANDSCAPE IN THE REGION**

**PERSPECTIVES FROM REGIONAL WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Regional organisations fund their activities, such as research, advocacy and training, from various sources. These include bilateral and multilateral donors, private foundations, international partners and local sources. The most commonly cited donors were FJS, AWDF, Urgent Action Fund, Oxfam and Equipop. However, many organisations rely on volunteers to assist in carrying out their work.

When asked their perceptions of donors, regional groups and activists said that partnerships were often complicated. The ideal relationship, they said, is based on trust and mutual respect and is one in which the donors listen to the stakeholders.

Opinions on the impact of NGO-isation varied among those interviewed. Some saw it as having been positive and beneficial to advancing their work; others saw it as complicated. The registration process involved in being accredited as an NGO can be costly for organisations as they may be required to
pay a fee to the government, which could be one-off or annual. Being an accredited organisation also means that governments can intimidate organisations while they are doing their activism work.

**PERSPECTIVES FROM FUNDERS/DONORS WORKING IN THE REGION**

Many of the funders interviewed support regional actors who are advancing the work of women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and human rights activists. The funders noted that they helped mobilise actors, promoted their partners’ advocacy work and provided financial, technical and strategic support and accompaniment. Some also support human rights defenders at the forefront, at significant personal risk.

The funders surveyed represent a bridge between international donors and regional organisations, movements and activists. Often, they interact with women’s organisations, feminist movements and human rights activists that are less visible to international donors. As many local organisations are not registered, the funders surveyed work with intermediary organisations that can be fiscally responsible and act as sponsors. This kind of work establishes a relationship that is based on trust.

Regarding NGO-isation, the funders interviewed said that this was a challenge for women’s groups but at the same time necessary. On the one hand, there is the need for accountability; the status of an NGO facilitates reporting on the funding disbursed. Conversely, NGO-isation prevents many actors from applying for funding or meeting the requirements. By working with intermediaries (fiscally responsible organisations), as previously mentioned, the funders interviewed can support those advancing human rights at the grassroots level.

**CHALLENGES IN THE REGION**

**PERSPECTIVES FROM REGIONAL WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

- One of the primary challenges concerns lack of financing. Financial resources often do not meet organisations’ needs, preventing them from implementing high-impact projects. Many also noted a lack of trust by donors. Lack of funding is a particular concern for youth organisations.

- A related challenge is a lack of capacity to mobilise resources to advance work and projects and organisational development through technical and material capacity-building.

- Many actors are not well structured, and their limited capacity affects their ability to access funding and work on issues of importance in their communities.

- The complexity of the application process and the requirements of technical and financial partners are often insurmountable barriers for regional actors. Funding applications come with documentation and accounting requirements that are very complicated.

- Customs and traditional and religious beliefs affect organisations’ work. For example, the impact of religion in Muslim countries is a challenge for actors working on LGBTQIA+ rights. Others mentioned negative perceptions of feminism as a challenge.

- Many actors interviewed said that NGO-isation limited their activities. Registered NGOs often have to pay yearly fees or a one-off large amount for their status. Moreover, NGOs face intimidation from authorities when attempting to engage in activism.

- The actors also highlighted the lack of spaces to meet. Many actors lack the resources to participate in regional, continental and international meetings.
• **Representation of girls and young women** in the West African and FWA movements is low. This is partly because the older generation is not giving girls and young women leadership positions. Many girls and young women lack awareness of their rights, how they can participate and advocate, and the existing regional instruments.

• Interviewees highlighted the **language barrier** as a significant challenge. While a few actors are bilingual, many are not, and the language barrier impedes alliance- and movement-building outside the region. Actors working with indigenous peoples noted that these groups did not speak French or English. A related challenge, they said, is that there is not enough accompaniment to address this concern.

• **For many women’s rights groups, feminist movements and LGBTIA+ organisations, it is men who are the leaders.** The leadership opportunities for girls and women are limited.

• The **changing political context complicates** gender equality work and can be tricky to navigate. Moreover, it often puts human rights defenders and activists at significant risk.

**PERSPECTIVES FROM FUNDERS/DONORS WORKING IN THE REGION**

• Few donors support organisations, movements and activists in the **FWA region**. Such donors noted that actors in FWA receive, by comparison, less funding and support for capacity-building than actors in other regions.

• **Access to financing** was also highlighted as a challenge. Funders struggle to obtain long-term financing. They also need resources to ensure adequate safety, security and well-being for the human rights defenders with whom they work.

• Funders highlighted a **lack of capacity (organisational, management, technical, financial)** as a significant challenge. Many organisations, the donors observed, are grassroots movements that cannot apply for and manage funds received, owing to capacity deficits. This lack of capacity is connected to limited financial support to actors in FWA. Moreover, not all organisations have access to the internet and, therefore, cannot access resources.

• **Alliance- and movement-building in FWA** is not well developed compared with in other regions. A lack of cooperation between actors and restricted resources are hindrances here.

• Funders also observed that feminist activists and women’s rights organisations in FWA **struggled to document their activities and capitalise on their experiences and knowledge.**

• **Feminism is an obstacle** to working together. Many actors do not want to participate in activities related to this theme and are reluctant to address the issue.

• **Donors set the agenda** rather than meeting local needs. This also means that organisations go where the money is; thus, many actors are working on the same issues.

• **In FWA, spaces are shrinking.** Because of the changing and often challenging context, access to spaces for regional actors is problematic.

• There is a lack of understanding and knowledge on **which actors work on which theme.** It is often challenging for donors to understand who does what and how.
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION

PERSPECTIVES FROM REGIONAL WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

- **Alliance- and movement-building are growing** in FWA. Networks are receiving more visibility and there is more collaboration between the different organisations and movements in the sub-region. The construction of networks is crucial, as these allow for synergy of action, exchanges of experiences and knowledge, and the joining of forces to raise funds.

- The creation of **shared spaces** plays a significant role in alliance- and movement-building. Some actors establish spaces; other spaces are set up by donors. These meeting places allow for exchanges such as on addressing the realities and difficulties transgender people face in the sub-region.

- Some regional actors provide grants to groups in their communities. Working collaboratively, **these community groups determine the need**, rather than the regional actor imposing a pre-planned activity.

- Individual activists **play an essential role in assisting groups in applying** for funding by filling in the project proposals, communicating with funders on behalf of the groups and translating documents.

PERSPECTIVES FROM FUNDERS/DONORS WORKING IN THE REGION

- **Identifying actors active in FWA** will assist donors to better understand who does what and how. Funders can better understand actors and their work in FWA by organising meeting spaces.

- **Alliance- and movement-building are moving in the right direction**, with diverse groups and actors coming together and building networks.

- The funders interviewed said that alliance- and movement-building was slowly growing in FWA despite the challenges. They reported supporting or creating spaces like the Francophone Forum for actors to discuss movement-building and find collaboration opportunities.

- **Facilitating exchanges by creating spaces** has played a positive role in alliance- and movement-building in FWA. The spaces created have allowed actors to meet and share knowledge and know-how. They also enable participating groups to build networks and find opportunities to work together and establish a connection, in a sisterhood with other actors.

- By **working with intermediaries**, the funders interviewed could overcome challenges associated with the capacities needed for working with funders.

- Funders should **build on the learning from the Covid-19 pandemic**, mainly to understand their own capacity to adapt and adjust to best meet needs on the ground as circumstances change.

- **More money** is coming, allowing more initiatives to be implemented in FWA by more actors. Fiscal sponsorships are an intermediary solution, allowing unregistered actors to access funding.
RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

- **Provide funding and leadership/management support** to new and existing women’s organisations, feminist movements and human rights defenders. The funding should include accompaniment.

- **Invest in women’s leadership** to empower women and girls in the region and **support mentoring** of young women in each country. This will help ensure that women’s projects are led and directed by women and girls.

- **Establish sponsorship systems** that allow registered organisations to accompany unregistered groups or activists in implementing projects and hosting funds.

- **Facilitate the creation of spaces and forums** for organisations, movements and activists to meet, discuss, share experiences and advocate for change.

- **Assist in identifying needs within new groups and make funds available to structure** groups’ organisation. This will also help actors identify needs and documentation they lack, such as accounting procedures, resource mobilisation strategies, budgets and strategic plans.

- **Provide support to overcome language barriers.** Many actors said they needed funding to hire translators to facilitate meetings and increase access to information.

- **Establish trust-based grant-making**, responsive partnerships, respectful of implementing partners.

- **As some actors have limited use of ICTs in their work because of low connectivity, support adapted and flexible strategies** to reach the maximum number of actors.

- **Identify problems** in collaboration with local actors.

- **Finance women’s funds in FWA and West Africa, so women-led organisations and individual activists can contribute significantly to movement-building.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FUNDERS/DONORS WORKING IN THE REGION

- **Increase financial support to FWA** to create and strengthen women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and human rights defenders, and alliance- and movement-building in the region.

- **Provide long-term and flexible funding** that adapts to the structuring in place and that capitalises on the knowledge and experiences of actors operating in the region. Funders should adapt to the realities on the ground and not only give project support. Moreover, funders should be flexible on how recipients provide documentation and accounting.

- **Strengthen women’s rights and feminist funders** to help open opportunities for women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and human rights defenders in FWA. This kind of support will also activate philanthropy in Africa.
• Give funding that allows for **financial sustainability** and incorporates **economic resilience**. Without financial stability, great work stops when financial support ends.

• **Include flexibility in the contract.** A contract may include an article concerning changes in the environmental context and the need to alter the work – for example if the context changes and the organisation needs to prioritise another area of work. The organisation can then contact the donor and revisit the agreement. Flexibility and trust between partners will bring practical solutions.

• **Actively work to identify women and human rights actors on the ground** to identify which areas they work on, and provide support where needed. These actors are often not the same actors who apply for funding.

• Allow actors on the ground to **determine need**, to ensure quality and allow for more significant impact.

• Provide **intergenerational** and **leadership support for young people**.

• Establish **knowledge management** to capitalise on successes and expertise, linking experts and actors in the region.

• **Promote sisterhood and collaboration** between activists, organisations and movements, nationally and regionally.

• **Protect women’s organisations and human rights defenders**. This should include providing them with mental health support, safety and security.

• **Create spaces/forums** for women and human rights actors in FWA to meet regularly, like in other regions.

• **Provide support for translation** to amplify the voices of activists and groups in FWA to overcome language barriers.
BURKINA FASO

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

In 1960, the Republic of Burkina Faso achieved independence from France. Since then, the country has seen different political regimes and several coups d’état. Burkinabè women were active participants in the independence movement and became early activists in political parties. Despite this, and their growing participation in public spaces and decision-making, it is mainly through women’s organisations that women have been able to push for change. The military coup in late January 2022 deepened the ongoing security crisis in the country. A few months later, the Transitional Legislative Assembly was sworn in. Few women, however, were appointed to this Assembly.

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Burkina Faso ratified CEDAW in 1987 and the Maputo Protocol in 2006. As of 2015, Burkina Faso is one of three Member States to incorporate the Guidelines for State Reporting under the Maputo Protocol in its periodic state report. The Constitution guarantees gender equality and non-discrimination. It ensures an equal right to work and prohibits discrimination in employment and remuneration matters. Under the Constitution, a marriage between a man and a woman is based on free consent. Regarding political participation, the 2009 Law on Quotas requires candidature lists presented for legislative and municipal elections to include 30% of either sex. In 2017, the National Assembly adopted legislation protecting human rights defenders, including against reprisals, arbitrary detention or execution in relation to their activities.

Burkina Faso has adopted laws and policies in line with international, continental and regional frameworks on gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Penal Code provides for access to abortion. Law 061-2015 on the Prevention, Repression and Reparation of Violence Against Women and Girls applies to all forms of VAWG. Tradition, culture or religion cannot be used to justify such acts. Burkina Faso became one of the first African countries to introduce a national law against FGM/C in 1996 by prohibiting and criminalising the practice in its Penal Code. Law 006-2004 modifying the Penal Code protects the physical integrity of women and girls and prohibits forced marriage and bigamy. In 2019, the Government reported that it had taken measures to grant 30% of newly developed land areas to women. To address child marriage, the country adopted the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Burkina Faso 2016–2025.

CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

Despite progress made, Burkinabè women and gender-nonconforming people face injustice and discrimination. Overlapping legal systems and prevailing cultural and social norms hinder the realisation and advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Despite the 2009 Law on Quotas and the Constitution guaranteeing all Burkinabè without distinction the right to participate in public and political affairs, the participation of women in decision-making is low. In 2022, women took up only 19.72% of the seats in parliament. The prevalence of FGM/C in women aged 15–49
is 75.8%. In Burkina Faso, 10% of girls are married under the age of 15, and 52% are married under the age of 18.

The rights of LGBTQIA+ and gender-nonconforming people are not explicitly protected. There is no criminal law against homosexuality. Same-sex marriage is not technically prohibited under the Personal and Family Code. Burkina Faso “does not have hate crime laws or other criminal justice mechanisms to aid in the investigation, prosecution, or sentencing of bias-motivated crimes against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community”. Societal discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons is a problem exacerbated by religious and traditional beliefs. LGBTQIA+ persons are also subject to verbal and physical abuse.

As a country in the Sahel region, Burkina Faso is severely affected by climate change. The gendered divisions of agricultural production mean that Burkinabè women face disproportionate impacts in this regard. Although women work on the land, they lack the ability to control it. Meanwhile, the extractive industries of gold mining in Burkina Faso have had implications for women, including forced displacement and reduced access to water, food and essential services. These have profoundly affected women in terms of health problems, unpaid care work responsibilities and increased violence.

THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

All 38 organisations participating in this study were created and are led by Burkinabè women. One of them is directed by women and girls with motor disabilities. The participating organisations work at the national level. Some are based in Ouagadougou, the capital, and others in rural areas. Many have existed for several decades; others are more recent. Among the actors are those who are constituted as an economic interest group and carry out income-generating activities (weaving, market gardening, soap-making, production of shea butter, peanut paste, etc.).

ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING

In Burkina Faso, several alliances and movements are grouped by field of intervention. Alliance-building involves mobilising groups with common objectives to act in synergy to correct an injustice. They work together on issues such as GBV, HIV/AIDS, SRHR, female leadership and enforcement of gender quotas through advocacy, awareness-raising and training. Some, consisting of feminist movements and women’s rights movements, come together during international meetings such as the Generation Equality Forum. Umbrella organisations comprising most of Burkina’s women’s associations, such as the African Network for Women and Development (RAFED), exist to coordinate organisations and activities.

Among the participants are those who consider “building alliances and movements is an essential step in the struggle for the well-being of communities”. It was noted that, for the past five to 10 years, alliance- and movement-building had resumed in response to the local socio-political context because, “One finger cannot pick up the flour.” Some of the participants perceive alliance-building as easy and experience no problems. Others said they found it complicated because of jealousy and egos. One organisation noted that alliances had been affected by politics, which had created divergences and led to their weakening.

The participation of girls and young women is well recognised. However, respondents noted that young girls and women were still not in positions of responsibility and were not well represented. One organisation said most of its members were young women and girls with disabilities. The organisation works for these girls and young women to have a voice and be counted.
Several organisations noted that they worked and collaborated with various groups of women, such as rural women and farmers, young women and girls, and domestic workers. Three organisations said they worked with women with disabilities groups. Two organisations said they worked with LGBTQIA+/gender-nonconforming groups.

In collaborating with other organisations and movements, scarcity and lack of funding (short and long term), organisational and leadership conflicts, and differences in views/politics are the most common obstacles. Another significant obstacle for many organisations is lack of internet access, which prevents them from participating in meetings. One participant shared that lack of funds to support actions by smaller partner organisations made her organisation feel used. Another shared that some associations did not want to work with others “when they think they are autonomous and a big actor”. The participants presented solutions to overcome these obstacles. These included working for synergy of action, endogenous mobilisation of resources and holding consultation meetings.

Some of the organisations interviewed said they engaged in cross-sectoral/border movements, whereas others had not. Some expressed an interest but said they had not yet had the opportunity to do so.

In general, collaborating with women’s rights organisations and movements outside of FWA is seen as desirable and beneficial. Participants said such collaboration would allow sharing of experiences, knowledge, best practices, lessons learnt and funding opportunities. It could also lead to participation in activities (physically and virtually) and field visits. Some expressed an interest in collaborating within FWA and then outside of the region.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

The participating organisations work on various women’s rights issues. Some organisations said they worked specifically with girls and women in rural areas. Among the issues are those that participants described as priority areas. These include economic empowerment; advocacy, lobbying and sensitisation; health and SRHR; women’s political participation and democracy; children and youth rights/issues; GBV/VAWG; rural women and agriculture; education of girls and/or women; WPS; harmful practices; widows; legal aid; counselling/psychosocial support; research; migration, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), humanitarian action; food security; environment and climate change; disability; and alliance- and movement-building.

A few participants shared areas of work in which they would not engage. One organisation specified that it would not work on abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights. Others said they did not promote LGBTQIA+ rights owing to societal perceptions that condemn such initiatives. In contrast, two organisations said no areas were off the table. One specifically noted that it was not afraid of talking about LGBTQIA+ rights.

Few of the organisations define themselves as feminist. One organisation said it “would be feminists as long as women live under unequal opportunities”. Organisations representing themselves as feminists said this had affected their work and visibility. When describing how it had affected them, one participant said, “We are often indexed and insulted on social networks.” Although feminism is stereotyped in general, views on it differ. In some places it is seen as positive; in others it is not seen as a real struggle. Some said that it was necessary to carry on the struggle without trying to clash and cause rejection.

Regarding strategies and approaches, most organisations engage in advocacy, awareness-raising, community organising and training focused on, for example, female leadership and entrepreneurship.
They use direct action, online activism and service delivery to connect with their constituencies. Some also provide legal support and support for specific groups such as widows, persons living with HIV/AIDS and rural women in agro-food processing.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

Some organisations felt that NGO-isation was unavoidable due to being necessary to access funding and formal support. The professionalisation of associations is also perceived as necessary because it allows many such associations to make themselves known. It is also the donor main requirement for accessing funds/grants. Participants noted that most associations needed institutional support to move towards becoming formal NGOs. For associations created by women with challenges related to literacy, this is a significant challenge. Many organisations participating in this study started as groups and evolved into cooperatives. Today, they are associations with proper accreditation and are looking to professionalise themselves by becoming NGOs.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Below are some of the key achievements and gains shared by the organisations interviewed:

- **Personal and Family Code**, which came into force in 1990. A code based on the principle of equal rights and duties between spouses, equal rights between children without distinction, with rights for girls and women with regard to inheritance and a ban on forced marriage and levirate in its Article 234.

- **Law 061 of the CNT of 2015**, known as the Burkinabe Women’s Protection Law, which cracks down on all kinds of violence, even those intended as violence.

- **The Penal Code** which now provides for access to abortion.

- **Fight for the respect of Law 006 of 2004** based on the respect of the integrity of women in its Articles 316 and 317.

- **Revision of Law 30 of 2008** on the rights of people living with HIV.

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Burkina Faso has been less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic than has its neighbours. At the beginning of the pandemic, however, the Government responded by imposing lockdowns and closing the borders. The pandemic exacerbated the country’s complex humanitarian and security crisis. The outbreak of Covid-19, along with growing insecurity and violence, disproportionately affected women and girls, particularly female IDPs. The fight against the pandemic brought challenges, such as people who tested positive facing stigma and spreading misinformation.
The participants shared that this had been a rather difficult period for them and had affected their ability to do their work. Many organisations said the pandemic had contributed to a loss of funding and had forced them to reduce or suspend activities, such as field visits and income-generating activities. It had also delayed the implementation of planned projects. Others noted that, because of the pandemic, they saw a regression in the gains made in the field and worsening incidence of violence. Some reported that lack of access to markets and blocked roads had reduced the income of their members living and working in rural areas.

The organisations responded to the pandemic by adapting their activities and how they worked. Some began working remotely, learned how to organise video conferences and produced short videos to raise funds.

In responding to the pandemic, several organisations took practical steps, such as acquiring protection and prevention materials against Covid-19 (such as soap, masks and hydroalcoholic gels and installing hand washers) and providing these materials to their partners. They also offered to train beneficiaries and partners in handwashing techniques and the correct use of masks.

When asked how donors could respond to the impact of Covid-19 and positively change their funding practices to support women’s rights and feminist movements in Burkina Faso, the organisations interviewed said:

- Make funds available so associations can train women to make soap, masks and hydroalcoholic gels;
- Ensure flexibility in funding;
- Facilitate networking and training, especially online;
- Support women’s rights and urgent needs, such as for food and care.

**FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

The interviews with Burkinabè organisations revealed that these funded their activities from various sources. Among these are membership contributions, volunteer work, donations and grants from individuals, endogenous resource mobilisation and financing obtained from women’s funds. One organisation that facilitates income-generating activities said that approximately 10% of the profits generated from those activities went to the training of its members.

Among donors from which the organisations said they had received funding are the following: embassies (Germany, Canada, France, etc.), UN agencies (UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, etc.), the Fairtrade Action Fund, a women’s support fund that makes loans to associations repayable at an interest rate of 10%, AWDF, etc.

The participants differed on whether the available grants matched their organisation’s needs. For some organisations, the funding received matched their needs; for others, it did not.

Concerning the perception of donors, the organisations felt they played an essential role in supporting the work of actors in Burkina Faso. Many said they had good relationships with donors. One organisation said it had developed a strong partnership with its donors that was mutually beneficial and where both parties shared common goals and activities. In contrast, one participant described the relationship with donors as a dictatorship, whereby the donor did not show respect and the organisation felt like it “had to accept everything”. This, they said, complicated the impact of the
project. Some organisations noted, however, that funders were not reassured by the security situation in Burkina – hence their mistrust.

They also shared that each donor had its own framework, criteria and conditions for obtaining funds, which were complicated for organisations to understand. Some felt that donors were very demanding. The ideal relationship with donors, they said, is one of partnership, mutual respect, and shared goals and visions, and where organisations have freedom and independence.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**CHALLENGES**

- One of the most significant challenges Burkinabé organisations and movements face is the scarcity of financial resources. Several participants shared that shortcomings in terms of funding harmed the stability of activities and often left young people discouraged. They also shared that, while the Ministry of Gender and the Family had a directory of associations it called upon for specific activities, it did not provide financial support.

- The exchanges with the participants also revealed that many associations were run by women facing literacy challenges who had never obtained funding from donors after many decades of existence. These organisations are, for the most part, self-financing, and lack knowledge of the criteria for applying for funding. Sometimes, they have patrons who come to their aid or they access loans repayable with interest.

- Regarding applying for funding, some organisations said they struggled with unreliable internet connections. Such challenges mean organisations are unable to access relevant forms and to apply on time. It was also noted that not all organisations had the ability to use smartphones and the internet. Other challenges in applying for funding include covetousness for the same projects. Organisations also feel donors display favouritism and a preference for financing micro-projects and not programmes and long-term projects. For younger organisations and movements, donor demand for experience is a particular challenge. Such organisations said they had the motivation but lacked the resources and ability to show their capacity.

- The language barrier was cited as a significant problem in applying for funding, working with organisations in non-French speaking countries and participating in international conferences.

- Concerning alliance- and movement-building, several participants connected challenges related to working together to the absence of funding. Not all organisations have access to the internet, and travel costs prevent them from participating in meetings, accessing information and sharing their perspectives. This, some noted, lessens the impact of projects and activities.

- The interviewees highlighted some challenges regarding the participation of girls and young women. While girls and young women want to participate, they are divided between commitments and responsibilities. Girls and young women, they said, do not have the same freedom as boys and young men.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Though there are challenges, the participants highlighted several opportunities. Female leadership in Burkina Faso is changing. According to the organisations interviewed, women are increasingly engaged. They are obtaining information and training to claim what is rightfully theirs. Women's
organisations are committed to advocating for compliance with laws. They noted that Burkinabè women were keen on the representation of women in decision-making bodies to ensure the laws passed are respected. New umbrella organisations are also being formed to promote, for example, women’s entrepreneurship. Others include legal clinics to help women.

To facilitate working together, the organisations suggested bringing together women from various groups, such as rural women, urban women and sex workers, to advance women’s rights. They also saw it as essential to provide training opportunities for female leadership.

The organisations noted specific areas of work that needed urgent funding. These include:

![Image of icons representing different areas of work]

Other opportunities include working with and providing support to specific groups. Several participants suggested giving aid and support to organisations that work with IDPs, of whom the majority are women and girls. As one interviewee noted, many young girls and women in Burkina Faso have been displaced by terrorism and are distressed.

The organisations noted several opportunities to strengthen strategies and approaches, such as:

- Awareness campaigns to reduce inequalities in provinces and villages;
- Advocacy for respect and implementation of women’s rights and gender equality legislation;
- Popularisation of women’s rights legislation and translation into local languages.

Participants also shared opportunities to focus on strengthening organisations that provide care and support, such as centres for young mothers and actors that provide psychosocial support.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The organisations interviewed also shared recommendations for international and continental funders. In the future, the participants felt donors should give special attention to:

- Providing **technical and financial support** to allow organisations to expand their areas of intervention and help small organisations grow;
- Responding to requests from small women’s and girls’ organisations by making grant access requirements **more flexible and less demanding**;

![Mapping of Women’s Groups and Feminist Organisations in Francophone West Africa]
• Providing **long-term financial support** that will allow for proper implementation and planning of projects and activities. This should also include resources to cover materials, equipment and internet access;

• **Supporting capacity-building activities** to strengthen Burkinabè organisations and movements;

• Providing funding for activities that match **local needs** and including support for travel;

• Providing **financial support** for hiring translators to overcome **language barriers** and opening opportunities for participation in meetings and conferences (virtual and in person);

• Supporting **networking opportunities and platform creation** to facilitate organisations and movements working together and create greater impact;

• Providing financial support and accompaniment for associations and **groups wishing to become NGOs** (accreditation from the Government).
In August 1960, Chad gained its independence, to become one of the 17 African countries to achieve self-governance in a year popularly referred to as “The Year of Africa”. Despite the optimism that came with autonomy, Chad fell into political upheaval and a civil war that disrupted the socioeconomic and cultural fabric of the country shortly after its accession to independence. Changing gender relations resulting from years of conflict gave women the opportunity to break with traditions and gain more autonomy. In essence, severance with the country’s cultural heritage set the course for women’s progressive acquisition of rights. It enabled women to leave their private sphere and take part extensively in the public domain, whether economic or political.

The 2018 Constitution of Chad provides a framework for equality (Art. 13) that includes the state’s obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women (Art. 14). On harmful practices, the Constitution prohibits practices such as slavery, human trafficking, physical violence, FGM and premature marriage (Art. 19). The state shall also work for the promotion of women’s political rights and better representation within elected assemblies and public and private institutions (Art. 34). Following the 2021 election, women currently hold 31.2% of seats in parliament.

Chad ratified CEDAW in 1995. In 2004, the country signed the Maputo Protocol, although it has yet to ratify it.

Chad has adopted legislation and policies to strengthen the protection and rights of women and girls. In 2021, the president signed Decree 0433 implementing Ordinance 012 of 2018 instituting parity in Chad’s nominative and elective offices. This sets the quota at 30%. Concerning child marriage, Article 2 of the Decree on the Prohibition of Child Marriage (promulgated as law in 2015) establishes the legal age of marriage for women and men at 18 years old. The 2019 Penal Code contains provisions relevant to women’s and girls’ rights. On harmful practices, the Penal Code prohibits FGM/C. It also includes a legal sanction of imprisonment of five to 10 years and a fine for those facilitating a child marriage. It criminalises rape and attempted rape. A 2017 Act revised the Penal Code and expanded Chadian women’s right to abortion in line with the Maputo Protocol. Act 006/PR/02 of 2002 on reproductive health prohibits domestic and sexual violence, FGM/C and early marriage. The decree of application giving legal effect to the 2002 Act was approved in 2018.

Chad has made progress in protecting and realising girls’ and women’s rights; however, challenges remain, ranging from unenforceability of laws to issues relating to socio-cultural adherence. Concerning harmful practices, 67% of girls are married before age 18 and 30% before the age of...
The prevalence of early marriage owes in part to conflicts with other laws, such as the Penal Code, which permits customary law marriages of girls above 13 years (Art. 277). FGM/C, practised in most parts of Chad, affects 44% of all women. Despite legal protections, 18% of women aged 15–49 in Chad have experienced physical or sexual violence against them by a partner at least once in their lifetime.

The rights of the LGBTQIA+ community are not protected and respected. Chad is a conservative society, and LGBTQIA+ persons conceal their identities owing to widespread cultural discrimination. The Penal Code prohibits same-sex sexual activity between men and between women and imposes a penalty of imprisonment and a fine. Information available suggests that, while the law is not actively enforced, the police have made arrests for same-sex sexual activity. As evidence is limited, the extent to which LGBTQIA+ persons face harassment, discrimination and violence remains largely unknown.

Chad, located in the Sahel, is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to environmental degradation and climate change. The country has seen an increase in extreme temperatures, causing drought in some parts and flooding in others. With access to water reducing, there is increasing reliance on Lake Chad for irrigation. Most Chadian earn their livelihoods from subsistence farming and livestock-rearing. It is estimated that 73% of women in Chad work in the agriculture sector. And women, especially those living in rural areas, have felt the effects of climate change. Food insecurity and limited access to water and land force Chadians to move in search of livelihoods. Displaced women are particularly vulnerable and exposed to risks of abuse and VAWG. The impact of environmental degradation and climate change, conflict and insecurity, poverty, the presence of Boko Haram and the growing number of displaced people and refugees means that Chad faces multiple interlinked challenges.

The landscape of women's rights and feminist organisations

The organisations surveyed are composed of young women, women and girls with disabilities, women, young mothers, girls and feminists. The oldest organisation has been in operation since 1990, while the four most recent started their work in 2021. Most organisations operate at the national level, with a limited number of organisations working at the regional, continental and international level.

Alliance- and movement-building

The organisations described alliance- and movement-building in Chad as less active than in other countries. Some interviewees perceived it as dynamic, even though it is moving slowly. In contrast, others noted that many associations failed to come together to advance women’s rights because of differences in priorities. Additionally, within existing networks, they said, larger organisations tend to take advantage of smaller or more recently established ones. Such larger organisations adopt coordinator roles to influence objectives and agendas, abuse this position and seek to extract rather than serve networks and coalitions.

Religious and socio-cultural constraints were also noted as factors inhibiting alliance- and movement-building and preventing women from participating. Some stressed that joining movements was a waste of time and laughed at the idea. Women often refuse to engage in specific movements because of the weight of traditions and fear. Another organisation claimed that negative perceptions of sex work deterred women and girls from joining movements that advocate for the rights of sex workers. Regardless of these challenges, participants noted that more and more girls were joining organisations and movements because of increasing awareness of their importance. Women are also opening up to the idea of being part of movements and genuinely desire to participate.
When participants were asked with whom they collaborated, most responded that they worked with all social groups: rural women who are farmers, women religious leaders, young women and girls, sex workers, domestic workers, women in academia, public and private sector actors, LGBTQIA+ persons, women with disability and women from minority ethnic groups.

Most respondents pointed to minimal participation of girls and young women in movements. As reasons for this, they highlighted literacy challenges, lack of information on organisations that advocate for women’s and girls’ rights, and inadequate liberty to join. The interviewees also shared that, when qualified young people sought to join after finishing their studies, they were motivated by passion and career prospects. However, career prospects are often not viable, and young women cannot sustain their involvement and thus seek salaried positions elsewhere. While older women emphasised the significance of involving these engaged younger women, they were uncertain about how to address the lack of incentives.

Several organisations are committed to building cross-sectoral/border movements. They are currently working with other organisations in Chad and beyond, especially in Central and West Africa, such as Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Mali and Nigeria. Collaboration is based on sharing the same goals, to ensure the well-being of women and girls. The associations mainly share experiences, learn additional skills and techniques, and strengthen capacity. They engage in fairs, awareness-raising actions, training and workshops together. Other organisations expressed a desire to cooperate with other movements. Some are hesitant when it comes to collaboration. Other associations that are open to collaboration can help these organisations overcome any reluctance and change their minds into cooperation by explaining the merits of working together. Some organisations, nonetheless, do not engage in multi-sectoral movements.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

When it comes to areas of work, most organisations in Chad focus on women’s economic empowerment. Many associations also engage on advocacy, lobbying and sensitisation; GBV/VAWG; rural women and agriculture; education; political participation and female leadership; WPS; SRHR and young mouthers; harmful practices; and supporting girls and women with disabilities. The organisations surveyed do not engage on abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights. This is because these areas of work are prohibited in Chad.

Most of the organisations interviewed do not define themselves as feminist, out of fear of prejudice and that people will be reluctant to accept them. A few interviewees did say that their organisations called themselves feminist.

Commonly used strategies and approaches, according to the associations, are direct action, activism, policy advocacy, community organisation, online activism, service delivery and legal reform. Women’s rights and feminist organisations in Chad have spaces that they make use of when carrying out their activities. These spaces include the platforms of their associations, cultural centres, the Ministry of Women and, the GBV sub-clusters, youth centres, the National Women’s House, social networks, Afrique care, women’s houses and any available spaces in the neighbourhood.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

Concerning NGO-isation, the interviewees said that professionalisation had a substantial impact on the activities of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in Chad mainly because it legitimises their operation. Some noted that being a professional organisation made it easy for them to attend activities freely or even participate in certain events. However, since the process of
professionalisation is complicated and tedious, some felt it was a real challenge and a waste of time. The organisations surveyed said a lack of knowledge of the procedure and tools of formalising associations and inadequate time to attend to the process discouraged organisations and movements. Since 2019, the Transitional National Council has refused to approve most permits, for political reasons. The Council is fearful of demonstrations and movements against it and its agenda.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Below are some of the key achievements and gains shared by the organisations and groups interviewed:

- The adoption of the National Gender Plan.
- The fight against excision through law No. 006/PR/2002 on the promotion of sexual and reproductive health.
- The integration of women in decision-making bodies through the quota of 30% in nominative and elective functions through the ordinance number 22 May 2018.
- The development of a national plan for the implementation of resolution 1325, which is being carried out by the public interest law centre, a Chadian CSO in 2022.
- The Family Code, which is struggling to see the light of day despite the struggle led by several women’s associations in this regard.

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

In response to the spread of Covid-19, the Government of Chad adopted the National Contingency Plan for Coronavirus Preparedness and Response. It also imposed curfews, mandated the use of face masks in public, closed schools and businesses and restricted the movements of refugees and IDPs, among other things. Similarly to in other countries, the pandemic exacerbated gender inequalities and the vulnerabilities of girls and women. It restricted their access to education, health services, food and livelihoods. It also increased their exposure to domestic violence and other forms of VAWG. There was also an increase in the number of schoolgirls who got married.

All organisations noted that the pandemic had had a negative impact on their organisational and movement-building abilities. One of the areas Covid-19 affected, according to most organisations, was the ability to conduct meetings. Other challenges included suspension of activities and programmes and accumulation of debt. Closure of markets disrupted opportunities to sell products for organisations involved with income-generating activities.

In response to the pandemic, women’s rights organisations and feminist movements pivoted from other work and activism to provide survivors’ counselling. They adapted by organising fewer activities, prioritising the most urgent cases, and conducted more limited awareness-raising campaigns. Groups
were smaller, and meetings were held in different houses, since public gatherings were prohibited. Others conducted meetings online. Frequent power cuts meant many struggled to work remotely and could not participate in virtual conferences.

**FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Most organisations fund their activities through their own resources, monthly contributions, private foundations and equity. Other sources include subsidies, donations, legacies and the sale of manufactured items. For most women’s and girls’ associations in Chad, women’s funds and regional feminist grant-making institutions do not play a part. Among the donors from which the organisations have received funding are embassies (the Netherlands), UN agencies (UNICEF), the ACRA Foundation, the Women’s Associations’ Information and Liaison Group (CELIAF), Arbor Day and CARE Africa.

Most organisations surveyed said that the received grants, funds or subsidies did not correspond to their needs. They also said that they faced real difficulties in accessing financial support.

In general, the perception of donors is negative. Funders are seen as distant and withdrawn, and as favouring supporting projects over women’s organisation themselves. Therefore, many Chadian organisations and movements do not engage with donors. Many also said that donors did not consider the conservative nature of society and its restrictions, and the lived realities of women, organisations and movements on the ground. However, some organisations have collaborated with donors and have excellent relations with their partners, who also serve as funders.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**CHALLENGES**

- **Limited capacity** undermines the organisations and movements’ potential to grow and have a more significant impact. Inadequate capacity prevents organisations and movements from accommodating more staff, including those with varying access needs, and from building and maintaining premises. Also noted were limited leadership and financial management capacity.

- This limited capacity and challenges related to maintaining staff mean that organisations and movements **struggle to apply for funding**. Many shared that they struggled to write the comprehensive project proposals required to apply for funding and to manage the heavy auditing and administrative processes. They felt that donors had too many application requirements.

- Many of the organisations are not French- or English-speaking. The **language barrier** makes it difficult for them to seek and apply for grants and build donor relationships. Existing donors tend to allocate resources to the small share of organisations with which they already have connections.

- Regarding **technical support**, while organisations know how to advocate within and work with their local communities, further support is required at the national level. There are limited mechanisms providing this kind of help.

- Those interviewed continually raised the weight and difficulty of working in a society in which **pervasive conservatism and active opposition** dominate and seek to limit rather
than expand women’s voices and their work. As a result of these narratives and forms of control, they said, girls and young women are “given away” early to stop them attending ‘modern schools’ and gaining independence.

- Allegedly, the Government has intentionally invested in creating and sustaining organisations that oppose women’s rights and feminist agendas. These organisations receive funding to advocate for their policies. This makes civil society spaces unwelcoming for other women’s rights organisations and feminist movements.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

As a result of the uncertainty of Chad’s political situation and of the national transition, women’s rights organisations and feminist groups have come to appreciate the value and power of constructing united movements. Those interviewed stated that increased pressure from the Transitional National Council and society was driving the formation of more alliances. Their collective impact is more significant than their impact as individual organisations.

When asked which areas are priorities and in need of urgent funding, the organisations highlighted:

- Of particular importance, the organisations and movements surveyed said, is to ensure that the new Family Code is officially codified and implemented. Despite their advocacy and lobbying efforts, this has not yet happened.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Generally, donors need to increase their presence in Chad so that associations can continue advocating for women’s and girls’ rights. Other key recommendations include the following:

- **Make long-term investments** to support organisations and movements’ initiatives that reflect real concerns and needs. Some donors do not understand the needs on the ground and do not meet organisations’ funding expectations. Working closely with organisations can make it possible to identify priority areas of work and strategies.

- **Modify practices and guidelines for issuing funding** and remove the requirement to be a professional organisation to be eligible for grants and other financial support.
• **Support advocacy** to domesticate and implement international and national women’s rights instruments, especially UNSCR 1325, and increase resources to influence government decisions at all levels.

• **Offer training** in grant applications, funding management and organisational leadership. Donors should also put in place consultative frameworks on the guidelines to help movements and organisations understand funding mechanisms.

• **Work directly** with women’s organisations and feminist movements to build their capacity to apply for funding.

• **Provide technical support** to women’s rights and feminist movements in the country.

• **Provide and increase funding** for organisations during public health crises, such as Covid-19, to lessen their impact on organisations and movements’ work.
CÔTE D’IVOIRE

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT
Gaining independence in 1960, Côte d’Ivoire was relatively stable until 1999, when a coup d’état disrupted the political landscape, followed by a civil war from 2002 to 2007 and a second during 2010–2011.

Ivorian women have a long history of activism. Although the political environment before independence provided them with only limited rights and opportunities, they were nevertheless active in marches for the release of political prisoners. They were also active participants in the independence movement. After independence, political parties established women’s branches and female candidates began to run in legislative and municipal elections.

Ivorian women are increasingly participating in decision-making in the public and private sectors and as active members of civil society. Following the violence in 2010, Côte d’Ivoire established the Commission for Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation. Women’s groups participated in the truth and reconciliation process, providing information and collecting evidence.

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS
The 2016 Constitution of Côte d’Ivoire enshrines the principle of equality between men and women and prohibits discrimination based on sex (Art. 4). It also prohibits harmful practices, for example slavery, human trafficking, forced labour, physical violence, FGM/C and all other forms of degradation (Art. 5). On women’s political participation, the state shall promote the political rights of women by increasing their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies (Art. 36). Furthermore, the Constitution obligates the state to promote equality between the sexes in the labour market and to promote women to decision-making positions in public institutions and administrations in addition to at the enterprise level (Art. 37).


The 2019 Promotion of Women’s Representation in Elected Assemblies Act stipulates a minimum quota of 30% of women candidates for both the majority and the proportional representation systems (Art. 3). If parties field at least 50% women candidates, the Act promises benefits for them from additional public funding (Art. 4). This Act applies to elections for the National Assembly, the Senate (indirect elections) and regional, district and municipal councils (Art. 2).

Regarding VAWG, Côte d’Ivoire adopted Law 98-757 in 1998 on the repression of certain forms, including FGM/C. The Government has since developed a national strategy to combat VAWG. In 2014, Côte d’Ivoire adopted Law 2014-388 on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders (Art. 9).
Concerning child marriage, in 2019 the Council of Ministers of Côte d’Ivoire approved a bill to amend the marriage law to harmonise the age of consent to 18 for both sexes (currently, it is 20 for men). Additionally, it removes the ability of the public prosecutor to grant a dispensation for underage marriage and obligates the civil registrar to confirm that both participants are of the required age. Further, this bill seeks equality in joint marital property. The parliament is yet to pass the bill.

CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

In recent years, progress has been made to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls; however, challenges remain. Despite implementation of a quota, women’s political participation remains low. Following the 2021 election, women held 12.94% of the seats in parliament.75 Concerning harmful practices, of women aged 15–49, 36.7% have undergone FGM/C.76 A total of 27% of girls in Côte d’Ivoire are married before the age of 18 and 7% are married before the age of 15.77 The country does not have a specific national strategy or plan to reduce either of these harmful practices but it is subsumed within GBV initiatives. Although women have the same rights as men to land, and they represent 29.9% of actors in the agriculture sector, they are largely excluded from owning land.78

While homosexual activity is not criminalised and there are no laws or measures censoring LGBTQIA+ persons, same-sex marriage is not yet recognised and no formal right is given to those who seek to change their legal gender or be recognised outside of the gender binary. Additionally, there are no legal protections against LGBTQA+ discrimination, and 79.42% of participants in a domestic survey stated that they would “not tolerate” having homosexual neighbours.79 Within the past five years, law enforcement has utilised general provisions of “public indecency” and “morality” in the Penal Code to arrest and prosecute members of the LGBTQIA+ community, in some cases leading to imprisonment.80 Further, the age of consent, as determined under Sections 356 and 358 of the Penal Code, differs between those of different sexes (15) and those of the same sex (18).

Environmental challenges are linked to the country’s civil wars, and include “the degradation of forests, national parks and the Ébrié lagoon; unplanned urban expansion; industrial and artisanal mining” and more.81 Climate change exacerbates these issues, threatening the country’s reliance on cocoa and the export of other crops. It has also led to rapidly rising sea levels, mainly affecting coastal communities. Positively, the Government is implementing multiple initiatives to mainstream gender into climate change, including in the current National Action Plan 2020–2024.82
Most of the organisations said they did not belong to any network. Some organisations belong to national and cross-sectoral networks and a few to cross-border networks. Through these, they cooperate, build alliances and networks, and implement activities. More and more organisations are involved in cross-sector organising, primarily through projects and activities. All interviewees wanted to collaborate with other feminist organisations outside FWA.

Organisations had mixed opinions regarding the involvement or membership of girls and young women in movements. Some said that girls and young women were not sufficiently involved. Some expressed an interest in including them but others said the opposite. Limited resources, lack of knowledge of their rights and the weight of patriarchy were mentioned as the main reasons for the lack of involvement of girls and young women in the different movements, along with refusal to accept them.

When asked which groups their organisations collaborated with, most responded that they engaged with women and girls, rural women and farmers, sex workers, women with disabilities, women in the private sector, women in academia, women in the public sector, domestic workers, and women religious and/or customary leaders. Some organisations responded that they worked with LGBTQIA+ and/or gender-nonconforming people and women from ethnic minority and indigenous groups. A few said that they engaged with widows, people living with HIV, young and vulnerable children, transgender women, women in the medical sector or children with sensory disabilities.

Most organisations said they encountered obstacles in collaborating; some said they did not. Leadership problems, lack of finances, competition between organisations, lack of will among young organisations, socio-cultural barriers, refusal of adults to open the door to younger generations and lack of visibility are among the challenges organisations face in collaborating with others.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

The work of the organisations surveyed covers various areas. These include women’s and girls’ right to education, GBV, SRHR, HIV, forced marriage, FGM/C, women’s empowerment and gender equality, women’s political representation and participation, WPS, safe abortion, research, counselling, child rights, sustainable development/environment, sex workers’ rights, the media, women’s right to land ownership and women’s economic empowerment. One association of LGBTQIA+ people said it led actions for LBQ and transgender women.

Most of the organisations said they identified as feminist. A few organisations said they did not, and others had no answer to the question. One organisation identified as trans-feminist, in an effort to allow all transgender women to express their gender and to educate others on what trans-feminism means.

Some organisations said they were reluctant to call themselves feminist because feminism is poorly understood. It is often viewed negatively in Côte d’Ivoire as it does not align with society’s values. When discussing feminism, one participant noted, “This is tantamount to rebellion, indiscipline, rudeness towards men.” Regarding the impact of defining themselves as feminist, the participants differed. While some said this definition closed doors, others said it had a positive effect. The latter said it strengthened their capacity to act and made them more determined and courageous to find solutions.

Most organisations are open to working on all issues. On abortion, for example, most organisations said they were in favour of engaging on the subject. In contrast, others said they would not or were unwilling to engage directly. Concerning working on LGBTQIA+ rights, a few organisations said they were resistant to this issue and were not involved. Some participants said they worked on LGBTQIA+ rights, while others said they were open to the subject but would refer cases to organisations working on it.
Concerning strategies and approaches, nearly all organisations interviewed said they used direct action such as policy work, advocacy and awareness-raising. Other techniques include online activism, community organising, service and care delivery, legal reform, lobbying, surveys and scientific research on GBV issues.

When asked if they were aware of spaces dedicated to women, most organisations said they knew of certain events. Others said there were no dedicated spaces in Côte d’Ivoire. A few participants said they were not aware of such spaces. One was unaware of spaces other than those it was invited to. Among existing spaces are meeting and conference rooms at organisations’ offices and cafés, and events such as meetups, festivals, online platforms, discussions and forums. Activities also include celebrating International Women’s Day (8 March), International Human Rights Day (10 December) and the 16 Days of Activism.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

Most participants saw the obligatory professionalisation of organisations and movements by technical and financial partners as positive. Some, however, expressed the opposite view. Those who took a positive view said that, by professionalising, organisations became more efficient in the field, and more credible and reliable with partners. According to others, some organisations become NGOs to access funds but do nothing, while organisations that genuinely work to assist women and girls do not get access to these funds. Furthermore, young organisations often cannot become NGOs as they are not legal entities and do not have a bank account or auditing and financial reports, or a board of directors as requested by donors.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Below are some of the key achievements and gains shared by the organisations and groups interviewed:

- Pushed for a reform of the Penal Code in 2019.
- Lobbied the Promotion of Women’s Representation in Elected Assemblies Act (adopted in 2019).
- Advocated for the insertion of the law on domestic violence in Ivorian legislation.
- Organised the regional project ‘Remove Legal Barrier’ to reduce the legal barriers that hinder access to care for people living with HIV and key populations.
- Publication of the investigation report on VAW in connection with Covid-19 in Abidjan.
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS
AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Côte d’Ivoire, like other countries, responded to the spread of Covid-19 by declaring a state of health emergency and adopting measures such as imposing curfews and lockdowns, mandating masks on public transportation, isolating Abidjan from the interior and closing schools and certain businesses. It also sought to relieve some of the economic burden by covering water and electricity bills for households in the lower income brackets. The government’s measures negatively affected the lives of women and girls, particularly those in rural areas. There was a rise in incidence of GBV, teenage pregnancy and poverty as income opportunities were reduced or disappeared. Vulnerability was also felt by sex workers and transgender people, for example, who could not work and earn a living or receive support from organisations.

Many women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in Côte d’Ivoire reported a drop in their performance and field activities as a result of Covid-19. Most shared that the pandemic had had negative impacts on their funding as resources were redirected to people with Covid-19 and to other activities. Those who had ongoing commitments with some donors saw the latter become inflexible and remain fixed on their objectives without considering the reality on the ground. Several organisations witnessed the breakdown of their relationships with donors. Organisations with more than 10 years of existence have been able to cope with the pandemic at certain levels, while young organisations have been the most affected. Many reported they had been forced to close. Some feminist activists reportedly turned to other activities such as distributing food and non-food items.

Participants had responded to the pandemic in various ways. Many organisations said their work had shifted towards online activities, awareness campaigns, consultations and training. During the pandemic, organisations created movements and alliances virtually and formed digital campaigns. They also began to educate women about ICTs and how to use these to strengthen feminist activism and networks. Others responded by creating support groups for vulnerable groups such as people living with HIV.

FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS
AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

The organisations interviewed said they received financial support from various sources, such as private foundations, women’s funds, and bilateral and multilateral partners. These include UN agencies (such as UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)), CARE International, AWDF and national embassies (Germany, France and Luxembourg for example). Many participants revealed that they financed the organisation’s activities with their own funds (personal investment) or by mobilising local resources.

The organisations differed as to whether funding received matched their needs. Most interviewees answered in the affirmative but a few responded negatively. About a quarter of the organisations interviewed said they had not yet received grants.

Regarding perceptions of funders, most women’s rights organisations and feminist movements surveyed had a neutral opinion. Some said they had a favourable view of donors, adding that some funders were very responsive. Other interviewees perceived international donors negatively, owing to the imposition of their priorities on local organisations and the cumbersome criteria put in place to obtain funding. Many find international donors easier to access than local ones, although others decried this. The interviews revealed that many organisations did not know any national funders. The ideal relationship with funders was described as one of collaboration, whereby the organisation is allowed to develop programmes that correspond to the community’s needs.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

- Concerning alliance- and movement-building, most organisations do not collaborate with young organisations or/and organisations working with key populations. There is also insufficient sharing of experiences between girls, young women and women and LGBTQIA+ people, transgender people and gender-nonconforming people.

- Barriers and obstacles prevent young women and girls from participating in feminist movements in the country. Norms, customs and traditions are used to prevent women from participating in political life and engaging with feminist movements out of fear of patriarchal authority.

- Young organisations tend to include members of the LGBTQIA+ community, who struggle to obtain funding and other support.

- Many organisations said that the language barrier was a significant challenge, leading to them being left out of the broader movement.

- While organisations perceive networking as positive, it is also associated with resource mobilisation challenges.

- The interviewees emphasised lack of access to information as slowing the participation of women. With activities centred in Abidjan, women in rural areas outside the capital cannot access up-to-date information or technology.

- Many women will not participate in movements because they are not financially independent, and often work in the informal sector, meaning they lack the time and resources to sustain participation.

OPPORTUNITIES

When discussing opportunities for women’s rights organisations and feminist movements, participants said there existed is a great deal of potential in alliance- and movement-building in Côte d’Ivoire. The organisations surveyed said there was a need to create a synergy of action to strengthen networks to carry out effective advocacy. There is also a need to reconcile the old generation of women’s rights pioneers in Côte d’Ivoire with the new generation of young feminists and to encourage more women to participate and be involved, especially among marginalised communities. Also, key is the development of cross-sectoral social partnerships beyond joint projects and programmes into multi-stakeholder initiatives to bring about systemic change on a common agenda.

On the question of areas in need of urgent funding, organisations noted the following explicitly:
Participants also saw opportunities for UN agencies, especially UN Women, and state authorities to support and sustain the actions of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in Côte d’Ivoire.

UN agencies can serve as a lever to help women’s and feminist organisations, especially emerging organisations, to structure themselves and become competitive. They can also promote a framework for North–South exchange and collaboration between women’s and feminist NGOs and development partners.

State authorities can support and sustain women’s rights organisations and feminist movements. They can facilitate the synergy of government and civil society actions through monthly and inclusive meetings. They may also be able to reduce the time required for NGOs to obtain a receipt and approval.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Funders should support women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in Côte d’Ivoire, particularly in rural areas. Other recommendations for donors include the following:

- **Provide financial support** for organisations based on the relevance of their project proposals. Funders should consider all actors, regardless of whether they have previously received funding, and include young organisations with limited or no budget. Financing should be multi-year.

- **Offer flexibility in application procedures and criteria.** Application packs should use clear language. Some organisations feel excluded because they cannot manage technical procedures. Funders should also avoid costly audit reports.

- **Let organisations make project proposals** and do not predefine the themes and the beneficiaries. Organisations in the field should make suggestions for areas that need funding. The goals set should be realistic.

- **Provide resilience/emergency funds** to assist organisations and movements in their work during crises, particularly health crises, emergencies or natural disasters.

- **Consider emerging organisations and movements** (with less than five years of existence) for funding opportunities.

- **Offer training** on how to apply for grants/funding and facilitate information on and access to funding opportunities. Fund training in financial management and accounting.

- **Develop collaborative relationships and partnerships** with local NGOs.

- **Strengthen capacity-building** of organisations, provide technical support and fund operating costs. Donors should, when necessary, accompany the organisation where it has gaps in specific areas.

- **Provide subsidies** for workshops, travel and the sharing of educational resources.

- **Build support and collaboration** between donors and organisations/movements by organising discussions and workshops and creating spaces where these meetings can occur.

- **Provide financial support for leadership training** for women and girls, especially young women.
BACKGROUND/CONTEXT
In 1958, the Republic of Guinea achieved independence from France, with Guinean women at the forefront of the struggle. Women participated in strikes and voted against Guinea’s membership in the French West Africa community. The independence movement gave women a greater public role, and women’s concerns formed a part of this. The leader of the Democratic Party of Guinea made women’s political participation one of the party’s four guiding principles.

Following independence, Guinea experienced political instability and underwent three military coups. The aftermath of the 2009 elections led to political unrest. During violent protests, women were deliberately targeted with sexual violence. The 2010 election ushered in a decade of civilian rule, which ended in 2021 following another military coup.

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS
The Constitution of Guinea guarantees equality before the law (Art. 9). It also affirms that parity between men and women in politics is a goal and prohibits discrimination based on sex (Art. 9). In 2020, the new Constitution was adopted. Among its amendments are provisions that strengthen women’s and girls’ rights. For example, the Constitution prohibits FGM/C (Art. 8) and forced marriage and sets the age of marriage at 18 (Art. 23). The state shall also protect youth from sexual abuse and trafficking (Art. 24).

Guinea ratified CEDAW in 1982 and the Maputo Protocol in 2012. To strengthen women’s and girls’ rights, Guinea has adopted laws and policies in line with international, continental and regional frameworks on gender equality. The 2016 Penal Code prohibits FGM/C by traditional and modern methods, covers domestic violence and rape and allows for abortion in some instances. The country’s National Action Plan 2009–2013 includes among its objectives the protection of women and girls from sexual violence and FGM/C. The 2019 Law on Parity calls for parity in any list of candidates for national and local elections and for the holding of elective offices in public institutions. The law specifies that lists of candidates must be alternately composed of both sexes. Regarding women’s economic empowerment, Law 2016/59 prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender. The Guinean Government has drafted an anti-trafficking action plan, which includes support for victims and training for law enforcement.

CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY
Despite laws, policies and strategies on women’s rights and gender equality, their realisation has not yet been fully achieved. Around 47% of girls in Guinea are married before their 18th birthday, and 17% before the age of 15. Exceptions to the law allow individuals to marry before 18 years for...
“serious reasons” and with parental consent. The country has one of the highest prevalence rates of FGM/C: a reported 95% of Guinean women and girls have experienced FGM/C. Nine out of 10 women aged 15–64 have experienced at least one act of violence. A 2016 national survey on GBV revealed that 55.7% of women reported being victims of physical violence and 29.3% of sexual violence. While the Penal Code covers physical violence, it does not address sexual violence or marital rape. In the political sphere, Guinean women make up 29.6% (24 out of 81 seats) of Guinea’s parliament – below the goal of parity in politics.

The review did not find any laws that protect and strengthen the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons in Guinea. Existing anti-discrimination laws do not apply to LGBTQIA+ persons, and thus discrimination against them is permissible. The 2016 Penal Code criminalises same-sex activity and provides for imprisonment and a fine for indecent or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex. Although there is little information on how the law is enforced, there are reports of sexual orientation-based arrests and subsequent imprisonment.

LGBTQIA+ persons often conceal their sexual orientation to avoid rejection by their family and Guinean society. The Guinean Government has explicitly stated its disapproval of homosexual conduct. A survey has revealed that Guinea is among the most intolerant countries towards homosexuals of all African countries. Because of social stigma and deep-rooted taboos, LGBTQIA+ persons do not report incidences of discrimination, abuse and violence. However, reports indicate that in recent years the situation for LGBTQIA+ persons has improved concerning access to health care.

Guinea is known as Africa’s “water tower”; the country’s highlands lie at the headwaters of the Gambia, Niger and Senegal River systems. However, climate change has become a reality in Guinea. Although Guinea already experiences floods during the rainy season, climate change is likely to alter rainfall patterns, limit access to potable water and cause desertification and soil erosion. The impacts of climate change are particularly felt in the agriculture sector, where Guinean women make up 80% of the workforce. This further reduces women’s incomes. Women also continue to face discrimination in access to land and credit, which limits their productivity, and their participation in decision-making remains low. To address the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls, the Government has pledged to develop a National Gender and Climate Strategy by 2024.

**THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Most of the Guinean women’s rights organisations interviewed were created and are led by women and girls. Other organisations are mixed and include men who coach and work in finance, project development, monitoring and evaluation. A group of women with disabilities runs one of the organisations that participated in the study.

The oldest organisations have been in the field for more than 15 years and the youngest for less than three years. All organisations surveyed are active at the national level. Some are also active at the regional level.

**ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING**

Some interviewees reported that they had developed internal policies on working with other organisations in consortia or networks, or in informal partnerships. Other organisations said they did not have such policies. Many organisations talked about financial interests causing difficulties in forming alliances. Perceived competition for funding and a scarcity mindset often drive organisations to work individually.
Meanwhile, a reliance on volunteering and volunteer work in alliances means that participation of girls and young women in movements is rare. In addition, lines between voluntary and paid work are often blurred. Those who come expect money; when there is none, they are often discouraged and go elsewhere to earn a better living. Institutional support limitations make it difficult maintain an office with permanent staff. While the organisations reported working with all types of women’s groups, none of them work with LGBTQIA+ and gender-nonconforming groups.

The construction of cross-sectoral and cross-border movements is seen as useful. Activities are carried out jointly; sometimes, convergent actions on shared projects are implemented. The outbreak of Ebola in Guinea led to the building of several movements between Guinea and Sierra Leone, for example, with awareness-raising activities held at the various borders.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

Among the areas of work cited by the organisations interviewed were the positioning of women in decision-making bodies; respect for parity and electoral monitoring; WPS, including popularisation of UNSCR 1325; the fight against GBV; education of girls and/or women; economic empowerment; eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM/C; alliance- and movement-building; the media; research; SRHR, including safe abortion; and disability. Direct actions, online activism, community organising, advocacy, and policy and legal reform are the most common strategies and approaches. International days, forums and other self-organised meetings are also critical spaces. All organisations have principles, and also codes of conduct for both members and partners.

Some organisations identified as feminist, noting that this had affected their work both positively and negatively. On the positive side, it has allowed the organisations to identify that there was a problem with understanding, awareness and acceptance of feminism in society. However, on the negative side, identifying as feminist is often correlated, by society and other organisations, with being “men haters” and the organisations have experienced this stigma. None of the organisations participating in this study work on LGBTQIA+ rights issues.

Almost all the organisations are involved in advocacy, community involvement, awareness-raising, prevention and social mobilisation. A few organisations conduct research as part of their work. Some organisations highlighted a resurgence of rape and clandestine abortion in some regions of Guinea; one had completed a rape investigation project and another had conducted an in-depth study on clandestine abortion. Other research has focused on women’s access to health care, VAWG and school violence.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

Lack of professionalisation can pose serious problems to partnerships. Professionalisation is a criterion for donors and is increasing among organisations and movements. Training programmes for those that are not professionalised help organisations conform to the rules of international organisations by improving their internal operating systems to obtain more funding on the national and international levels. For mutually beneficial partnerships, interviewees cited the importance of sharing experience and information.

Some of the actors interviewed are convinced of the importance of NGO-isation, and are working on strengthening their internal management capacity to obtain the confidence of their partners so that the latter will make funds available to them.

Many of those interviewed cited recent difficulties in registering and even attaining permits to operate,
owing to increased government restrictions and complicated criteria. According to these respondents, the Government is concerned about the work women’s rights organisations and movements do. As a result, many organisations operate without permits.

**MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Below are some of the key achievements and gains shared by the organisations and groups interviewed:

- Unanimous passing of the 2019 law on parity.
- Revision of the Civil Code which involved removing discriminatory articles.
- Adoption on the law on SRHR which included criminalizing FGM.
- Passing and promulgation of the Penal Code and the Code of Penal Procedures.
- Organisation of women’s rights projects regarding the new constitution, fighting for the principle of one man, one woman to be taken into account in the electoral lists.

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Like when the Ebola virus hit the country in 2014, Covid-19 has disproportionately affected Guinean women and girls, owing to structural and gender inequalities." The measures imposed in response to the pandemic included a ban on large gatherings and a curfew at 10 pm, which the new military authorities have maintained. These measures harm Guinean women by reducing their economic opportunities and increasing the risk of violence and abuse. Since the onset of Covid-19, VAWG has increased by 20%.110

According to the interviewees, the pandemic had impacts on their activities. Almost all donor funds were redirected to the fight against Covid-19, leaving organisations without support. Because of this and government restrictions, all planned activities were cancelled or delayed, nationally and regionally. Restrictions on travel and movement, reductions in resources and lack of information compounded the impacts of the pandemic.

The most resilient organisations have continued to operate using their own funds from members’ contributions. Others have completely disappeared. Some have reoriented their activities through social networks, trying to reach as many people as possible from among their primary target groups. Through this utilisation of ICTs, organisations have found new and effective modes of organising. Many have begun working remotely and using social media and ICTs to organise meetings and communicate with other organisations, and to enable actors to participate in various activities.
FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Women’s rights organisations finance their activities in several ways, often through voluntary work. Some use members’ contributions. The most commonly cited funding sources include UN agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF), OSIWA, Equipop, the EU, Search for Common Ground, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), Ecobank, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Ministry of Women’s Promotion, the Ministry of Youth and France Volontaires.

The interviewees use the funds obtained for research, training, promotion of women’s sorority, to conduct activities which support government initiatives/campaigns, helping civil society achieve their objectives and women’s empowerment.

All organisations interviewed spoke of good relations with donors. However, they all described partnership as the ideal dynamic. Such a dynamic would end the view of organisations in Guinea as implementers rather than as partners, even if it is still donors who do the financing. There would be shared responsibility for the different projects. Interviewees perceive international donors as “people who act according to their interests even if they allow organisations to build their capacity or acquire knowledge”.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

- Among the most cited challenges was the need for in-depth capacity-building in, for example, advocacy, awareness-raising and communication.

- Another significant challenge is the language barrier. While some organisations can translate documents, others cannot. Some shared that, while they understood English, they did not speak it well, which limited their ability to participate in meetings.

- The organisations interviewed cited access to funding as a significant challenge. The difficulties include a lack of appropriate training in international funding research and the fact that available grants do not correspond with organisations’ needs. The predominant use of English in application processes means that meanings are often lost in translation. Criteria for admission to funds are complex and there is a long wait for offers. The organisations noted the need for greater support post-covid.

- Alliance- and movement-building with different organisations is challenging for several reasons, including those related to personal interests. Throughout the interviews, the organisations regretted the lack of synergy between Guinean civil society organisations, particularly among those working to defend women’s rights.

- The organisations cited government inaction as a challenge. They also denounced certain behaviours of national authorities, for example refusal to popularise the law on safe abortion and the lack of GBV legislation.

OPPORTUNITIES

During the interviews, Guinean organisations noted opportunities for advancing women’s rights and leadership of women and girls in the country.
They talked about federating all motivated women’s rights organisations. To strengthen relationships and facilitate **alliance- and movement-building**, the organisations called for coordinating actions, tolerance, mutual support and frank collaboration by agreeing to advance together. They proposed increased leadership, organisational management and volunteer training to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of women-led organisations and movements.

As a strategy for collaboration between feminist movements and women’s rights organisations, they proposed:

- Prioritising training for those who are not feminists so they recognise their role in defence of women’s rights;
- Raising awareness so that organisations understand the need to come together to benefit from specific grants and funds that cannot be granted individually;
- Explaining “feminism” better so it can be more easily integrated into organisations’ work. Currently, the word “feminism” scares some women;
- Working on women’s solidarity, which is floundering, when it needs to be strong, energetic and active to move forward with the same momentum.

The organisations participating in this study also spoke of the need to integrate gender issues into the Constitution and to address women’s political participation to advance the women’s rights agenda. Further, to address VAWG/GBV, they proposed increased lobbying and advocacy with the Government to adopt corresponding legislation with harsher criminal penalties, alongside sensitisation efforts. They also noted a need to reform existing national policies that are not adapted to women’s and girls’ needs.

On the question of areas in need of urgent funding, they noted specifically the following:

- Support by the Government to national organisations that go beyond ad hoc agreements with certain ministerial departments. This should include giving out subsidies such as those the Government provides for actors like political parties, the media and unions in Guinea.
- Almost all interviewees spoke of the urgent need to equip their organisations.

The participating organisations also highlighted some urgent opportunities:

- Support by the Government to national organisations that go beyond ad hoc agreements with certain ministerial departments. This should include giving out subsidies such as those the Government provides for actors like political parties, the media and unions in Guinea.

- Almost all interviewees spoke of the urgent need to equip their organisations.
There is a critical need for synergy of action between organisations to strengthen civil society to act as a counterweight. For this, organisations proposed funding civil society foundations, including women’s rights organisations, to help them settle their differences and start again on a new strong and solid base.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide **flexible and long-term funding** based on the needs identified by women’s rights organisations and feminist movements in Guinea.

- Ensure **applications and calls for funding are available in French** and not only in English, to allow more actors to apply.

- Support efforts by Guinean women’s rights and feminist groups to push for the **adoption and implementation of legislation prohibiting VAWG**.

- Strengthen **capacity-building and facilitate leadership training** at all levels to allow for more effective implementation of the women’s rights agenda and more project impact.

- Assist women’s rights organisations and feminist groups in **efforts to strengthen the application of UNSCR 1325**. Support should ensure that women and girls are protected against violence during conflict and have a role in decision-making positions post-conflict.

- **Federate all women’s rights organisations** that are motivated to integrate gender issues into the Constitution and think about women’s political participation to advance the women’s rights agenda.

- **Strengthen women’s solidarity**, which is faltering and needs to be strong, energetic and active if women are to be able to move forward with momentum.

- Provide **psychosocial support** to victims of VAW

- Support the **reform of existing national policies** that are not adapted to needs.

- Ensure the **effective implementation of laws** and encourage women to go into politics to better defend the law.
BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Malian women have been instrumental throughout the country’s political history. Mali’s independence from France in 1960 was preceded by the election of the first female deputy, Aoua Keïta, to the National Assembly of Mali Federation in 1959. This was proceeded by some progressive reforms in 1962: women gained the right to consensual marriage, rape was made punishable by up to 20 years in prison and women created the Commission for Social Women in Mali. From 1990 to 1992, women-led protest marches against Moussa Traoré led to the formation of the Collective of Women in Mali and contributed to talks between Tuareg rebels and the Government. Similarly, women played a pivotal role in inaugurating the 1996 “Flame of Peace” ceremony, now an annual protest against small arms and light weapons, in the creation of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family in 1997 and in the formation of the National Gender Policy, adopted in 2011.

However, since 2012, Mali has experienced multiple coup d’états, the most recent being in May 2021. Malian women’s political participation has been stifled throughout these periods of political insecurity. In the 2015 peace talks, 5% of negotiators and 15% of signatories were women. General elections were scheduled for February of 2022 but were delayed by the Transitional Council by five years. A new transitional charter and plan were also approved. ECOWAS has maintained sanctions against Mali as a result of this delay in returning to civilian rule.

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

The successive constitutions of Mali since its independence in 1960 have enshrined the principle of equality of all citizens, men and women, before the law without distinction of origin, race, language, sex, religion or belief. That of the Third Republic, adopted on 25 February 1992, has a specificity. It subscribes to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December 1948 and to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights of 26 June 1981. It states in its preamble that, “The sovereign people of Mali proclaim their determination to defend the rights of women and children.”

Mali ratified CEDAW in 1985 and acceded to the Optional Protocol in 2000 with no reservations. On 9 December 2003, Mali was one of the first 10 AU member states to sign the Maputo Protocol. It ratified the Protocol on 13 January 2005.

As of April 2022, Mali was ranked 84th in the world regarding the percentage of women in parliament, with 26.2% representation in the National Assembly. This falls short of the 30% quota stipulated by the gender quota legislation passed in 2015. Financial incentives are also given for elevating women to senior decision-making positions: “10% of public funding is proportionately shared among political parties which have women elected as deputies or municipal councillors.” A specialised women’s caucus, the Network of Women Parliamentarians of Mali, was established in 2007.
In 2018, Mali adopted legislation to protect human rights defenders. Since 2010, Mali has also developed several programmes to help women out of poverty and enable their economic inclusion. For example, Faim Zéro supports women experiencing precarity as a result of conflict.

In its National Plan for Family Planning 2014–2018, Mali committed to addressing the unmet need for family planning and achieving a contraceptive prevalence rate of 15% by 2018. In 2010, Mali created 10 safe houses for women and children (two in the capital Bamako and eight in the regional capitals). In 2018, it built a one-stop centre designed for survivors of VAWG. In the same vein, the Malian Government built women’s houses for counselling victims of VAWG in 2018.

**CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

There is currently no legislation outlawing the harmful practice of FGM/C, with 88.6% prevalence among girls and women aged 15–49. In 2021, leading women’s rights organisations jointly filed a case at the ECOWAS Court of Justice against Mali for failing to adopt a legal and policy framework that would criminalise FGM/C. In 2019, Mali reported that effective enforcement of GBV laws had been affected by a lack of political will, and pointed to challenges in reforming its constitutional and legal framework to address VAWG. There is a 35.5% prevalence rate of intimate partner violence against women (over 15 years of age). The Persons and Family Code sets the age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys, although girls can marry at 15 with permission from a judge and parental consent.

In 2018, the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights held that Mali’s Persons and Family Code violated its obligations under international human rights standards (including the African Children’s Charter, the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW) by failing to establish a minimum age for marriage (18). This is a significant decision for girls’ rights and for Member States that fail to domesticate their international obligations. This was the first case before the Court to apply the provisions of the Maputo Protocol. In its decision, the Court urged Mali to revise its Persons and Family Code to reflect international standards for the minimum age of 18 for marriage. Additionally, it called for Mali to sensitise and educate the population to reflect this new standard.

In contrast to some of its neighbours, Mali does not make homosexual activity explicitly illegal, and there are no censorship laws relating to LGBTQIA+ topics. However, same-sex marriage is not yet legal, and studies examining public opinion find that the majority of the Malian population characterises “homosexual practices as ‘immoral and evil’” and would “not tolerate” neighbours identifying with the LGBTQIA+ community. It is unclear what rights citizens have to legally change their gender, and there is no government mention relating to nationally recognising non-binary gender. Further, there are no legal protections against discrimination based on LGBTQIA+ identity.

Since the military coup in 2012, domestic and regional insecurity has continued to disproportionately affect women, and seemingly the evolution of feminist movements and discourse. Conflict and violence within the regions of Gao, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu have “produced 187,140 internally displaced people, with approximately 10,000 people becoming newly displaced each month…the leading cause of food insecurity within the region”. The conflict in Mali has disrupted women’s ability to trade, severely affecting their livelihoods. Despite the 2015 Bamako Agreement on peace, “Women are hardly involved in implementation as well as in national and local governance.”

Despite its large land mass and significant economic dependence on agriculture, only “14% of the country’s land area is considered suitable for agriculture, making sustainable land management a major concern.” This is compounded by climate change. At the most recent Commission on the
Status of Women, Foune Coulibaly Wadidie, Minister for the Advancement of Women, Children and Family of Mali, noted the “specified impact of climate change on women, who contribute between 60 to 80 per cent of its food resources”.

Malian women agriculturalists proportionately own the least land compared with its neighbours, apart from Côte d’Ivoire.

**THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Many organisations that work on Malian women’s rights and issues pertaining to feminism are broader human rights organisations dedicated to multiple causes. Most of these organisations were created and/or are led by men. There are structures created and directed by women but most depend on a technical team made up of men. The women interviewed agreed that, “Bringing about real change on women’s rights in Mali requires the involvement of men.” However, several organisations said that women made up 90% or more of the membership and that they were also led by women. The few organisations that have leaders who identify as LGBTQIA+ and gender-nonconforming said that they “remain hidden because of the violent repression by the community; we must protect them by not mentioning them openly”.

These structures have existed for between four and more than 40 years. Within their mandates, the vast majority include some form of advocacy and awareness-raising. The different structures operate nationally. Many of them are based in Bamako. Still, we also exchanged with some based in the regions of Koutiala, Liéo du Sahel, Mopti, Ségou and Kayes.

**ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING**

Ideas are divided here; some think alliance-building does not encounter any problems and alliances are made without significant difficulty. However, others believe that alliance-building is afflicted by jealousy between some women leaders and by lack of female solidarity, the cause of which, according to them, is the still undeveloped leadership of women. Newer organisations run by younger women noted tension between and within older organisations but said that this was not the case within the “younger consortium”, noting that, “There is a generational change going on.”

Mali’s main religion is Islam. The organisations interviewed discussed the common public sentiment that girls do not need to go to university because they have to get married. Correlating to these types of gender-discriminatory notions, women’s rights organisations, especially those that identify as feminist associations, experience significant public criticism. For example, one of the first women to become known publicly as a feminist, Siné Diakité, was cursed in Mali by all the country’s religious leaders, through a fatwa, for having spoken out against FGM/C. However, this has not stopped others from advancing their fight for women’s rights and the realisation of feminist principles and movements. That being said, out of the 42 interviewed, only two organisations are comfortable engaging on abortion and on LGBTQIA+ and gender-nonconforming or gender-expansive rights. Some even stated that they thought LGBTQIA+ issues were undermining the gender struggle through creating divisions in the feminist movement.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

Areas of work include economic empowerment, including vocational training, socio-professional integration and the promotion of income-generating activities; advocacy, promotion and defence of women’s and girls’ rights; women’s leadership; environment and climate change; alliance- and movement-building; the enrolment and retention of girls in school; supporting rural women, especially
those in agro-food processing; health and SRHR; the fight against GBV and harmful practices; research; legal aid; food security; disability; supporting young girls in distress; WPS, including the fight against violent extremism; media; LGBTQIA+ issues; and ICT. Advocacy, awareness-raising and community organising are the direct-action strategies and approaches used.

Most organisations are guided by general principles of equality, equity, justice, non-discrimination, transparency and gender promotion. Some identify explicitly as feminist, while many were ambiguous in their responses and a large number explicitly do not identify as feminist. Those from the former two categories cited multiple challenges in publicly using the feminist label, such as in gaining recognition and acceptance by their target groups, and the fact that only a few people know what it means. Women who identify as feminists are perceived to have no respect for their family, society or religion. Mali’s society is very conservative in terms of its socio-cultural values. Attempting to change this is complex, and the actors responsible are often despised; feminists are frequently perceived as “lesbians who want to drag others with them”. This creates fear with regard to collaborating on specific issues and with certain groups, especially when the target is traditionalists or religious people.

However, others hinted that progress, while slow, was occurring: “In the beginning, there were a few small criticisms here and there, but over time things have changed dramatically. Identifying ourselves as feminists have increased our confidence.” The few organisations that reported conducting activities on LGBTQIA+ rights were those that identified as feminist. Multiple organisations did not want to engage in anti-regime protests and movements or on activities deemed as politically antagonistic, for fear of prosecution and of other work being undermined. Several organisations reported that they had engaged on abortion but this had almost always been framed through other entry points, such as rape and unwanted pregnancy.

Regarding spaces and gatherings for women’s rights organisations and feminist movements, many referenced national network coordination platforms, both online and offline, such as the Women of Mali communication space, and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) Mali conferences and Facebook pages. Although some were unaware of such opportunities, multiple organisations referred to international commemorative events such as International Women’s Day and 16 Days of Activism campaigns and marches. Others mentioned academic and school conferences, cultural women’s and girls’ festivals and meetings conducted by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

On professionalisation, almost all organisations noted that this was a good approach, to be backed up through audits and certified reports to partners and the Government, thus requiring high-quality internal organisation. It was additionally noted that NGO status added legitimacy to the otherwise criticised field of women’s rights and feminist movements, and that this legitimacy attracted resourcing. This is especially important given that Malian society has a very negative interpretation of the concept of feminism. The few that have not yet registered as NGOs expressed a desire to do so. However, interviewees also claimed that NGO-isation, often mandatory to access funding, was often long, tedious and expensive. Challenges exist, especially for smaller organisations, in maintaining a physical office and conducting professional auditing.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Below are some of the key achievements and gains shared by the organisations and groups interviewed:
Challenges to women’s rights, driven by the environment and insecurity, have been compounded by Covid-19, which has been labelled a “triple blow”, especially to internally displaced and stateless women and girls in Mali. Mali was one of the last African countries to record an outbreak of the virus (on 25 March 2020). Still, the Government had already put in place international travel restrictions, closed schools and suspended meetings of more than 50 persons. Following the in-country infections, Mali implemented a curfew from 9 pm to 5 am. However, most of these measures were lifted soon after, on 25 July 2020. The lasting consequences of the pandemic include increased reports of GBV, spiralling poverty and higher rates of girls dropping out of school, child labour and child marriage.

Mali has been facing a political crisis since 2012, which has led to a scarcity of funding and has dramatically disrupted the implementation of activities on the ground. The pandemic has added to this challenging situation by negatively affecting the mobilisation of resources. Almost all organisations reported a sudden reduction, cessation or suspension of funding, leading to the postponement or cancelling of planned activities. A common frustrating experience for organisations was that they were aware of the increase in intimate partner violence during the pandemic but were not able to assist survivors.

The organisations reported that a great deal of funding was earmarked for Covid-19 emergency health initiatives, including for personal protective equipment, but women had little access to these resources. Despite Malian women’s and girls’ increased vulnerability because of the crisis, as well as sanctions and growing insecurity compounded by the pandemic, the organisations reported decreased funding availability specific to their needs. Further, emergency government initiatives and funding ignored women in the informal sector and gave little attention to women’s health issues, including maternal and sexual and reproductive health. It was reported that many women giving birth were turned away from health facilities owing to fear of Covid-19 infection. Additionally, international and national travel restrictions and the cancellation of in-person forums reduced opportunities for advocacy and fundraising. Several organisations have not been able to implement any activities since the pandemic.

Those who could continue activities had to pivot to online spaces, with many target populations excluded, given their lack of access to and expertise in technology. The same issues affected the organisations themselves: during the pandemic period, only a few umbrella organisations used Zoom, and the vast majority did not take advantage of this tool. Some turned to organise via WhatsApp. However, some managed to carry out awareness-raising activities on Covid-19 and GBV thanks to their local partners. Those that were able to continue operating said their success owed to flexible...
funding that enabled them to adhere to national health requirements or purchase computers and virtual meeting packages. Positively, those with access to resources reported that this was a productive opportunity to learn new ICT skills.

**FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

There are several types of funding. Funding raised through membership fees is common but, in most cases, insufficient. Other funding is sourced through donors, foundations, sponsors and other partners. The most frequently cited donors are UN agencies and programmes (UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the Spotlight Initiative), bilateral donors and embassies (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the US), the Malian Ministry of the Exterior and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family, the Global Fund for Women, etc.

According to women we interviewed funding in Mali used to be more accessible, and donors were not very demanding. But today donors have become more demanding, especially on linking the management of funds to results. The main shortcomings related to funding cited are lack of knowledge of sources and lack of access to the internet for rural women and their movements and organisations, meaning they cannot access calls for applications or application processes. Regional organisations reported difficulties finding partners because of the security crisis in Mali, especially in the affected regions, and insufficient funds for Malian feminist movements’ and women’s organisations’ agendas. High competition between organisations working on similar areas and limited expertise and skills in project design, grant management and MEL perpetuate a lack of credibility and accountability to donors.

Some believe that donors’ intervention areas are sometimes different from those of NGOs, with the former focusing on one-off activities rather than programmes that promote behavioural or systemic change. Much funding is announced and managed in English, inhibiting applications, free-flowing donor communication and reporting. Organisations reported using automatic online translations but found that significant meaning was often lost in this process. Others employ translators, but this is very costly and often deters them from applying in the first place. Many donors are from anglophone countries, with few from francophone countries; this affects communication and donor priorities, approaches and strategies.

There is a poor perception of donors: organisations interviewed believe that donors need to understand the contexts, specificities and realities of the country, and characterised their requests for documents as “senseless”. Further, it was felt that donors were often not transparent or accountable regarding their management and allocation of grants/funds. Many of those interviewed said that donors were often nepotistic or maintained a small roster of groups and organisations with which they had a pre-existing affinity, and would not assess organisations outside of these tight-knit circles. This was associated mainly with international NGO funders. The example of the Spotlight Initiative was given; it is not known who is accessing this funding and how it is being spent. Donors also propose ready-made products when, ideally, they should listen to the aspirations of organisations that are closer to the target populations. Ultimately, those interviewed wanted a more positive and equitable relationship with donors, to transcend the dualistic funder–implementer dynamic to achieve one that is more collaborative at each project stage.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

- **Common challenges** highlighted by the organisations/movements relate to women’s access to land; women’s participation in political governance; unity, credibility and good governance of organisations and movements; access to law and acquisition of knowledge on legal and judicial systems; empowerment initiatives that are devoid of economic development; the rise of religious fundamentalism;

- **Limited resources** on WPS as well as gender mainstreaming; and establishing a culture of promoting and defending women’s rights and feminist agendas through social transformation that requires a change in behaviour.

- Under Mali’s dominant patriarchal society, some men find it difficult to accept that women have rights that should be respected. Meanwhile, most organisations working on women’s rights are run by men. Some women in civil society believe they do this solely because of the opportunities to make money from donors: “They create structures for the defence of women’s rights when in fact they don’t believe in them; it’s just to benefit from the funds granted by the donors.”

- Women are convinced that the fight for the promotion of women’s rights is a **long-term issue** that requires the commitment of women themselves and a genuine political will to support and accompany national authorities and donors. The political and security crisis and Covid-19 have exacerbated women’s vulnerability, and organisations know that strong and consistent synergy of action is needed to achieve their objectives.

- There have been shortcomings in terms of the implementation of Law 052/2015, which advocates for 30% representation of women in elective and nominative functions. The current National Transitional Council has only 20 women out of 147 councillors.

- Another challenge relates to the **revision of the Persons and Family Code**, which currently sets the legal age of marriage for girls at 16 years, whereas the Maputo Protocol states 18 years.

- Women’s rights organisations in Mali are fighting for a **law against GBV** because there is no law against excision in the current Penal Code. A draft law exists but this has been blocked because religious actors feel it goes against religion and promotes an LGBTQIA+ agenda. Such actors have asked to change the name from GBV to VAWG so that it does not protect LGBTQIA+ people. **Advocacy efforts** are underway at the Commission on the Status of Women and the current National Transitional Council Law Commission.

- On the issue of **female leadership**, those interviewed said that the blockage starts in the family, where little girls are taught that they are inferior; then comes society, which reinforces the teaching. Interviewees believe that the notion of leadership is not well understood in Mali, and that the pioneers of the feminist movement have not been able to draw in the younger generations and that it is time for the older women to make way for the younger ones. Further, it was suggested that it was time to banish sterile competition between women and to establish transparency and alternation within the structures to advance women’s leadership in Mali.
OPPORTUNITIES

The following thematic areas were agreed to be worthwhile and necessary focuses for further investment and action by women’s organisations and feminist movements: WPS; research; SRHR; agri-food; GBV; women’s representation in decision-making bodies; training of out-of-school girls; intergenerational dialogue and feminism; and national, regional, continental and international networking. Also discussed was the creation of mutual saving accounts/banks, especially for rural women.

As a strategy for collaboration between feminist and non-feminist movements, those interviewed highlighted networking; empathy; self-esteem and the esteem of others; mutual acceptance; banishing the spirit of superiority of literate women in relation to nonliterate women; and prioritising coaching to overcome the negative views and interpretations of Malian society with regard to feminism. The creation of a space for synergy by theme and by centre of interest was also proposed and had substantial support.

Finally, collaborating to lobby for the adoption, codification and implementation of the above-discussed draft bills was highlighted as an ongoing opportunity for progressive change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by these experiences and analyses, the following are key recommendations for funders seeking to resource Malian women’s organisations and feminist movements:

- **Give priority to longer-term programming** – preferably three to five years – to achieve longer-term change, rather than funding one-off activities with short-term benefits. “Move away from subsidies towards autonomy” by strengthening institutional capacity.

- Tailor increased funding to **rural women’s unique needs**, movements and organisational capacities.

- **Strengthen support to organisations’ ICT needs**. As part of this, funders could facilitate dialogue to discuss challenges and assess new technical training and equipment needs.

- **Innovate means of communication** so organisations do not rely solely on internet connectivity.

- **Create rapid funds for crisis resilience and response** and ease criteria for such funding, to enable rapid action corresponding to the developing needs of communities in crisis.
• Dedicate human resources funding and invest in women’s transformative leadership and project management training.

• **Increase flexibility and adaptability of funding**, listening to the needs and priorities of those on the ground. The organisations interviewed particularly targeted this recommendation towards embassies and bilateral initiatives, also asking them to be more realistic in their project timelines and expected outcomes.

• Put in place **mechanisms to support activists**, organisations and movements to network.

• Advocate for **more funding** for women’s rights in Mali.

• **Fund actions to protect women’s rights defenders and feminists**.

• Contribute to the renewal of women’s and feminist movements by supporting youth organisations, which do not always work with donors. Further, **simplify and increase the accessibility of application systems** for younger organisations and those predominantly made up of nonliterate persons, especially regarding the complex and expensive required documents.

• **Approach associations directly** and support more innovative and creative projects as well as civil society organisations that identify as feminist.
BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Since the country’s independence on 28 November 1960, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania’s political system has been characterised as “hyper-presidential”, whereby the president holds most of the power. However, following the 2018 election, for the first time since independence was declared, Mauritania witnessed a peaceful and institutionalised presidential transition. Nevertheless, the process was still heavily criticised, in particular because no international observers were allowed. The Government is implementing its Expanded Priority Programme, which integrates the Covid-19 response plan and focuses on resilient recovery. The Mauritanian legal system is based on secular and Islamic elements, and the Constitution and all other legal frameworks are imbued with Sharia law.

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Article 1 of Mauritania’s Constitution stipulates, “The Republic ensures all its citizens equality before the law, without distinction as to origin, race, sex or social condition.” Article 15 guarantees the right to property (paragraph 1) and the right to inheritance (paragraph 2) for all citizens without distinction.

Mauritania ratified CEDAW in 2001 alongside several reservations, whereby only those articles that comply with Sharia law and the Mauritanian Constitution would be applied, leading to a discrepancy between national laws and the international treaty. Mauritania ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2005 and submitted its most recent state report in 2016.

Mauritanian women have the right to vote and are eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, including the Office of the President of the Republic, the National Assembly, the Senate and municipal councils. The Mauritanian Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action highlights that, “These instruments were reinforced by the 2006 legislation on promoting the involvement of women in decision-making processes. This legislation imposed a quota of 20% for the representation of women on each municipal and legislative list.” Law 2012-029 amended the Organic Law on the Election of Members of the National Assembly to stipulate that “twenty seats are reserved for women candidates running in a single nationwide list” and Article 6 of the same law encourages women’s political participation by financially incentivising political parties that elect more women than the quota.

There are 31 women currently holding seats in the National Assembly, out of a total of 153 seats, thus meeting the established quota of 20%.

The principle of equality, as enshrined in the Constitution, is restated in all legislative texts (labour, trade, investment, land tenure, etc.). The Personal Status Code sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls. It articulates the right of a wife to “continue one’s studies and..."
to engage in professional activities”. Further, Mauritania maintains the Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity Strategy 2016–2030 on women’s productive and economic rights, which plans explicitly for reducing poverty and increasing opportunities for women. The country legislates that women should be provided with 14 weeks of maternity leave and sustain a training centre for women’s empowerment. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and Family has also developed, among others, the National Strategy for the Promotion of Women, the National Family Policy, the National Strategy to Eliminate FGM/C, the National Action Plan for Women in Rural Areas and the National Strategy on Gender Mainstreaming.

Alongside these measures, following two days of debate led by the Forum for Islamic Thought and Cultural Dialogue in the capital Nouakchott in 2010, a fatwa (a Muslim jurisconsult opinion) was pronounced at the national and sub-regional levels, encouraging the abandoning of FGM/C practices. The country also maintains regional and departmental committees in areas with high FGM/C prevalence and a unit to combat GBV, including FGM/C.

Under the Penal Code of 1983, Article 308 (“Act Against Nature”), same-sex sexual activity is criminalised for men and women and carries a maximum penalty of death by stoning; however, the state operates a de facto moratorium on its use, and capital punishment has not been carried out since 1987.

**CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

The Mauritanian Government highlights that FGM/C continues to be practised on young girls and that “Child marriages are consummated before the age of majority, which contributes to the low level of education, and early pregnancies aggravate difficulties during delivery.” The state also notes the harmful practice of force-feeding, whereby, “Female children and adolescents are forced to eat excessively so that they will gain weight and become obese.”

Mauritania is located in one of the most precarious environments in the world: the Sahel. In addition to being one of the poorest countries globally, with only 0.5% arable land and an economy dependent on agriculture, Mauritania’s extremely advanced desertification means that the impacts of climate change are particularly severe. Regarding subsequent food insecurity, women and children are reported to be the most vulnerable. Men herders must now travel further to source food and water, and women pastoralists are taking on more responsibilities – but with little recognition. As Aminetou Mint Maouloud, who started the country’s first association of women herders in 2014, states, “Whether it’s making butter from cow milk, fetching wood, managing the household’s finances or tending to ill animals, it all comes down to women…but [women] won’t get any credit for it.”

Lastly, in its most recent State Report on the Maputo Protocol, Mauritania identifies “ownership by women of the contents of legal human rights instruments in general and women’s rights in particular” and “the lack of human and financial resources of institutions and organisations defending human rights in general and women’s rights in particular” as challenges to the treaty’s implementation.

**THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Among the interviewed organisations, the youngest is three years old and the two oldest ones are 25 years old. More than half of the organisations are led by one or more women; over a third describe themselves as “women’s associations” without further specification; and a small number specify that they are composed of both women and men. Regarding their relationship to feminism, organisations did not wish to be divided between those who identified and those that did not identify as feminist.
but argued that, regardless of labels, they were all fighting for similar goals. They did not want such a division to disrupt their efforts towards harmonisation and inclusive dialogue. Some organisations work with continental and global networks.

**ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING**

According to the interviewed organisations, alliances and movements are challenging to create; those that exist are fragile, unproductive and often non-functional. There was said to be a lack of seriousness and transparency on the part of many organisations, reinforced by management, coordination and leadership problems. Organisations thus distrust each other, making networking difficult. The leading cause of failure is reportedly lack of resources, both financial and human, and skills. Some partnerships do exist at the community level but are difficult to sustain because of lack of ownership and overreliance on one or two coordinating bodies. Differences in principles and values also apparently undermine potential relationships.

However, all the respondents were open to collaboration. Some organisations have managed to overcome the barriers, for example through clear and direct communication, facilitated by social networks such as WhatsApp, or by collaborating on an ad-hoc basis only. Others encourage collaboration with young organisations around common goals.

Mindset changes, albeit relatively minimal, and awareness campaigns are encouraging women’s and girls’ participation in movements but rates remain low. Lack of funds makes it difficult to mobilise members, as many people cannot afford to volunteer. Socio-cultural and religious pressures are another barrier. As Mauritanian society is strongly anchored in patriarchal ideals, the struggle for women’s rights and, especially, feminism is seen negatively. In addition, many women are not aware of their rights, pointing to the strong need for continued schooling and awareness-raising among girls. On the other hand, some argue that women and girls are easily mobilised and participate actively in organisations. A minority said they were active but often disappointed by the lack of results.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

The priority areas of work are advocating, sensitising and lobbying for gender justice and equality; children and youth rights and issues; education of girls and women; health and SRHR, particularly maternal health; women’s political participation; the fight against GBV/VAWG and harmful practices, including FGM/C and forced marriage; economic and community empowerment; WPS; alliance- and movement-building; supporting rural women and agriculture; migration, refugees and IDPs; food security; the media; environment and climate change; and counselling.

The majority of the organisations work with ethnic minority or indigenous groups. Less than half work with “professional or highly educated” groups and movements. Only a few work with LGBTQIA+ rights organisations and people. According to the organisations interviewed, this is because of a lack of societal and religious acceptance and legal prohibitions in this domain.

Most organisations are involved in building and organising cross-sectoral movements. These are based on the exchange of experiences, expertise and advice, as well as awareness-raising campaigns. Other organisations engage by setting up referral procedures to other organisations that may be more suitable in response to some types of need.

Most of the organisations that identify as feminist reported facing adverse reactions to their status as feminist, particularly criticism and persecution for being “anti-values” and “Islam-defying”. This stigmatisation can go as far as social isolation and the sending of death threats. On the other hand,
other organisations felt that being feminist brought more determination and opened more doors professionally.

Most organisations have issues that they do not touch. The main issues mentioned were abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights, as these are considered contrary to religion and the law or are not accepted by society. However, a small percentage of those interviewed said they did engage on LGBTQIA+ rights issues.

The three most used strategies are advocacy, community development and direct action, mainly through awareness-raising, training and one-off activities.\(^{154}\)

Most respondents either do not have knowledge of key spaces for girls’, women’s rights’ and feminist organisations and movements in the country, or felt that no such spaces existed. However, several general spaces were mentioned, including online platforms, shelters for victims, spaces used by networks of women’s organisations and school youth clubs.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

NGO-isation is seen as mandatory to access funding. Less than half of the respondents indicated a positive effect, saying that NGO-isation enabled them to be better structured and increased their capacity to mobilise participants and funds and to gain autonomy. Also, public services seem to listen more and provide more support to these organisations. This allows them more visibility and means they have greater impact and can achieve the desired changes more quickly and effectively. For the remaining majority, NGO-isation has a negative effect, with the most significant barrier being funders’ cumbersome administrative procedures, which are even less accessible than before. In particular, the need for legal recognition, mentioned by several organisations, is problematic. This directly affects the funding of organisations, which, in turn, leads to difficulties mobilising members and achieving goals. Meanwhile, not all organisations can NGO-ise, especially those working on issues that are taboo in the country.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Notable achievements of women’s rights groups and activists centre around advocacy efforts are as follows:

- Advocacy for a specific month on gender-based violence: a proposed law, proposed to the ministry in charge but still not voted.
- Advocacy to obtain a law for a 20% quota of women’s representation on elective lists.
- Advocacy for the lifting of reservations of Article 16 (Marriage and family life) and Article 13(a) (the right to family benefits) of CEDAW.
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic and health crisis have led to a significant economic decline in Mauritania. In March 2020, the Government imposed a night curfew (from 8 pm to 6 am), closed schools, implemented internal travel restrictions and closed the international airport. Women were reportedly largely excluded from consultations regarding the containment measures, and the curfew disproportionately affected women working in the informal and restaurant sectors. Additionally, throughout the health sector, women’s health issues were deprioritised. All measures have been lifted since October 2021.

Organisations mentioned having had to reduce or even suspend activities, as funding stopped at least partially, and highlighted a forced decrease in human mobilisation because of the sanitary restrictions. Many structures, such as victims’ shelters, had to close. Consequently, assets and achievements were reduced, and they witnessed significant delay in their projects and objectives. Organisations had to shift towards remote, virtual work and increase the utilisation of social media, which was reportedly a big learning curve; however, they persisted through these challenges, noting that, “Women’s rights issues cannot wait.”

Funders must consider that some organisations, by their very nature, cannot stop working regardless of the context – such as organisations for victims of violence. On this point, respondents stressed the need for funders to be aware of the reality on the ground: for instance, during the pandemic, rates of divorce and violence increased sharply and, hence, so did the need for assistance from specialised organisations. Also, it is essential to be aware that organisations have an even greater need for funds so they can adapt their activities in such periods. Accordingly, to better support women’s movements, funders need to ensure the continuity of organisations’ activities, including by carrying on providing funding, setting up emergency funds and strengthening partnerships. According to respondents, organisations also need logistical support, which can be achieved by facilitating training and effective communication with those working on the ground. Last but not least, donors must ease procedures for accessing funds, especially in times of crisis.

FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Organisations fund their work and activism through membership fees, volunteers, bilateral sources, private financing and donations, mainly because their work is often viewed negatively, discouraging funders and local public agencies from supporting them. The primary funding sources are the EU, the French Embassy, UNFPA and Save the Children.

The organisations interviewed would like donors and other funding institutions to specialise in or at least set up specific funds for women’s rights and empowerment. They also felt it would be beneficial if funders encouraged sustainable collaborations and partnerships between organisations, to enable expansion beyond the donor–implementor power binary. Furthermore, the organisations emphasised the need, demonstrated by the pandemic, for funders to ensure continuity of funding even in times of crisis, especially when it comes to issues such as violence.

The high-demand processes involved in accessing funding are reportedly consistent regardless of the size of the grant or whether the funder is national or international. Administrative procedures and required documentation are complicated and take a heavy toll on those on the ground; the auditing is “killing them”. Smaller organisations often go through larger, international, organisations to receive funding, in a form of sub-contracting. International organisations are more consistently successful
in attaining funding, and divide the resources among the smaller, national, organisations, which lose autonomy, status and influence.

Often, funding is not consistent, and does not take into account the human and technical resources needed for organisations to function and achieve their objectives, such as having internet access. The scarcity of local funding was also highlighted.

Respondents were divided regarding their relationship with funders: half feel they have a mutually satisfying relationship, based on transparency, communication and results, with both parties gaining experience and exchanging good practices. The other half sees these relationships in a negative light. For them, donors lack seriousness and respect. They do not know the realities of the field, and blindly follow their own agenda, which is often political: the process is highly politicised and corrupt. This leads funders to favour organisations with a similar political orientation. Additionally, according to respondents, as feminism and feminists are stigmatised, there are few funders for feminist organisations.

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**CHALLENGES**

In addition to the challenges caused by Covid-19, the most significant challenges facing women’s rights organisations include:

- The need to **become independent**, which will be possible only if the above-mentioned challenges in accessing financial resources are addressed as well as the need for autonomy to ensure the continuation and sustainability of their actions.

- **Restrictions on freedoms and social, political and religious paradigms.**

- Mauritania’s **conservative state and government mean that it is difficult to attract donors**, and make it very challenging for women’s rights organisations to advance a progressive agenda.

- Heads of organisations, collectives and movements are often **untrained in financial and organisational management and leadership**. This is because many enter the movement motivated by a particular injustice or passion rather than with intentions of following a human rights career. This is not necessarily a negative factor but it means that many do not have formal training, which becomes necessary as the organisation or network grows.

- There is **limited capacity and knowledge among organisations and activists regarding relevant international and domestic rights instruments** and how to utilise or engage with them.

- Networks and collectives are often made up of and led by volunteers with **limited time and resources**. Those who have formed a network tend to do so around a particular, urgent, issue. These networks require reinforced capacity. Meanwhile, because of the diversity of work areas and expectations, it can reportedly be challenging to form partnerships.

- Currently, **access to justice** is not free, and **discrimination** is common against the categories of people most marginalised by society, who are also most at risk of being victims of many types of violence. Improved access to justice would also involve making legal texts understandable by everyone.
**OPPORTUNITIES**

As attitudes are changing in a positive direction regarding these issues and the country is increasingly committing to the defence of women, as seen with the establishment of the Gender Equality Observatory in 2021\textsuperscript{157}, women are becoming more aware of their importance. This means that opportunities exist to advance the leadership of women and girls in the country.

The areas and issues needing the most urgent support and investment are as follows:

- **Illiteracy**
- **SRHR & Services**
- **Economic Empowerment**
- **Rural Girls' Access to Education**
- **Climate Change**
- **Covid-19 ongoing Food Crisis**
- **Accessibility of Justice for All**
- **Women's Political Participation & Decision-making**

It was felt that advancing SRHR would be possible only if, at the same time, women could participate effectively and actively in political and other decision-making mechanisms. Additionally, adopting and implementing the GBV draft law presents a significant opportunity. Those interviewed expressed a strong desire to be involved in this process and in building infrastructure to protect survivors of violence.

Continuous education of young girls, particularly in rural areas, where the school dropout rate is highest, is another urgent matter, and should include the provision of education, training and guidance on reproductive health.

Other urgent issues include the fight against climate change, addressing the food crisis caused by Covid-19 and making access to justice possible for all.

During the interviews, organisations mentioned several strategies and opportunities to strengthen the movement. First, it will be vital to create a network of all women’s organisations and of spaces dedicated to these organisations. This will encourage collaboration between organisations, allowing for a more inclusive and intersectional fight. However, several organisations felt that none of this would be possible if a consensus was not first reached on what “feminism” is and, above all, “Mauritanian feminism”.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Funders should work together with **existing organisations and movements** to provide further attention to urgent matters in Mauritania. As part of this, funders could move beyond the current model of only financing international organisations to work directly with domestic women’s rights organisations.

- **Open annual support funds** for women-led organisations in Mauritania.
- **Fight corruption and promote access to finance** for women and girls.

- **Lighten administrative procedures** and make application call requirements less demanding.

- **Maintain an honest and transparent dialogue between organisations and funders**, with a greater voice for the former. This would allow funders to be aware of the realities on the ground and to have a better vision of the needs of organisations. As part of this, funders should seek to fund organisations’ self-identified needs and areas of work, asking, “Where can we help you?” rather than saying, “This is what we think should be done.”

- **Ensure donor requirements match organisations’ capacity.** Donors should carry out further investigation and research to identify effective organisations and support them.

- Establish a **platform listing the different funding opportunities available**, as well as a “directory” of all the organisations in the country or region, to make it easier to set up partnerships and alliances. Coupled with this, sharing good practices in accessing funding through training, for example, could address many of the gaps.

- **Move away from restrictive, short-term projects** towards strengthening core internal capacities to enhance the sustainability of those on the ground. Ideally, funding timeliness would be at least three to four years.

- **Increase the use of French and other domestic languages** at all stages of grants and funding.
**BACKGROUND/CONTEXT**

After its independence from France in 1960, Niger was characterised by severe droughts and periods of political instability, which included a rebellion in 1990. On 13 May 1991, Nigerien women carried out a historic march, organised to protest the set-up of the Preparatory Committee of the National Conference, coordinating the transition and peace processes, on which no woman was sitting. The Committee was reconstituted as soon as the march was over, with women integrated into it. This peaceful march gave rise to National Women’s Day, now celebrated every 13 May in Niger, and represented the start point of the boom in women’s organisations in Niger. A new constitution, approved via referendum in 2010 and amended in 2017, was designed to curb political insurrections and promote democratic civilian rule. The 2021 election was seen as the “first democratic transfer of power since independence”.

**OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS**

The Constitution of Niger, in its Article 8, “assures to all equality before the law without distinction of sex, [or] of social, racial, ethnic or religious origin”. It is further stipulated (Art. 22) that the state should eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, young girls and people living with disabilities. Its further assures them an equal representation within public bodies.

Niger acceded to CEDAW in 1999 with reservations. The reservations presented concern Article 2 (d) and (f); Article 5 (a); Article 15, paragraph 4; Article 16, paragraph 1(c), (e) and (g); and Article 29 – largely relating to socio-cultural norms and the rights of married women. Niger signed the Maputo Protocol on 6 July 2004 but is yet to ratify it, making it the only country in West Africa that has not ratified the Protocol.

In addition to the commitment to equal representation stipulated in the Constitution, following women’s mobilisation to push for, draft and adopt a quota law, Article 3 of Law 2000/08 established a quota system for elected offices. The quota law mandated the inclusion of both sexes on candidate lists at the national and sub-national levels and that the proportion of elected candidates of either sex should not be less than 10%. This law was first amended in 2014 bringing the quota from 10 to 15% for elective offices and from 15 to 25% for appointed positions. In 2019, the same law was revised to increase the quota for elective positions from 15 to 25% and from 25 to 30% for the appointed position in the Government.

As of May 2022, Niger is ranked 88th in the world for representation of women in parliament, with women making up 25.9% of its National Assembly. Its youngest member of parliament (24 years) is a woman named Kaila Rabi Maman. There is a specialised women’s caucus, the Niger Network.
of Parliamentarians on Gender Issues, which deals with establishing quotas and the law on VAWG. Niger also has a fund to support female political candidates and increase women’s representation.

The Civil Code of 1993 sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 15 and for boys at 18. Around 28% of girls are married by the age of 15 and 76% by 18. Meanwhile, discrepancies between civil and traditional marriage law present a barrier to changing behaviour and attitudes towards child marriage. While Niger attempted to reform the discriminatory provisions in its Family Code in 2011, it has faced challenges in adopting this as a result of the strong beliefs held in certain communities. Niger outlawed and criminalised FGM/C in 2003 and has established a Nigerien Committee on Traditional Practices, which says the law has been largely successful, with FGM/C now having a 2% prevalence rate.

**CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

Intimate partner violence is an ongoing challenge within Niger; in 2021, around 12.9% of women aged 15–49 reported being subject to physical and sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Niger has one of the highest rates in the world of adolescent pregnancy and the highest rate of child marriage.

While same-sex sexual activity is not illegal in Niger, nor are there censorship laws restricting conversations on LGBTQIA+ topics, stigma persists: 91.5% of the surveyed population stated that they would “really hate” having a homosexual as a neighbour. Additionally, the Nigerien Penal Code states that the legal age for consensual sexual relations for heterosexuals differs from that of same-sex persons, at 13 and 21, respectively, referring to same-sex activity as “an indecent act or an act against nature” and maintaining differing penalties. Same-sex marriage is not yet legal, the right to legally change one’s gender is legally ambiguous, there is no government mention of gender outside of the gender binary and there are no protections against LGBTQIA+ discrimination.

More than 80% of Niger’s population depends on agriculture, and these populations are suffering from the effects of climate change; droughts and the scarcity of natural resources have created a displaced population of 2 million, approximately 8% of the population. Niger is situated within the Sahel region, where the temperature is rising 1.5 times faster than in the rest of the world. Combining this with conflict in neighbouring Mali and Nigeria, Niger is experiencing an “internal displacement and refugee crisis”. As farmable land becomes more crowded, women are increasingly being excluded as a result of poorly enforced legislation and cultural practices such as kubli, whereby, “Landless young women live in seclusion and can only leave their homes with the permission of their husband.” This practice is spreading from the wealthier to poorer households and inhibiting women’s economic development and food security.

**THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Many organisations are led by women, even if they use the services of men within their ranks. Organisations that are also run by men, such as the National Youth Council of Niger, have adopted a model that allows women to be represented, to the same degree as men, in decision-making bodies (the one-man, one-woman system). Many organisations are roughly 10 years old; a few have been founded more recently, less than three years ago. The oldest of the organisations interviewed is the Coordination of Niger Women’s NGOs and Associations (CONGAFEN), which has been operating for 30 years; some other organisations were established soon after.
Most organisations operate nationally, being based in Niamey, the capital, and working in various regions.

**ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING**

Niger has umbrella organisations such as CONGAFEN. There are also women’s networks, particularly for peace, and all these structures work on all issues related to women.

Regarding the strength of women’s movements, the trend in Niger is downwards, because of a “lack of female solidarity”, which complicates the establishment of working synergies. This was a problem almost all organisations reported. Despite the existence of networks, national organisations tend to work in silos owing to a lack of trust, competition for the minimal funding available and lack of leadership in uniting the groups. Further, limited initiative and leadership relating to financial management, organisational capacity and advocacy minimise the success of collaborations. Funders reportedly exacerbate these issues by largely funding individual organisations rather than collectives, dis/incentivising collaboration. Those who attempt to build and coordinate alliances are mostly volunteers, who burn out, then the cycle begins again; this high turnover rate limits the potential for ongoing and consistent growth.

Related to this are difficulties in motivating the next generation to join movements, given the few entry points and the limited to no salaried positions available after girls finish studying. Instead, youth seek out careers with international NGOs that can afford them. There is also sometimes a lack of commitment among young women, and the few who join associations are in a hurry to advance and “to get rich”. All this creates generational clashes, and has led to the creation of several associations, managed solely by young girls, so they too can be present on the national scene for the defence of girls and women’s rights. Meanwhile, young feminists pointed out that some associations were being managed as “private property”.

The few interviewees who offered a contrasting, more positive, experience of alliance-building stated that working with those with overlapping values and missions had been a successful approach.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

Most of the organisations interviewed are involved in advocacy activities to fight against all forms of violence and discrimination against women. Community involvement is one of the areas most targeted by Nigerien organisations. Other areas of work include economic empowerment; women’s political participation and democracy efforts; education of girls and women; rights of children and youth; rural women and agriculture; environment and climate change; alliance- and movement-building; food security; WPS; health and SRHR; legal aid; humanitarian action; research; the media; and counselling.

Niger is a Sahelian Muslim country that has suffered from numerous terrorist attacks, including the Boko Haram attacks, which began in 2015. These attacks have caused continued impoverishment in villages, where women and youth make up the majority of the population. Many organisations have sprung up to assist these women, mainly regarding agriculture and market gardening, as well as many other income-generating activities. Thus, several of the organisations interviewed are represented throughout Niger.

There appear to be two types of NGO in Niger that consider themselves feminist. There are those that explicitly assume their role and, depending on the socio-cultural context, try to demonstrate the bravery of women and their added value in Nigerien society. The second category, which could
perhaps be classed as “feminist-adjacent”, work to advance women’s rights but do not try to shake up the pre-established order of society. No organisations reported working on LGBTQIA+ issues or having LGBTQIA+ staff.

A good 10 of the organisations are well organised, with three-year strategic plans with defined axes, covering the personal development of members and advisory support.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS**

NGO-isation was viewed as challenging but necessary to access resources. Respondents affirmed that registering was very effective for fundraising as it was perceived as bestowing legitimacy. However, the lengthy registration process is fraught with difficulties and is especially tough for younger organisations that cannot resource the required physical office and paid staff. Subsequently, many operate without permits.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

In terms of achievements on the ground, respondents highlighted the following:

- **Introduction of the legislative article on sexual harassment.**
- **Criminalisation of rape.**
- **Drafted the law on the quota, with 30% for nominative posts and 25% for elective positions.**
- **SOS Femmes et Enfants Victimes de Violence Familiale winning the first ever International Gender Equality Prize (2017) which was used to build a large centre for the care of GBV survivors.**

**IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

The outbreak of the pandemic has put further pressure on the overwhelming and underfunded health and social care system in Niger.174

Domestic containment measures were relatively short-lived compared with in neighbouring countries and even internationally. School closures went on till November 2020 but international travel restrictions were only relaxed in April of 2022. Limited reporting on Covid-19 in the country hampered knowledge production and awareness measures.

According to the Nigerien women interviewed, Covid-19 has had both inhibiting and progressive impacts on women’s organisations and feminist movements. While temporary measures blocked physical movement, this resulted in some organisations improving their performance in terms of the use of technology and working remotely. Many developed e-working capabilities, equipping
themselves with Wi-Fi and computers and training their members in using new tools such as Zoom. Today, having made the best out of the challenging situation, many now work better with ICTs. It was mainly young women who were instrumental in teaching these skills and supporting organisations to continue.

Unfortunately, organisations reported that much of their funding was redirected towards health and Covid-19-dedicated initiatives, which were not necessary gender-inclusive. Additionally, funding from the Government was re-prioritised. Women were largely forgotten in these social protection measures, as they are very often to be found in the informal sector.

Below are some recommendations on how donors can better respond to the impacts of Covid-19:

- **Increase funding** and support to innovation for women in agriculture, as they have been particularly affected by the pandemic.
- **Strengthen the capacity of NGOs** to facilitate online work and use technology.
- **Increase the flexibility and inclusivity of funding**, supporting the administration process and innovating with alternative application formats to complex documents.
- **Contextualise funding** to Niger, especially taking into consideration high international and domestic transport costs.

### FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Organisations and movements finance their activities through membership fees and independent fundraising. However, such funding is difficult to obtain and, again, ongoing management costs subsume a large share of these resources. Local branches often manage to function without the help of the national branch by applying to local calls for projects.

Organisations highlighted a tightening in the conditions of calls for projects, which has eliminated many from the competition. These conditions include the need for a large number of complex documents, such as three years of audited accounts, which are far beyond organisations’ budgets. This is combined with a slow disbursement procedure and the exclusivity of networks and funders, which prioritise funding towards acquaintances, with no consideration given to other organisations. Meanwhile, most organisations stressed that available grants did not always correspond to communities’ actual needs and lived realities. They believe that funders are often resistant to adapting their funding. These factors culminate in poor perceptions of donors, who are seen as not thinking or functioning beyond restrictive project norms. The most common example, shared by all organisations, is of funders asking organisations to talk about issues that are not relevant to them, particularly issues that are not accepted in Nigerien society, such as those related to the LGBTQIA+ and gender-nonconforming persons, or abortion.

There is also a perception that funders prioritise international organisations with an office or existing projects within Niger and rarely seek out and support domestic organisations. Multiple interviewees also reported poor communication with donors, who had been slow to respond or provide feedback and had given unclear application expectations and outlines. Others highlighted that grant budgets did not cater sufficiently for operational costs, limiting the sustainability of projects and organisations themselves.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

- The most significant challenge identified across the organisations and movements was **minimal financial support**. Support is inconsistent and usually short in term (six months to a year), yet donors simultaneously expect unrealistic outcomes within these timeframes. Organisations have already communicated this with donors, to no avail. This funding timeline is unsustainable for in-country actors, who would prefer a longer-term, three- to five-year, project timeline with yearly monitoring.

- **Movements and organisations feel unheard** by funders, who impose pre-established projects and activities without consulting those on the ground and refuse to adapt initiatives and targets to the actual context and target populations’ lived realities. Subsequently, grantees and applicants find that they are the ones who must bend to the will of the donor. The most common example was of donors pushing for work on LGBTQIA+ issues, putting activists and organisation team members at risk, with the real threat of arrest in addition to social threats.

- Such inflexible international donor approaches have “an unintended consequence of providing fodder to conservative religious activists”, who frame international women’s rights treaties as “foreign impositions”.

- **Restrictions on women’s voice and agency** exist because of the conservative and patriarchal nature of Nigerien society. These barriers inhibit the younger generations and women from getting their foot in the door and contributing their valuable skills and expertise. Organisations must make strategic alliances with men, have a pool male resource person and prioritise HeForShe approaches, all while defending feminism.

- Further, given the **scarcity of resources**, women’s organisations compete in all the funded areas, meaning that, “Every organisation does everything.” Organisations are spread too thinly rather than becoming experts on a few issues. This leads to internal conflict in their agendas.

OPPORTUNITIES

On the question of current and urgent opportunities for advancing women’s leadership in Niger, the organisations replied that there was real work to be done upstream, particularly by the Nigerien state itself – namely, the Nigerien state has not acceded to the Maputo Protocol. While it has acceded to CEDAW, this has been with significant reservations, which have emptied the treaty of its substance. “It is as if Niger does not align itself with other nations that commit themselves body and soul to promote women’s rights.” Meanwhile, the law on the political quota is not always respected. The issue of women’s access to justice was also mentioned. Meanwhile, there was a demand that the state grant a substantial budget to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which is currently one of the poorest departments of the Government. “As long as this ministry is not financially supported, there will always be a blockage because we cannot always rely on partners; they cannot do everything.”

Insecurity has turned everything upside down in Niger. The following areas need urgent funding for consistent support to women:
Nigerien women also envision a more productive funding landscape by abandoning one-off activities in favour of longer-term programming. “The programme approach makes it possible to carry out work during three to five years to be able to measure the real impact of the activities on the ground.” Additionally, if funders transform their approach towards in-country movements and organisations, from being top-down and authoritative in nature to reflecting more equitable partnerships and collaborations, much could be achieved.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Facilitate intergenerational dialogue** to map all barriers and root causes to identify a clear way forward. Additionally, invest in youth-led movements through intergenerational organisational coaching and mentoring and the creation of learning exchange frameworks.

- **Support structures to increase their use of modern media** for advocacy purposes.

- **Foster diverse women’s leadership and training.**

- **Increase access to consistent financing** with longer timelines and more realistic budgets and expectations.

- **Consider the reality on the ground** (cultural, religious and social). Funders must not “blanket impose their own agendas but partner with in-country actors to determine safer methods of operation”.

- **Strengthen institutional and technical organisational capacity** through resourcing and organisational training in weaker areas such as financial administration, project management and advocacy. Interviewees often mentioned wanting to be trained explicitly in the “theory of transformational leadership”.

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Mapping of Women’s Groups and Feminist Organisations in Francophone West Africa

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SENEGAL

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Senegal became a republic in 1958 and gained independence from France in 1960. With uninterrupted civilian rule since independence, the country’s long history of regular elections and peaceful transitions has fostered a vibrant and dynamic society. As a stable democracy, Senegal is considered an exception in a region plagued by military coups, civil wars and ethnic conflict. This freedom has facilitated the gradual advancement of women’s rights in the country. Notably, in 1945, Senegal granted women the right to vote and stand for elections, one of the first countries to do so.176

OVERVIEW OF LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS

The 2001 Constitution of Senegal guarantees equality before the law (Art. 1) and prohibits discrimination in, for example, employment and remuneration (Art. 25).177 It also prohibits forced marriage (Art. 18) and guarantees matrimonial equality (Art. 19). Concerning harmful practices, the Constitution provides that each individual has the right to protection against all physical mutilations (Art. 7).

Senegal ratified CEDAW in 1985 and the Maputo Protocol in 2005. Notably, Senegal has translated the Maputo Protocol into the country’s main languages, making it widely accessible. Regarding equal representation in politics, Law 2012-01 of 2012 mandates parity on all candidate lists for the general elections.178 Currently, women hold 42.7% of seats in parliament.179 Since adoption of the law, women’s representation has increased, although it falls short of parity.

The situation of women and girls has improved in Senegal in recent decades with the adoption of laws and policies to strengthen their rights. The 2005 Law in Relation to Reproductive Health recognises reproductive health as a “fundamental and universal right guaranteed to all individuals without discrimination based on age, sex, wealth, religion, race, ethnicity, matrimonial situation or any other situation”.180 Progress in protecting women and girls against rape and paedophilia after years of silence and its categorisation as a minor offence came in 2020 through the introduction of a new law that brought stricter penalties for such crimes.181 To combat and eliminate VAWG and harmful practices, Senegal has adopted policies such as the Second National Action Plan for the Abandon of Female Genital Mutilation 2010–2015. The National Action Plan on Combating Gender-Based Violence, adopted in 2015, categorises child marriage as GBV.182

CHALLENGES IN THE REALISATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

Socio-cultural and legal constraints, including customary law, present barriers to fully realising gender quality and women’s empowerment. The 1989 Family Code sets the legal age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys; however, 29% of girls are married before 18 and 8% before age 15.183 FGM/C
is prohibited under the Penal Code and is a criminal offence but about 25% of girls and women aged 15–49 years have been subjected to the practice. Another barrier to gender equality in Senegal is the perpetuation of VAWG. About 27% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence. While the law prohibits this, doubt has been cast on its applicability, given the entrenched rape culture and the fact that GBV appears as pervasive as ever, with victim-blaming typifying low- and high-profile cases. Active campaigns by conservative NGOs to limit abortion rights have turned public opinion against feminist activists and effectively made the advancement of legal change much harder.

While it is not legal to identify as LGBTQIA+, there are no laws that censor the discussion or the promotion of LGBTQIA+ rights. Senegal is a deeply conservative Muslim nation. Homosexuality is prohibited under the Penal Code and same-sex activities are punishable by up to five years in prison. However, Senegal’s president has stressed that LGBTQIA+ people are not ostracised. Instead, the ban merely reflects cultural norms. The Government has, for this reason, repeatedly ruled out legalising LGBTQIA+ identification.

For Senegal, like many countries in the Sahel region, the effects of climate change have become a reality, with increased desertification and land degradation and reduced access to water. Women especially feel the impacts. Senegalese women comprise 70% of the agricultural workforce and are responsible for producing 80% of the yield. Their exposure to the most extreme conditions of poverty owing to droughts compels them to be more adaptive and innovative as they combat the consequences of climate change. Women’s organisations have contributed to these efforts by providing means of adapting and growing.

**THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Most Senegalese organisations interviewed are run by women, mostly intellectuals. Of these, two are led by young women. In some organisations, young women are part of the leadership. In a few cases, men have created organisations to defend women’s rights that operate in Dakar and the regions. All the organisations interviewed work at the national level, the majority in Dakar and one each in Kaolack and Thiès. The oldest organisation has been active for more than 20 years and the youngest for two years.

**ALLIANCE- AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING**

The organisations participating in the study perceive alliance- and movement-building as essential. They have united in coalitions of feminists and women’s rights organisations to fight against cultural and religious restrictions and ensure equal opportunities. They also work together to defend the rights of girls and women, specifically on issues such as the right to abortion, child marriage, child exploitation and FGM/C.

Among the benefits of working in consortia, the participants cited exchange of information and a more significant impact on advocacy at higher levels. They noted that women’s rights organisations had won essential fights thanks to working together in consortia. Consortia are also increasingly formed in response to calls from donors. One organisation said it was also working to consolidate a large sub-regional network against VAWG together with the Association of African Jurists.

Regarding issues with the construction of alliances and movements, the organisations differed in their views. Some said they had not experienced any difficulties, generally because they knew one another, were members of the same collectives, networks and platforms and collaborated on projects. Others had experienced problems related to funding, governance, leadership, goals and objectives.
Obstacles concerning alliance- and movement-building had been overcome by strengthening synergy of action with partner organisations to involve them more in implementation, and by consolidating communication in technical meetings for the preparation of activities.

Among the groups the organisations said they worked or collaborated with were domestic workers, sex workers, young girls and young women, women in the private and public sectors, rural women, women in academia, women and groups with disabilities, female religious and/or cultural leaders and women from ethnic minority and indigenous groups. Two organisations said they also worked with LGBTQIA+/gender-nonconforming individuals and/or groups. Some rely on the participation of men as they perceive their inclusion as indispensable. Men who participate are referred to as “HeForShe”.

When it comes to the participation of young girls and women, their level of involvement depends on the activity, one organisation noted. Another said the participation of girls and young women in movements was motivated by their commitment to defend their rights and contributions to changing mentalities.

Some expressed an interest in working with organisations outside of the FWA region. They believe partnerships with these organisations will allow for the diversification of methods and intervention strategies. Partnering with organisations outside FWA on issues such as VAWG, FGM/C and child marriage will increase understanding of the issues and of how others work to find solutions. Among the benefits of these partnerships, organisations cited professional support, the pooling of financial resources and opportunities to strengthen synergies of action.

**AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES**

The interviews revealed that many organisations did not have specific areas of work. Instead, their focus is broadly on defending women’s rights and economic empowerment. However, other organisations work on particular areas. Some prioritise women’s economic empowerment because, as they noted, one cannot talk about freedom and respect for women’s rights without this. Other areas of work include education of girls and women; rights of youth and children; the media; health and SRHR; GBV/VAWG; women’s political participation; environment and climate change; WPS; harmful practices; disability; counselling; and alliance- and movement-building.

Regarding areas of work in which organisations do not engage, some highlighted abortion and LGBTQIA+ rights, although one declared that it defended human rights without distinction. On LGBTQIA+ issues, organisations said that Senegalese society, which is very conservative, and where culture plays a big part, was not yet ready to talk about these. Respect for the mainstream Senegalese view and the hostile environment are the main reasons organisations abstain from working on these questions for the moment.

A few organisations said they identified as feminist and said that this identification harmed their action. Others shared that identifying as feminist did not facilitate their interventions but did not affect their ability. Senegalese women and girls who identify receive criticism as society does not understand their struggle. Some Senegalese believe feminists defend women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights, and therefore view feminists and their actions negatively.

Concerning strategies and approaches, all organisations interviewed said they used advocacy in their work. Other methods used to promote, popularise and protect the fundamental rights of women and children include research, awareness-raising, communication activities, online activism, community organising and providing services to victims of GBV. Some activities aim to reach specific groups,
such as decision-makers, young people, religious leaders, rural women and victims of GBV. Art is also used as a tool for advocacy and awareness-raising.

Positive masculinity, transformational leadership and intersectionality to empower women and girls and advance their rights are also examples of strategies and approaches used.

Women’s rights organisations and feminist movements use several spaces in their work. The main gathering places cited include youth centres and the premises of specific large movements/organisations. Groups also gather in villages, towns, markets, conferences, public areas, schools and stadiums.

**NGO-ISATION AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS**

Most of the organisations interviewed defined themselves as professional organisations. They had decided to become formalised organisations with capable management systems, a procedure manual, a volunteer charter and five-year strategic and operational plans. Most said they had found it necessary to adapt so that the state and donors would view them differently.

Many organisations interviewed said that professionalisation had had a positive impact. It allows for a legal basis but also openings and partnerships. Others said it had positively affected their ability to mobilise the masses through well-structured advocacy strategies.

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS**

Women’s and girls’ rights organisations have played a leading role in the adoption of several laws and projects in favour of equality in Senegal:

- **Harmonised Senegalese domestic law with international conventions (CEDAW and Maputo Protocol).**
- **Contributed to the passing of Law nO 2020 – 05 criminalising rape and paedophilia.**
- **Facilitated the adoption of a law to amend Articles 15 of the RH Law, 305 and 305 bis of Penal Code, 35 of the code of Medical Ethics and harmonized these articles with Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol.**
- **Contributed to the modification of Law n0 61-10 of March 7, 1961 determining the Senegalese nationality by law n0 2013-05 of July 8, 2013 which allows the Senegalese woman to give her nationality to her child.**
- **The drafting of the social orientation law in favour of disabled people in Senegal.**
IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Drawing from experience in responding to the Ebola virus in 2013 and 2014, the Senegalese Government responded to Covid-19 by declaring a state of emergency and imposing measures to curb the spread. Senegalese women and girls were greatly affected by the measures taken. It is estimated that 75% of Senegalese women work in the informal sector. Lockdown measures imposed had negative impacts on their income. Meanwhile, incidence of domestic violence and other forms of VAWG increased, and educational opportunities and access to health care, particularly reproductive health care, reduced.

The pandemic reduced the inflow of funds from donors. It prevented organisations from implementing projects and programmes, and they had to suspend field activities to protect their teams. Many organisations were left at a standstill as funders redirected financial resources. Most said they had no budgetary resilience plans. One organisation said it modified its budget allocations in response to the pandemic.

Several organisations said they had responded to the pandemic by adapting their strategies. Many began using social media, such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp, to raise awareness about Covid-19 in various national languages, including French. Many organisations reorganised their work and began operating remotely. Some actors used the various online platforms to hold meetings; others had to postpone or cancel planned activities. However, not all organisations could adapt and work remotely.

As Covid-19 exacerbated poverty, organisations arranged help for the most vulnerable groups. Some began distributing food and masks. Others also raised awareness among policy-makers of the pandemic’s disproportionate effect on women and girls and the need to implement adequate mitigation measures. An organisation working with women and girls with disabilities held a press conference to appeal to the authorities on behalf of its constituency.

FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR WOMEN’S GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

The organisations interviewed fund their activities through, for example, local resource mobilisation, their volunteer base, membership fees or working on projects. Other methods of financing include support from patrons or partners, fundraising and responding to calls for grants from various donors and private and women’s foundations. Almost all these organisations benefit from donor grants, alone or in a consortium.

Among the donors most cited by the Senegalese organisations are embassies (US, Canada and almost all European countries), UN agencies (UNFPA, UN Women), AWDF, Amplify Change, OSIWA, Urgent Action Fund, Oxfam and the French Development Agency.

Regarding perceptions of donors, the organisations interviewed felt that funders gave grants that allowed for one-off actions/projects, whereas they should work together on a more sustainable programme approach. Meanwhile, some interviewees felt that women’s funds and regional feminist grant-making institutions played a critical role in promoting women’s and girls’ rights and feminist organising. They believed these funders had more knowledge of the issues and were closer to the women’s rights organisations and feminist movements working in these areas.

Some respondents reported having good relationships with their donors. The ideal dynamic with donors would be based on a long-term partnership and not short-term funding. It should include
a framework for establishing a volunteer programme to facilitate capacity-building of members of organisations through practice, development of an information system and sharing of results.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

- Most Senegalese organisations consider the language barrier a real problem for francophones. It is challenging to research and apply for funding, access information and participate in meetings where the primary language is English.

- Regarding accessing financial resources, cumbersome procedures, strict criteria and excessive demands for documentation by donors were among the challenges cited. Lack of information on grants and funding opportunities, limited capacity to write and submit project proposals/grant applications and legal status issues also prevent organisations from applying for financial resources. There are almost no government subsidies.

- The organisations felt that funders rarely considered realities on the ground. They also noted that interventions were not well targeted, and funding was insufficient or no longer corresponded to critical needs.

- Because of limited funding, organisations struggle to maintain a permanent staff that is qualified and competent in their intervention areas. Funding shortages also prevent organisations from strengthening their organisational capacity and their resilience to internal and external risk, from responding to demands and from increasing the number of interventions in the field. Funding problems also impede them from carrying out their projects, achieving their objectives and scaling up regionally to strengthen youth involvement. There is also no system for capitalising on results.

- Some donors work with ministries, which puts limits on the interventions of many organisations. When ministries act as intermediaries, they do not restrict the implementation of planned activities, and the money does not always reach the beneficiaries. In terms of impact, according to some organisations, experience shows that donors often make mistakes about actors, focusing on the least successful.

- Concerning alliance- and movement-building, limitations regarding funding, training opportunities, governance and leadership were among the most shared challenges. Others include a lack of synergy of action with other organisations in implementing projects, insufficient logistics (such as computers, vehicles, etc.) and delays in submitting activity reports. The organisations said they also struggled to build on what they learned and to find resources to create networks. Social, cultural and religious barriers also pose challenges for coalitions in carrying out their work.

- Many organisations also saw generational succession and the participation of young girls and women as significant challenges. While young girls and women are represented in movements, they often do not occupy positions of responsibility. They are often limited by men or older people who do not integrate them fully. Others noted that the employment search limited young women’s ability to participate. They also noted the lack of a mentoring system and a framework for sharing experiences between generations. Covid-19 posed a problem: the organisations pointed out that youth had other priorities and “activism and volunteerism are not their problems”.

Mapping of Women’s Groups and Feminist Organisations in Francophone West Africa
Regarding **NGO-isation and professionalisation**, some organisations said that a challenge lay in moving from association status to NGO status. One organisation noted that having NGO status not only opened up funding opportunities but also allowed admission to observer status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. According to other organisations, professionalisation entails basic operating needs, such as rent for a headquarters and salaries for permanent staff, which are very costly. This presents a barrier to the professionalisation of Senegalese organisations.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

The interviewees noted several opportunities in the future. Regarding the challenge of working together, the organisations recommended creating horizontal, participative and inclusive leadership that considers everyone. They cited the need for an intergenerational approach in practice to include more young girls and women. The latter could have a presence at the continental, regional and national levels with local anchoring. Interviewees also suggested the creation of intergenerational consortia of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements as an opportunity.

The organisations noted several work areas and strategies/approaches that need urgent funding. Among these are the following:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination in the workplace</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Disability Rights in Rural Areas</td>
<td>Harmonisation of National Laws with International Frameworks</td>
<td>Abortion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategies/approaches to be funded:**

- Transformational and inclusive women’s leadership training;
- Advocacy and awareness-raising of women’s rights;
- Communication training;
- Intergenerational dialogue;
- Capacity-building in general and on project writing specifically;
- Creating frameworks for consultation and mutual learning between organisations;
- Development of a joint action plan for the implementation of actions and activities;
- Opportunities for girls and young women to participate and develop self-confidence;

RECOMMENDATIONS

The organisations surveyed also shared recommendations for international and continental funders. These include the following:

• Implement a survey to learn about the essential needs of women in the countries where they want to intervene. Do not come with a preconceived agenda.

• Develop long-term partnerships to ensure continued funding for more significant impact.

• Set up emergency funds during pandemics and emergencies that correspond to the needs of organisations and allow for quick and effective interventions.

• Provide support to women’s organisations and girls and women in rural areas.

• Include an accompaniment programme in funding.

• Consider organisations without legal identity for funding opportunities.

• Regarding persons with disabilities, consider mobility issues and needs.

• Create opportunities for alliance- and movement-building. Non-FWA organisations should be more systematically involved in FWA activities to enhance contributions and facilitate collaboration.

• Fund feminist organisations and projects in Senegal to help these actors broaden their scope and enable them to fight at the national and international levels.
APPENDIX

ANNEX A

FJS/AWDF THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE DESK RESEARCH

ACTORS

a. Which key women’s, girls’ rights and feminist organisations and movements are undertaking progressive and critical human rights work in FWA as a region and in Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinée, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal in particular? How are they organised and where do they stand when it comes to feminist values?

b. Which girl-led and young women-led activists are most active? How are they organised?

c. Which groups, organisations, networks, or movements are demonstrating strong modes of organising/power-building and alignment with FJS’s and AWDF’s feminist values, especially those outside of well-known and mainstream feminist spaces?

d. Who are potential allies identified by those groups, organisations and movements?

ALLIANCE AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

1) What does alliance and movement building look like in the sub region as a whole and in particular in Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinée, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal? Which movements exist and what do they work (raison d’être, goals) on as a movement?

2) What are the dynamics around the participation (or lack of participation) of girls and young women in movements?

3) To what extent are women and girls working in the informal sector (domestic workers, sex workers, rural, farmers) collaborating:
   - with “professional/highly educated” women’s, girls’ rights groups and movements
   - with groups, organisations and movements that identify as “ethnic minority or indigenous groups”
   - with LGBTQI rights organisations and movements?

4) Do women’s, girls’ rights and feminist organisations in the sub region engage in cross sector/border organising and movement building? If so, how?

5) To what extent is there “NGOisation” appearing in women’s rights and feminist
movement spaces? If yes, what pressures or practices seem to be driving this trend?

6) What other movements are women, girls engaging in and building across?

7) What common barriers are preventing women, girls and LGBTQI people to engage or form a broader movement with a collective agenda for gender justice?

AREAS OF WORK, STRATEGIES & APPROACHES

1) What are the priority areas of work of women’s and girls’ rights groups and movements by country? (ex: sexual and reproductive rights/justice, gender-based violence, leadership development, labor and economic rights, land, natural resources and environmental rights, etc.)

2) How do these groups understand feminism and incorporate feminist values in their work? Are there issues that are off the table for them? If so, which ones?

3) What strategies and approaches are organisations and movements taking to carry out their work and advance their human rights? (ex: direct action, online activism, service provision, community organising, policy and advocacy, legal reform, etc.)

4) What are the unique ways in which feminist activists, organisations & movements organise outside of mainstream human rights organisations and movements (working with populations other than women, girls, LGBTQI and gender non-conforming people?)

5) What are key spaces, convenings, and conferences for girls, women’s rights and feminist organisations and movements in the sub-region?

6) What are their approaches to sustaining their organisations, movements and leaders in the long-term? What are their resiliency practices and approaches to safety and security?

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1) What are current and emerging opportunities for advancing the leadership of women, girls and gender non-conforming people in FWA and in the 8 countries of the research?

2) Are there particular strategies/issues/areas that need urgent support/investment?

3) What are some of the greatest challenges and needs that face feminists and women’s, girls’ rights activists and their organisations and movements?

IMPACT OF COVID-19

1) What is the impact (short, medium and long term) of Covid-19 on organising and movement building activities in the region and what key implications should funders consider to best support partners?

2) How can funders best rise up to the moment and positively shift their funding practices to support feminist organising and movement building in the region?
FUNDING LANDSCAPE

1) How are women’s, girls’ rights and feminist organisations resourcing their work and activism? (Local resource mobilisation, volunteer basis, state funding, private foundations, bilateral and multilateral funding sources, women’s funds, etc.)

2) What role do women’s funds and feminist regional grant-making institutions play in supporting women, girls’ rights and feminist organising in the region? What are the opportunities for greater support and collaboration?

3) What are key funding and strategic gaps for feminist and women, girls’ rights organisations and movements that FJS and AWDF are well positioned to address?
## EXAMPLE DESK REVIEW DATA COLLECTION
INTERNAL TOOL PER COUNTRY.

### THEME 1: ACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>1.a. How are you organised? For example, are you a women-led group, a young women's group, an LGBTQI+ group, a disability group, etc.?</th>
<th>1b. How long have you been operational?</th>
<th>Where do you work (i.e. national, regional or continental)?</th>
<th>What kind of work do you do? For example, advocacy, research, lobbying, policy, grant-making, etc.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activist y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation z</td>
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Full list of all the identified resources and main funders are available in the appendix


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