

Transcript Episode 4

Feminist Development Policy: Funding beyond power differentials (4/5)

[OVOC Jingle]

Samie: Our Voices, Our Choices, the feminist podcast from the Heinrich Boell Foundation

Angelika: It is for those of us who currently have the power and are in the positions of power, to really kind of humble ourselves and say, whatever we have been doing and putting so much money into, some of it worked, but a lot of it has not. What are we doing wrong?

Chantelle: There is of course, just the reality of the fact that much of this money is coming from wealthier nations. A lot of this funding has been amassed through histories of colonisation, histories of war, histories of oppression.

[Transition]

Samie: Welcome back to “Feminist Development Policy: A Pathway toward Feminist Global Collaboration”. I’m Samie Blasingame and this is episode four of our five-part series.

This episode we are diving into the topic of funding: What does it look like, who is it reaching, and what do we need to be doing to ensure it helps achieve a feminist agenda of economic, social and environmental justice?

As you will see, funding in the development space is marred by a myriad of challenges with deep structural roots that we hope to provide you with space to reflect on. We would also like to acknowledge the incredible work of feminist and women’s organisations and funders who, over the years, have been leading the way to improve funding structures and ensure that funding gets to those who are working, every day, to bring needed change throughout our societies. You will find several publications from other actors in our show notes.

To start us off, we wanted to share this wonderful quote with you from our guest Sanyu who joined us for Episode 3:

Sanyu: There's just something magical about when feminists come together to dream and imagine other ways of being. It's not just magical, it's powerful. It's the reason why our societies look the way they look now, because of the work that our feminist elders have put. I love demanding for change as part of a collective. I love people power and what it can do, and yeah. Feminists have been doing the work of analysing, documenting, dreaming, imagining other ways of being. That would centre collective care, wellbeing and that's who we need to be paying attention to as we move forward.



Samie: Now, to get a better overview of the funding landscape and what is needed to achieve impactful change, we spoke to two wonderful guests who have worked in this area for more than a decade.

[Transition]

Samie: Our first guest is a long-time activist and agitator in the feminist funding landscape. Her name is Angelika Arutyunova and she joins us from the United States.

Angelika: I'm Angelika Arutyunova, and I am an international feminist consultant. I'm originally from Uzbekistan and I'm Armenian. I have been living in the US for the last 20 or so years and have been doing a lot of activism back home before I came here as a youth activist. And have always been asking questions of why girls and women cannot do certain things and men can, and why there is such strong divisions in society among people of different religions or different way of presenting themselves. And those question were not easy to answer in the quite conservative community that I was growing up in.

And so feminist movements around the world are definitely something that I very deeply connect myself with and my work over the last 20 years has focused a lot on moving resources to the feminist movements around the world. Whether it is me directly being a grant maker, holding a portfolio and giving away the resources, or me doing research on where is the money for women's rights and channelling the resources that way by advocating with the funders around the world. I'm also a co-founder of FRIDA, the young feminist fund, and constantly looking at different ways to kinda expand the pool of money that is going into feminist and social justice organising around the world.

Samie: Angelika has conceptualized, developed and co-authored ground-breaking research on funding trends as part of AWID's – The Association of Women in Development's "Where is the Money" initiative, which noted several important findings such as the fact that:

- On average, women's rights organisations receive only 0.13% of Official Development Assistance and only 0.4% of all gender-related aid funding.
- That roughly half of women's rights organisations in the Global South operate on a median annual budget of \$30,000 US dollars or less.
- Or that the majority of women's rights organisations have never received core or multi-year funding at all. In fact, the International Center for Research on Women found that only 2% of gender-focused aid from countries with a Feminist Foreign or Development Policy actual goes to feminist organisations.

[slight pause]

For those who are unfamiliar with the term Official Development Assistance, or ODA for short. This is a term for governmental funds that promote and specifically target the economic development and welfare of so-called developing countries. It is the largest chunk of money flowing around in the funding landscape, and broadly speaking, is often divided into either humanitarian aid for crisis emergencies or day-to-day developmental assistance, including the funding of UN agencies like UN Women.



Then we have funds that are flowing to and from NGOs, which are funded through a government's development assistance pot and from private institutions and individual people, giving them a higher level of independence than governments, who are accountable to their taxpayers.

And then aside from that, we have the private philanthropic sector, whose funds are sourced from inheritances, but also sometimes through governments and private individuals as well. Think the Gates or Open Society Foundations. These organisations have the largest degree of freedom when it comes to accountability and the projects they choose to focus on.

And so, money is constantly flowing within this ecosystem but there is one major issue: decisions on how to spend funds are often made without the people who they are said to be directed at. Within Feminist Global Collaboration, the power to decide how funds are allocated and dispersed should be acknowledged and shared, but this is yet to be a widespread practice.

Here is Angelika again with thoughts on how this disconnect plays out in practice:

Angelika: Who is dictating a certain agenda? Is it coming from the community itself? Is the migrants and the LGBTIQ community that is saying this is what we need and this is what the funding should look like? Or is it coming from the quote unquote "top"?

And that is the problem that we see in all of this is in addition to all of the sources of money are not talking to one another and creating their own agendas, they're also not talking to the communities that are impacted. That is the biggest problem in the funding ecosystem currently. Majority of the programs are being developed outside of even the conversation with the communities that are impacted. I think that's also where I'm seeing the mistake that comes with this. You know, Oh, we have the money, we can fix the problem and doing it with a very rigid response of, okay, if we put this metrics together, all this impact, you know, indicators, and then we'll just go, you know, one by one and I mean a very linear idea of what progress is. Progress doesn't work this way. Change doesn't work this way.

Let's channel those resources to people who are actually at the forefront of experiencing the oppressions and maybe having better ideas of how to solve them. And if they don't have ideas how to solve them right now, it's also because they've never been invested in, because they've never actually had spaciousness, oxygen and resources to think of the ideas. So, let's just step back, put the resources out there, and stop measuring every dollar we spend. And can I attribute this change to me, you know? Social change takes time. It is progressive, and so this is the difference between the current development system, which is very metrics oriented and indicators and all of this nitty greets versus like, let's just put the money out there and let things flourish.

Samie: If you've tuned in to previous episodes, you'll know that our guests have already mentioned the limitations of focusing solely on metrics and log frames, or how colonial continuities are present in current developmental practice. And well, if we discuss what funding could look like within a more Feminist Global Collaboration, the same recognitions apply.

Which is why Angelika advocates for a *feminist* funding ecosystem – one in which inequitable power structures are named and acknowledged for what they are, where funds are dispersed in coordination



and in a commitment to a feminist agenda, and therefore become more accessible to those who are, worldwide, actually creating change in their day to day lives by organising across their communities.

Angelika: This idea of the feminist funding ecosystem is deeply, deeply rooted in the understanding that the resource distribution that we have right now is problematic.

The way the resources have been generated, over history and the extraction of resources from a lot of places and communities and people has been very problematic and the system that is now trying to fix it, quote unquote, is part of a problem, right? It has been created and set up by this unfair extraction of resources from particular communities. What this funding ecosystem hopefully is able to, to shift this position is that we need to redistribute those resources back to the communities that have been exploited and extracted for hundreds and hundreds of years with trust that they will know what to do with this money. Because that's another piece that we are not seeing right now. There is absolutely no trust in the impacted communities, that they know what the, what needs to happen. There is this hierarchy of privilege that is happening is in addition to we have the money, we also have the answers, and that is not the case. The idea of this feminist funding ecosystem is that - to really deeply undo this colonial relationship in the development world.

Samie: Consequences of this status quo is that the resources that are out there are getting lost along the way. A study by Mama Cash and GENDERNET from 2020 highlighted that:

“Remarkably, three-quarters of ODA does not leave bilateral development agencies, with it being circulated instead into agencies’ gender programming instead of financing the work of feminist organisations directly.”

The remaining money that is allocated outside of development agencies goes almost entirely to larger international non-governmental organisations the vast majority based in the Global North. Does this mean that we're currently seeing money channelled elsewhere? Such as into the expenses and salaries of people working in organisations based in the Global North?

This is an uncomfortable discussion for the sector and many people within in, but a reality that must be faced if we are to be serious about achieving feminist goals within Feminist Global Collaboration. Paired with this is the various degrees of power the current funding landscape produces --- being a donor, or a receiver of funds, means holding different and often unequal positions of power. So, the question is, how can we redress this?

Here's Angelika again, with a suggestion:

Angelika: I look at this from a way of there, is a power imbalance or there is a power differential. The way we can look at it is there is a power differential among all of us in whatever ways we show up. It becomes imbalanced when it's not recognized. When it's not named. When it's not addressed and then it's not transparent.

I think the power differential can absolutely stay there and we cannot do anything about it. People who have resources and people who do not have resources have different power presenting. How we're using that power is a different story. Naming it that I have resources that you don't currently have should not give me power over you. That's where the imbalance happens and I'm unpacking this because oftentimes I don't see this conversation being unpacked within the foundations. There is a lot of, oftentimes these very nominal kind of value statements that oftentimes sound hollow to me,



because there hasn't been a lot of the power analysis internally within the development structures or philanthropy structures.

[Transition]

Samie: Our other guest this episode is Chantelle de Nobrega, who currently works as the Grants Manager at Mama Cash – and as such, she is quite familiar with what it takes to actively dismantle these power imbalances and authentically navigate the power differentials that Angelika speaks of. Chantelle joins us from her home, in Cape Town.

Chantelle: I'm Chantel De Nobrega. I have worked in philanthropy for I think about 10 years, a bit more than that, although I've worked in human rights organising really since I was a student, I guess. So that's about 20 years ago. And I've worked a lot on feminist organising, queer organising, anti-racism, access to social services. I've worked in a lot of different areas.

Samie: So, Chantelle brings a wealth of experience as to how funding practices shape our societies, and having held multiple positions within Mama Cash, she can also speak to ways her organisation and others like it are working to establish a new status quo within the funding world.

Chantelle: Well, Mama Cash is a woman's fund. I believe we are the first International Women's Fund. So, it started in 1983. We turned 40 next year, which is super exciting. And we are a feminist funder, what that means is that we focus on supporting and resourcing feminist organising around the world. A group can apply to us from any country in the world. And we support women, girls, trans and intersex people who are doing human rights organising on almost any human rights topic really. We find groups working on environmental justice, working on labour rights, working on sex worker rights, trans and intersex organizing, sexuality, reproduction. So, we really have a very broad depth of groups that we support.

In terms of the Grants manager role, my focus really is on ensuring that how we do on grant making is, efficient, but also that is politically consistent with our values. Which is important. It's not enough just to say that we give money. We have to think about how we do that and if we're doing it in a way that is really going to reach the groups that we want to reach.

Samie: And to return to the points on power imbalances rooted in funding modalities, one mechanism that has become popular, including in the development sector, is so-called “participatory” approaches. This approach is about sharing power and recognising that the communities the funds are supposed to reach need to serve as experts, by fully embedding them in the decision-making processes of funding distribution.

Chantelle: For the past few years, you know, anyone who's sort of been following the philanthropy sector knows that there's been a lot of discussions around sharing power and around things like participatory grant making, which is something that Mama Cash has sort of been testing, testing out for several years and recently moved to sort of like, you know, participatory grant making as being the primary way we make our grant making decisions. There are a lot of models out there which will really help donors actually share power in this way. Now participatory grant making is not some sort of cure-all that's gonna completely, you know, erase power imbalances. There's still power. But it's certainly, I think, an important step towards addressing some of the power imbalances within the sector. And then again, answering this question of, who is making decisions about funding. Not



every donor can necessarily go down that route, but can they fund organisations that are going down that route? There are a lot of smaller funds that are using these methods, so maybe larger donors, such as government donors, need to be looking at actually, you know, putting their funding through, through these types of funds, which are really catalysing a sort of shift in power with regard to development funding.

Samie: It is something to consider, and as Chantelle explains, this work – the work of moving resources and ensuring who and how they reach people – is inherently political.

Chantelle: I think that part of the problem is that there's not a lot of space sometimes for nuance within the sector. There is a very kind of strong focus on... sort of individual empowerment sometimes, you know, there's this kind of neoliberal feminism that is very present, I think, often in development spaces.

And I sometimes, I think a lack of attention to just how political this work is, right? This is political work. It's not just technocratic work. And so that can often impact the way we do our work because we're trying to access funding that can be difficult for smaller groups to access and sort of try to ensure that it's, you know, it's reaching really incredible feminist activism. But then there's the duality of sort of trying to, you know, answer these active development models with certain frameworks, which may or may not really speak to the reality of what groups are doing. Now we see it as our job to do that, but I think that more sort of openness to the politics of this work and some flexibility on the part of like government donors and larger donors is something which I think would really help kind of make the context a little bit easier, I think.

It feels like it kind of runs as a common thread across the sector and even sometimes donors with the best of intentions sort of perpetuate this.

Samie: In talking about the flow of money around the concept of development, Chantelle made a really good point about how we need to be thinking about development policy in the context of a country's overall political agenda:

Chantelle: Maybe a broader question, but one that I think we should speak about, which is the way that, you know, a feminist development policy is really just one pillar in transformational change, right? It's not completely going to transform things. It's a starting point, I think, for governments, particularly in the Global North, to consider the interconnectedness of the other policies such as their domestic policies or their foreign policies. How are those connecting to the development sector?

You know, how are actions taken by companies who are from the Global North, but working in the Global South, how is that undermining human rights such as capital flight through tax avoidance or violence against land defenders?

Development policy really is not enough. What there needs to be is policy coherence across trade diplomacy, security, you know, and there can be a lot of hypocrisy in the part of governments who claim support for feminist agendas publicly. Meanwhile, they're investing significantly in policies that are, advancing climate change, right? So, if countries are going to claim to embrace feminist principles as part of their policies, this needs to include things like more humane immigration and asylum policies. Will they make commitments to peace and security, such as ending arms exports? So, I think it's really important that we also think about policy as something which is not just a standalone or something connected to all the other choices that these governments make.



Samie: The point Chantelle is making about policy coherence is in fact an essential element of Feminist Global Collaboration - and it is pretty clear that if we are serious about implementing a feminist development policy, governments must do more than fund a higher percentage of gender-focused initiatives in the Global South. Feminist principles must permeate all decisions across the political spectrum, from foreign to economic policy, and onto interior policies such as those that address migration.

Another thing we need to be keeping an eye on are recent political developments and increased funding to right wing groups. A tangible example is what we're seeing with Sweden's newly elected right-wing government, which will revoke its feminist foreign policy. Sweden became the first country in 2014 to officially adopt a feminist foreign policy, an approach that aimed to address barriers to gender equality and include a gender perspective in all policy development and decision-making.

Here is Angelika again, with some context:

Angelika: If we look at the Nordic states and European states traditionally they have been providing a lot of the kind of progressive quote unquote development assistance, but that is shifting a lot and the election of conservative governments across Europe has definitely impacted of how much money is going to the progressive agendas around the world. And with the latest two developments, one, over the last 10 years, the migration increase, as Europeans call it, crisis, which in many cases they themselves created by colonial past. And then the second one is in the last eight months, the war in Ukraine. The response to both of those pieces has been that a lot of the development assistance from the European countries has shrunk and has been actually shifted back to the internal security budgets, an increase of the military spendings within the countries that usually did not have as much of the military spending.

I think that there's a deep work that needs to happen within the societies that are living under very militarized regimes like United States, like a lot of the governments who are spending such a huge, huge, huge chunks of money on military industrial complex to really shift from that.

Samie: And on that note, here is a good time to highlight the tendency of government funders to justify their traditionally strict oversight of the funds that they disperse with the fact that it is taxpayer money, but what does that say about the much larger sums of money going into fossil fuels or military spending as subsidies? Not to play in to the 'whataboutism' of this discourse but, is there strict and transparent oversight there?

A new report by Transnational Institute finds that the richest countries (categorised as Annex II in the UN climate talks) are spending 30 times as much on their armed forces as they spend on providing climate finance for the world's most vulnerable countries – something they are actually legally bound to do. Some of the top ten historical emitters of greenhouse gases are also among the top ten global military spenders: in order of magnitude the United States spends by far the most, followed by China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Japan and Germany.

The sums going into global military spending are enormous. Between 2013 and 2021, the countries just listed spent 9.45 trillion USD on military, 56.3% of total global military spending which lies at a staggering \$16.8 trillion USD.



Equally alarming is a 2020 Report by “[Investigate Europe](#)” highlighting that 30 countries of the European Economic Zone and the United Kingdom provide subsidies for fossil fuels such as coal, lignite, gas and oil to the tune of at least 137 billion Euro a year. These subsidies lay slightly behind the total annual budget of the EU at 155 billion Euros and are granted in forms of tax breaks or the emissions trading system. By now most people in the world understand the danger of emitting high amounts of the emissions produced by fossil fuels. So, if asked, we wonder whether tax payers would be OK with the fact that their taxes are spent to ensure the continuation of fossil fuel companies such as Shell or Total Energies whose profits will be more than 60 billion USD this year? And so, Angelika reminds us we don’t actually have a problem of scarcity when it comes to resources, but a problem of distribution:

Angelika: My main premise of understanding the funding system and a funding trends analysis comes from the premise of there is no problem of resources, there is no scarcity of resources. We do not have scarcity of resources, and that is one mentality that we need to be shifting. We have distribution problem. The way our societies currently have been making choices of funding distribution, of resource distribution is skewed towards violence, war, oppression, greed, corruption. It is not going towards education, health system, social justice, social beauty and joy. It is not. Look at the budget of every single government. A bigger chunk goes to military spendings. A smaller chunk goes to social issues. If you have that disproportion in the funding, you will have a result that is not peaceful. That is the biggest premise of this understanding the feminist ecosystem of funding, because at the end of the day, what we want is not, let's just have more funders who have better politics. We want a society that actually doesn't have to have funding to fix the problems. We want the society that is driven by joy, happiness, dignity of people. That is the piece. It's not to keep fixing the problem that we keep creating by spending the money in the wrong ways. That's the core of it.

Samie: So, considering the overall state of the funding ecosystem for gender equality and women’s rights, it is clear, as Angelika points out, that the problem is not a lack of resources. Rather, it's the ways in which funding resources flow – *this* is what warrants review in aim of bridging the gap between intent and practice.

There are certain government initiatives that seek to ensure funding reaches grassroots groups without intermediaries and with reduced bureaucracy. These include Canada's investment of 300 million Canadian dollars within the Equality Fund in 2019, or the Dutch government’s funding of the “Leading from the South” program, but development funding still largely operates within a top-down approach to philanthropic giving. Hence the importance of an increased focus on participatory approaches in recent years – as we’ve already mentioned.

Angelika: Over the last 10, 15 years or more, there have been a lot of changes and this is purely a credit to the feminist movements that have been pushing and have been talking about this and have been advocating and doing really careful organising. The Netherlands as an example, they did not have a women's rights portfolio before AWID’s first report on where is the money in 2006. And so, we have to really look at the successes of the funding shifts that we have been seeing that are purely credit to feminist organising to make that shift.

The donors did not come to this on their own. They have been advised by a lot of us, they have been educated. And that's a lot of labour and it's a lot of unpaid labour that the feminist movements have



been taking on for decades now, since Beijing conference on women in 1995. When commitment have been made for women and girls around the world, but it did not come with the funding. And from that point on, the feminist movements were like, wait a minute, if you want us to succeed, you need to invest some resources into us.

Samie: And over the years, as the issues we are addressing here have become more and more urgent, the way feminist groups are organising has been changing as well, which means funding structures need to be changing as well.

Angelika: A lot of the organising started shifting away from wanting to create an NGO to much more agile fast initiatives and coming together of individuals around a particular issue or particular strategy or particular tactic.

And we are seeing much more of that organising happening rather than this traditional NGO model. And that kind of organising does not have resourcing fuelling it because the resource structure is actually not in a position to be supporting that.

So, what we are seeing is that disconnect between the funding modalities and the organising that is happening across the world that is actually fuelling social change. So how we can be shifting the funding possibilities and modalities to respond, to catch up with, the movement, and not ask the movement to fit in a certain box.

So, it is a job and responsibility now of the funders who are saying we're intersectional to do two things. One, centre, the people most impacted by the struggles. And two, make sure that you have funding modalities that are flexible, that are agile and that are, you know, going into this different ways of supporting and resourcing the movements that need it outside of the NGO model.

Samie: Mama Cash is noted as one of the funders who are pushing to make the funding landscape and its practices more just and therefore, impactful. I'll let Chantelle explain what that looks like for them...

Chantelle: The role that I always think of, which is important for us, is really as a bit of a translator between decision making spaces with a lot of resource, and then trying to get those resources to activists. And that's not only a role, that Mama Cash plays. I think that is a role that is very specific to women's funds and really where women's funds add so much value. Women's funds in general, I think, actually have some really similar principles, which is that we fund self-led work. We fund groups that are really being led by women, girls, trans and intersex people. And this is true of many women's funds, because not every donor, particularly government donors, but even just large foundations or multilateral funders are really in a good place to channel their funding to work that is being led by those who are most affected by, you know, patriarchy or racism. They're just too big and sometimes what they're trying to fund seems really small.

But Mama Cash I think is really good at taking that funding, and acting as a bit of a buffer. So, we absorb a lot of the demands of what it means to access larger sources of funding and we then pass that on to activists that are doing this incredible work around the world so that they can get on with doing that work and not have to worry about like, you know, 15,000 reports that they have to submit.

Samie: That is a super valuable point. Grassroot groups perceive the majority of funding opportunities as inaccessible due to the overbearing, time intensive grant writing and reporting



requirements which get in the way of doing the actual urgent and important work that brought them together in the first place – which is why it is so necessary to have funders that understand the context within which grassroots groups are organising and the overall vision they have for the work they dedicate themselves to.

Chantelle: I think what's really important about the type of work we do is to look beyond the individual grants, it's about understanding how that connects to the movements we are funding. And that means taking on movement perspective, which means looking at what is actually happening within movements. What are the trends, what are the priorities? What are, what are movements asking for? What are some of the tensions? What are challenges the movements are facing? Are they facing criminalisation? Is there rising right wing populism? And I think understanding this context, is how it is that we are able to say that by funding groups we are funding movements. So, actually a common question for us when we are considering whether or not to fund a group is, are they connected to movements? Do they have alliances? Do they have alliances in their movement? Do they have alliances in other movements? That's a really important criteria for us and overwhelmingly, what, what the research tells us is that the most significant factor in actually making change in these areas is an independent, well-funded and autonomous feminist movement. It's not, you know, macroeconomics, it's not more women in politics. These things can be helpful, but they are not the deciding factor. It's whether or not you're gonna have an autonomous movement, well-funded and grassroots grown, right? Operating nationally, not operating because an international NGO came and sort of, you know, replanted something. So that is something which we know to be true. And so we take this movement by perspective, by asking what, what is happening right now? And how do we fund that? And we make sure that the groups we are funding are also using this, this, this movement mentality, as in they understand the importance of collective power. They are harnessing it to really affect change.

Samie: Collective power is a concept truly reflective of feminist principles, which is why it is so important that funding structures are set up to enable it. Chantelle shares here what doing that would bring us in terms of connecting different struggles:

Chantelle: Well, what's important about feminist organising is that it's really about challenging systems, challenging values, challenging social norms, challenging structures, which are stopping other people from accessing their human rights, from being safe, from being able to really grow into their full potential. And there are a lot of those types of systems. Patriarchy is obviously a massive one. You know, patriarchy sort of underpins so much of how this world works. But patriarchy is also connected to other systems of oppression, right? So, racism, capitalism, economic injustice, climate change is very much, I think, a reflection of, you know, the way that we relate to the earth is really links the way that we relate to each other and the way that we relate to each other as human beings is really dysfunctional.

And so, so many of these systems are working together, in order to basically stop us from being recognized as like fully human, and being able to access those things, which we are all entitled to, you know, being human. And because of that, it's actually important that we fund this work with that lens, which means we are funding work on climate justice. We are funding work on, supporting land defenders. We are funding sex worker rights. This is all feminist work. We are funding Black liberation movements. And this is all connected to feminism. It's the same struggle. There may, there may at times be slightly different emphasis and a different lens, but these are interconnected struggles and we recognize that at Mama Cash.



Samie: This is so important to reiterate, Chantelle rightly calls on donors to reflect on how they decide whom to fund. And that the criteria of this funding ought to always be centring the needs of the people in the communities they are aiming to support.

Chantelle: I think what's really helpful about a feminist approach is that it puts the focus on how we do things and not just why we do them. And that's the language I think, would really help donors. It's not that we shouldn't think about things like outcome and impact, but how we do this work is important and who we are funding is also important.

So, for example, there are many government donors or donors in general that really just fund larger organisations because that's who they can reach and they consider themselves less with who is actually making funding decisions at that level.

There are not actually that many donors. Not only governments, but sometimes foundations as well that really are paying attention to who is actually making the decisions about where this funding is going.

A few years ago, Mama Cash, we did a research report was on a funding to lesbian, bisexual woman, queer woman and trans people. And I believe was the first report of its type of, of its type, which focused on, what is happening with regard to funding these movements globally. And something which we found was very, very interesting was that when we asked many donors if they could give us data on, if their funding was actually reaching LBQ woman, they said, "Well, of course it is". And then when we asked for specifics, they're like, "Well, we don't actually track it". Right? And so, this is quite a common thing is that we're like, well, we are funding women's rights generally, or we're funding queer movements generally, and so it must be reaching LBQ woman. It's like, okay, but maybe it is. But how do you know LBQ women are leading this work, making the decisions about where the funding goes? They don't really know?

And so a sort of practical suggestion I think is for many donors to actually really think about are they funding movements that are actually being led by the people whose lives they're trying to change. And that is something which donors can get better at doing. It's work, but it's something which I think is really important.

Samie: The way donors can start moving beyond funding established NGOs or other "household names" in the activist space, and start actually funding incremental change is to practice what is being called "trust-based" philanthropy. How Mama Cash goes about funding could be considered within an understanding of this practice – which involves putting in the work to meet new people understand their work and their values. And ultimately, it's less about funding a project for a year or two, and more about funding the people and process behind it. How does this look?

Chantelle: Almost all of our funding is going out through what we call the, the, the resilience fund. This is where most of our funding goes. And this is core funding. So, groups can use the funding as they need. We do have a set of funding criteria, but this criteria that doesn't really relate to how groups want to use the money, it more relates to who they are. You know, are they connected to movements? Are they using a feminist approach? Are they trying to, impact systems and structures? Are they self-led? You know, those are the sort of typical, criteria that we ask about and we don't spend a lot of time talking about, well, exactly how are you going to use the funding, because that's really up to groups to, to decide.



You know, you say for example, that you're working on sex worker rights, but you don't have any sex workers involved in leadership. Like, why is that? Are the people who are from your focus group, are they the ones who actually receive salaries or they receiving just small amounts of money and other people from outside of your community are getting larger salaries? So those are all the types of questions that we ask, which is really about understanding what the group is about, who they are, what their politics are around the work that they do.

And then once we can sort of establish that as a baseline, then we trust that groups are going to be implementing work that is in line with that. Of course, we do our checks, and we ask our questions, and we check in with our networks, in their context. But we really do try to base our relationships on trust, and that has been a very big organising principle for our grant making for many, many years.

Samie: Now as we shift funding principles and advocate for the funding of more movements rather than individual groups or projects. It is important that we remain conscious of the risk of being absorbed by institutional structures as they currently stand. Now, some say one of the risks of funding is that it is not actually consistent with radical politics, but if done right, how can we, in the development sector, support more radical, feminist movement building?

Chantelle: Well, [laugh], as someone who worked, um, in sort of moving building and feminist organising before I came into philanthropy. Honestly, what I would say, and maybe I shouldn't say this as a funder, but, but I feel like sometimes. Receiving funding, particularly for the first time, can really be the death of radical politics. That has been my experience, unfortunately and I know sometimes the groups we speak to, they say that as well.

And I would say on the part of Mama Cash, I think we are aware of the risks and so we tend to ask these questions as well before we even give the first grant, we have conversations with groups and we ask these types of questions like: How are you going to make decisions? How are you going to ensure that the priorities that you set will actually remain? If you want to change these decisions, how are you going to agree to that?

Some groups have found that the first time they access our funding, they spend very slowly exactly for this reason, because they're grappling with the reality of, we have this funding, but we can't run ahead too fast because that is gonna, you know, cause us to sort of result in some type of mission drift.

And I think what's really great about a funder, like when Mama Cash and many other women's funds is that they have a flexibility to say, can we have a bit more time? We need some more time, to think through these things. And we really, really encourage groups to take that time and not like, well, you know, you said you were spent by the states to spend, You know, we try to make sure that there's space for them to actually do the work that, that they need to do so that they don't have this problem all of suddenly, losing the sense of their identity and of their politics. Because that I think really is a risk and not something that we want to contribute to.

Samie: So, moving forward... what is it that those of you active in the development sector, and especially those in charge of dispersing funds, need to be keeping in mind?

Here's Angelika again, with some thoughts...

Angelika: There hasn't been a lot of the power analysis internally within the development structures or philanthropy structures to understand the privilege from which you are coming from and how it's



impacting your decisions. That is an important internal work for people who have resources that they need to do. And there's a lot of fragility that comes that work, and that is not it should not be held by those of us who don't hold that power. That's a lot of labour that has to happen internally with the people who are holding resources, who have that power.

What comes from that, like really deep work on power analysis of people who are holding resources is then understanding that just because you have resources doesn't mean you have answers. And the level of humility that we need to see in the development world that we are not seeing right now, that comes from not knowing.

I haven't met a single development professional or a philanthropy professional who actually uttered the word "I do not know." And so that will help us to, to really reach out and to have the space with the people who have answers, but not resources and co-create, co-develop.

It has been so joyful for me to watch a shift within my own movement of how the, the faces and the accents are shifting and, the way the work is being presented is changing with that. Because if you do not have a lived experience of seeing first-hand what is happening when we are talking about whether it's oppression, whether it's discrimination, you are really a little bit detached from it, and you can intellectualise the problem in as many ways as possible. And not to diminish the intellectual piece of it, however, there is some embodied way to understand how to solve a problem when you have seen your own community and you come from your own community, to do this work.

[Transition]

Samie: On another level, we should be asking ourselves what the aim of a different kind of funding system is, at all. And now Chantelle reminds us that, if done well, development as it is currently understood, would cease to exist...

Chantelle: I mean, maybe controversially, in some ways I think the funding landscape needs to disappear, or rather [laugh], or rather, I think that I would like to see that we pay more attention to the reasons why we do this work. I think it's very true of feminist funders that we do talk about this. Like, why is it that we are here, right?

And not, Okay, why are we doing this? Why is it important? How did we get here? And the reason that's so important is because unfortunately, I think we're seeing that some of the things that got us to this place are being replicated within funding circles, right? Sort of like colonial approach to development, a lack of sharing power, you know, things like this. So, I would love to see funders just sort of stop, take a moment, and ask themselves, how did we get here and are we making sure that we are not doing the same thing again?

[Transition]

Samie: We have come to the end of our fourth episode and what we can see is that all the topics we have spoken about so far are so interconnected and important to consider on so many different levels. We believe this episode on funding to be such a vital one, as true feminist funding ecosystems can help bring the much-needed chance of healing the world we live in and contributing to one in which communities have the resources and space to decide what their true priorities are.



Recommendations for practical action will follow, so stay tuned for those – but in the meantime, we hope you will keep doing what you can to create a world where we dismantle the capitalist incentive of funders and instead see the beauty in funding and advancing grassroots movements for social change.

[Transition]

Samie: As we will do for each episode, we would like to end with a quote by an activist, scholar or practitioner. Today, that's with wonderful words by Theo Sawa, co-chairperson of the Equality Fund.

“To truly drive social justice, we need people who have a love for humanity to fund this work. This radical transformation will not be created by an over reliance on foreign foundations and Overseas Development Aid. The revolution needs everybody to play their part, including people with wealth.”

[Transitions]

This has been a podcast of „Our Voices, Our Choices“ in the series “Feminist Development Policy: A pathway towards Feminist Global Collaboration”. You can find this and other episodes on the podcast app of your choice, and if you could help us spread the word by rating us or recommending us to others, we would be very grateful. We'd also love to hear from you! You can also send us feedback and suggestions at podcast@boell.de

Audio for this podcast was produced by Gretch and directed by me, your host, Samie Blasingame, in collaboration with the Audiokollektiv. Thanks so much for listening and see you here next time!