

# TIP SHEET

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## Supporting women's organisations

**Women-led and women's rights organisations that have a gender transformative approach and work with the explicit purpose of promoting and protecting women's rights**, advancing gender equality and women's empowerment should be prioritised for partnerships. The SDC supports national, sub-national, grassroots and women-led women's rights organisations and has an emerging interest in supporting LGBTIQ+ led, LGBTIQ+ rights organisations.

**Women's organisations, feminist activists and networks are at the forefront of efforts to address GBV**: they mobilise women, communities and advocate with institutions and governments for gender equality and ending GBV, and they provide support and response services to GBV survivors. The difficult work of changing deeply ingrained gender and social norms and structures that promote gender-based violence is a long-term endeavour and has always been carried out by women and collectives of women around the world.

**Women's (and LGBTIQ+) organisations have experience, and a wealth of knowledge and skills in addressing GBV in their specific contexts**. They have, often at great risk to their lives and selves, resisted oppressive norms, advocated for an egalitarian society, lived their lives differently and emboldened other women to do the same.

**It is only fitting and ethical that women, girls (and LGBTIQ+ communities) lead humanitarian/development efforts to address GBV**. Those who are most affected by an issue must also lead the solutions to address the issue. In the case of GBV, since it is women, girls (and LGBTIQ+ communities) who are most affected, they and their organisations must lead the efforts on GBV prevention and response. Not just as "implementing" partners but as equal partners in decision-making on project design, strategies and implementation.

### SDC commitments to local women's organisations – Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies 2021–2025

"At least 10% of SDC/Humanitarian Action GBV programme funding is channelled directly to local actors (without any intermediary) and at least 50% with only one intermediary."

"60% of GBV projects funded by the SDC/HA invest in institutional capacity-building for local actors, particularly women-led organisations and government agencies."

Source: [Swiss Commitments](#) to the Call to Action.

### **Barriers to funding for women's organisations**

Partner selection of donors, including the SDC's, is based on the organisation's past history of absorbing a certain amount of funding and history of compliance with large donors and funding mechanisms. Technical capacity is judged based on their familiarity with and adherence to international programming standards (e.g. GBViE Minimum Standards). Since women's and LGBTIQ+ organisations have historically not been the direct/indirect recipients of donor funding, they may not be familiar with or have experience of such expectations. But that does not mean that they are not capable and effective. Funding in general and GBV funding specifically is skewed in favour of larger, national level organisations at the expense of smaller organisations.

**Women's organisations are under-prioritised** and underfunded in international development and humanitarian action on GBV (and so are LGBTIQ+ organisations). Due to the historically patriarchal set-up of humanitarian and development aid, women's organisations form a small proportion of civil society organisations that have been funded for humanitarian and development work in general, including for GBV prevention and response. The GBV sub-clusters in most humanitarian emergencies are dominated by international actors and among national actors, women's organisations are severely under-represented. As a result of this marginalisation, many women's organisations have little experience in partnership with international actors and that is often the biggest barrier to their access to funding. Unless funded specifically, many women's organisations are unable to invest funds or human resources to participate actively in and influence decision-making in international humanitarian processes.

### **Recent history in the demand for greater resources to women's organisations**

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain Friends of Gender Group, confirmed the need to invest in gender equality and the empowerment of crisis affected women and girls, including the resourcing and participation of women led organisations (WLO) and women rights organisations (WRO).

Although this was inadequately taken up in the original Grand Bargain commitments it was translated in accompanying documents such as Guidance Notes by UN women (e.g. on how to promote gender responsive localisation) as well as the Grand Bargain 2.0 framework with potential indicators including one on "more funding to local actors including local women-led organisations (...)".

According to the Friends of Gender Group there has been some improvement in participation and involvement of WLOs and WROs but, there has been limited overall progress on shifting power, resources and decision making to them. In 2021 there was a global drop in direct funding to local actors overall.

## ? — Essential questions to ask when promoting women's organisations

### 1 — How can the SDC engage with women's organisations for the work on GBV?

The majority of SDC funding for local women's organisations is currently provided through intermediary organisations such as INGOs. However, there is an increasing emphasis on funding women's organisations directly. Women's and LGBTIQ+ organisations can be engaged in different ways in SDC-funded GBV projects based on their interests, expertise and requirements:

- **Implementation of GBV prevention and response work:** SDC funding on GBV can be a good opportunity to support national/sub-national and grassroots women's organisations to strengthen and continue the provision of GBV services and prevention interventions.
- **Leadership and advocacy on ending GBV and gender equality:** Beyond funding for specific projects and actions, the SDC can contribute core fund support to women's organisations for ongoing, long-term endeavours that are crucial to bringing about change at the structural level.
- **Leadership in international humanitarian mechanisms and funding decisions on GBV:** SDC project funding should support women's organisations working at different levels (national to grassroots and even regional) to enable them to influence decision-making in international humanitarian actions.

#### **Example of the SDC's support to local women's organisations on ending GBV**

The SDC has provided direct funding to the Jordanian Arab Women Organisation (AWO) for bringing together small and medium-size women-led organisations from Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine to share their experiences. Together these organisations have drafted a Call to Action on the Protection from GBV in Emergency: Road Map for the MENA region. This document defines the objectives for GBV prevention and response, and the actions required by organisations and by donors to achieve these objectives. The AWO is now also a member of the steering committee of the Call to Action and feeds the perspective of women-led organisations into national and international forums.

Source: Women-led Organizations' proposed Road Map to implement the Call to Action in the MENA Region. Developed by AWO and a network of 52 women in MENA, 2022.



**When considering women's organisations for direct funding, pay attention to the following:**

- How can SDC funds contribute to the core costs of the organisation?
- How can SDC funds cover the cost of addressing specific safety and security risks faced by women's organisations?
- How can SDC funds cover costs for organisational development, including development that enables organisations to absorb greater amounts of funds, apply for other funds (administrative, financial management capacities as required)
- Can some of the SDC's administrative requirements be adapted/simplified?

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**What are some of the ways in which the SDC can increase effective funding to women's organisations?**

There are many administrative challenges to directly funding women's (LGBTIQ+) organisations, especially those organisations set up by women/LGBTIQ+ communities that are further marginalised: based in rural areas, lacking history of direct funding partnerships and so on. The SDC can diversify the funding portfolio for example by funding a mix of "well-established" and "lesser known" women's organisations and by actively reaching out to women's (LGBTIQ+) organisations working at the margins and/or led by groups of women who face multiple disadvantages on account of ethnicity, disability, displacement and so on. Here are some options that can be explored for funding such women's organisations:

- Collaborate with international and national grant-making organisations that specifically focus on funding women's organisations. For instance, the SDC could fund a local women's fund to enable resources to be routed to women's organisations that cannot directly partner with the SDC.
- Fund a consortium of local women's organisations. This will also support solidarity/movement-building among women's organisations.
- Use the Small Action modality fund to reach out to women's organisations of marginalised groups and to organisations that work with the LGBTIQ+ community. The interaction with these groups will enhance the knowledge of the SDC team about their issues.
- Explore purely finance routing arrangements. Engage with an intermediary that is only responsible for managing financial and administrative arrangements. Control of programmatic decisions remain with the women's organisations (see example on page 52 of the [GBV toolkit complete edition](#)).

### **Example of financial intermediary used by the SDC.**

The East Europe Foundation (EEF) acts as an intermediary for the SDC in Ukraine. The EEF issues grants of CHF 50,000 each to 15 CSOs nominated by the SDC. The EEF invites CSOs to develop and submit project proposals and assists them in developing their proposals. The EEF uses a simplified application process: the applicants submit a two- narrative application in English or Ukrainian and a project budget. The EEF carries out due diligence for grantees who respond, including checking their registration and governance documents and accounts for 2021. The EEF presents all received proposals to the SDC for approval. Once the proposals are approved, the EEF contracts and disburses the funds, collects and reviews reports, carries out regular check-ins with grantees.

Source: SDC credit proposal 2022.



### **When exploring alternative ways to fund women's organisations, check for the following:**

- Does the routing agency (consortium/women's fund) have established links to grassroots women's organisations, links to organisations of women with disabilities, or of other disadvantaged women?
- How will the routing agency share resources equitably with grassroots women's organisations?
- What measures are put in place to ensure an equitable partnership (partners in decision-making rather than merely subcontracting)?

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## **What to consider when women's organisations are subcontracted by an intermediary international organisation (INGO or UN)**

Intermediary INGOs are often the direct recipients of SDC funds and they further subcontract local organisations, including women's organisations. For humanitarian contexts, the Grand Bargain called for intermediaries to be held accountable to their local/national partners and for fair partnership between intermediaries and national/local organisations. These concerns are also relevant in development contexts. It is important that in SDC-funded GBV projects with intermediaries, local/national organisations are not treated as de facto employees of intermediary organisations or subordinate to decisions made by intermediary organisations.



### **When reviewing GBV projects where the primary applicant is an international (intermediary) organisation, check the following:**

- How was the women's (LGBTIQ+) organisation identified and selected for this project? Check for any conscious/unconscious biases in favour of "larger", more well-known organisations.
- Could they be directly funded by the SDC, and the intermediary organisation be subcontracted by the women's organisation for any specific technical support

or service? For example, in Jordan, the SDC directly funds the Arab Women's Organisation, which in turn subcontracts CARE for technical services.

- What is the role of the women's (LGBTIQ+) organisation? Is it just to implement the project designed by the intermediary or did it have an equal say in the design of the project?
- Is the division of roles and responsibilities cognizant of the expertise and experience of women's (LGBTIQ+) organisations?
- Does the project provide a sufficient percentage of funding for the partner organisation's
  - overhead costs/indirect allowances
  - organisational development
  - core costs?
- Is there transparency in funding and budgets towards subcontracted organisations?
- Are the subcontracted women's organisations engaged in PCM moments?

#### **Additional ways in which the SDC can support women's organisations:**

- The SDC can call for safe and enabling environments for women's organisations to operate (especially e.g. in contexts where governments/ de facto authorities restrict women's organisations)
- Engage women's rights organisations in the development of SDC country/regional/GBV strategy development; engaging women's rights organisations/activists as consultants for project design and or evaluations.
- Advocate with the international humanitarian actors for greater representation not only of "local actors" but greater representation of and leadership by women's organisations, including in GBV sub-clusters.
- Advocate with country-based pooled funds to make specific allocations for women's organisations for GBV-specific work.
- Organisations of LGBTIQ+ often do not work explicitly as LGBTIQ+ organisations and may function under different explicit mandates or as loosely formed groups. Make efforts to reach out to activists and informal groups, fund them as part of consortiums, invite them as experts on your panels, project development or evaluation missions and as technical experts for your cooperation office and other partners.
- If you fund an intermediary, make sure that the subcontracted local organisations get fair conditions, as outlined in the Grand Bargain intermediary caucus outcome document that was endorsed by Switzerland in September 2022.