



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

THE NETHERLANDS PARTNER WITH LOCAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Key messages

Local civil society organisations like women's rights organisations (WROs) and feminist movements are well-placed to address the structural and societal drivers of gender inequalities and deliver gender transformative change. However, WROs often endure backlash, face legal and systematic barriers, and are not included in decision-making processes. They are also continuously under-resourced. The Netherlands' SDG5 fund uses several financing mechanisms to partner with, and support, WROs with the aim of achieving gender equality.

This In Practice example builds on the [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: Guidance for Development Partners](#).

Keywords

Civil society | Finance | Gender equality | Partner countries

Key partner

Netherlands

Challenge

Women's rights organisations (WROs) and feminist movements are critical actors in the protection and advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment, and ultimately in achieving the goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development that leaves no one behind. However, they often lack the resources required to carry out their work. While overall financing for gender equality has increased in recent years, financing to these organisations remains irregular and limited. Barriers such as lack of access to technology and training, administrative burdens, and remote locations inhibit financial resources from getting into the hands of local WROs. Additionally, managing small grants to several local organisations is labour intensive for development co-operation partners, yet new efforts to support WROs are emerging.

Approach

The Netherlands recognised the need for alternative financing mechanisms for gender equality and introduced its [SDG5 fund](#) with a budget of almost EUR 500 million over five years (2021-2025). This Fund includes several financing mechanisms for gender equality, including the [Leading from the South](#) (LFS) programme and the [Power of Women](#) grant instrument, both of which are dedicated to funding WROs and feminist movements.

Leading from the South is a feminist funding alliance, led by four women's funds in the Global South, that resources and supports feminist and women's rights organisations, networks and movements that are working towards gender transformative change and the advancement of human rights. LFS has focused on empowering women, girls and transgender persons as agents of change and supports women's rights' activism and lobbying efforts. The first phase of LFS (LFS I) ran from 2017-2020 with a budget of EUR 42 million and was aligned with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) [Dutch Policy on Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#) and the [Policy Framework "Dialogue and Dissent"](#). LFS focuses on three objectives:

- preventing and eliminating sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls
- elevating women's leadership and participation in (political) decision-making
- strengthening women's economic empowerment and improving the economic climate for women.

Results

The LFS programme successfully provided **direct support to 290 organisations** in the Global South. An end of term [evaluation of the LFS programme](#), highlighted the following results:

- By shifting decision-making power to WROs in the Global South, the LFS programme has enabled them to become more involved in decision making, **transforming unfair policies and practices into ones that rebalance power relations and create pathways for change**. This was demonstrated in the case of the Mukkuvar fisherwomen in India (page 45 of the [evaluation report](#)).
- The programme reached and empowered women often overlooked by the mainstream development community due to barriers such as remote locations, disability, lack of skills, technology, or resources.
- The LFS model **facilitated better support to smaller grassroots WROs** through capacity building, assisting with regulatory limitations and collaboration with larger feminist networks.
- Over 86% of LFS I grantees noted significant changes or shifts within their organisational capacity due to LFS funding.
- The increased capacity and visibility of some supported WROs enabled their **contribution to climate and gender policy discussions at the Conference of Parties (COP25 and 26)**.
- The LFS programme, and particularly the significant work of the four women's funds, has helped to fundamentally shift perceptions regarding the capacity of WROs and southern-led women's funds to receive and manage large grants.

The programme was renewed for a second phase (LFS II) of five years (2021-2025) with a budget of EUR 80 million. The four women's funds have already selected nearly 300 grantees and have started to work with them.

Lessons learnt

The LFS programme has enabled the Dutch MFA to learn from and harness southern-led women's funds' unique and deep understanding of the context, dynamics, constraints, needs and opportunities for local WROs and feminist movements. Key lessons learnt include:

- The importance of **accessible, flexible and adaptable funding principles**:
 - The feminist funding principles applied by the four women's funds in the LFS alliance ensure that their grant making is driven by the needs and priorities of the feminist movement.
 - The LFS approach to identifying WROs to fund follows specific thematic areas aligned with MFA priorities while remaining broad enough to allow for a range of WROs to apply.
 - The flexibility of the funds allows for the adaptable and responsive allocation of resources while maintaining the focus on the overall objectives of the programme.
 - It proved critical to reach regions that have been deprioritised by the international development community, particularly for WROs working in contexts hostile to women's rights defenders, and for women and trans-led organisations in middle-income countries.
- Finding ways to **target and support historically excluded and small grassroots WROs and to help address and rebalance the power relationship** between women's rights funders and grantees:
 - Putting local WROs and women's funds at the centre of the MFA's grant-making agenda.
 - Directing funds into WROs' core operating costs enables the organisations to continuously carry out their work and withstand potential shocks, changes in priorities, or political cycles.
 - Maintaining an open and transparent relationship between the women's funds and the Dutch MFA, with a commitment to identifying and rethinking the practices of traditional bilateral development partner relationships.

Further information

Leading from the South, <https://www.leadingfromthesouth.org/about-us>.

Government of the Netherlands (2021), *End evaluation of the policy framework Leading from the South 2017-2020*, https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/documenten/reports/2021/10/30/end-evaluation-of-the-policy-framework-leading-from-the-south/TI-TRANSTEC+Final+Report_LFS+Evaluation.pdf.

Government of the Netherlands, *Equal rights and opportunities for women and girls*, <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/the-development-policy-of-the-netherlands/equal-rights-for-women-and-girls>.

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OECD resources

OECD (2022), *Blended finance for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/2022-blended-finance-gender-equality.pdf>.

OECD (2022), *Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment: A snapshot*, https://www.oecd.org/dac/Gender_ODA_2022.pdf.

OECD (2022), *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: Guidance for Development Partners*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls_0bddfa8f-en.

OECD (2021), *Development finance towards the elimination of gender-based violence*, <https://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/development-finance-elimination-gender-based-violence.pdf>.

OECD (2021), *Development finance for gender equality: the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/financing-for-the-gef-action-coalitions-web-june.pdf>.

OECD, "Guidance on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls", *Development Co-operation Fundamentals*, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=1143_1143052-b7ff8og4ir&title=Guidance-on-Gender-Equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women-and-girls.

To learn more about the Netherlands' development co-operation see:

OECD, "Netherlands", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/2faea623-en>.

OECD, *Netherlands' strategic partnerships to strengthen civil society advocacy capacity*, <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/practices/netherlands-strategic-partnerships-to-strengthen-civil-society-advocacy-capacity-68164dc7>.

OECD, *The Netherlands' inclusive and human rights-based approach to supporting civil society in the digital age*, <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/practices/the-netherlands-inclusive-and-human-rights-based-approach-to-supporting-civil-society-in-the-digital-age-cca7bb2>.

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