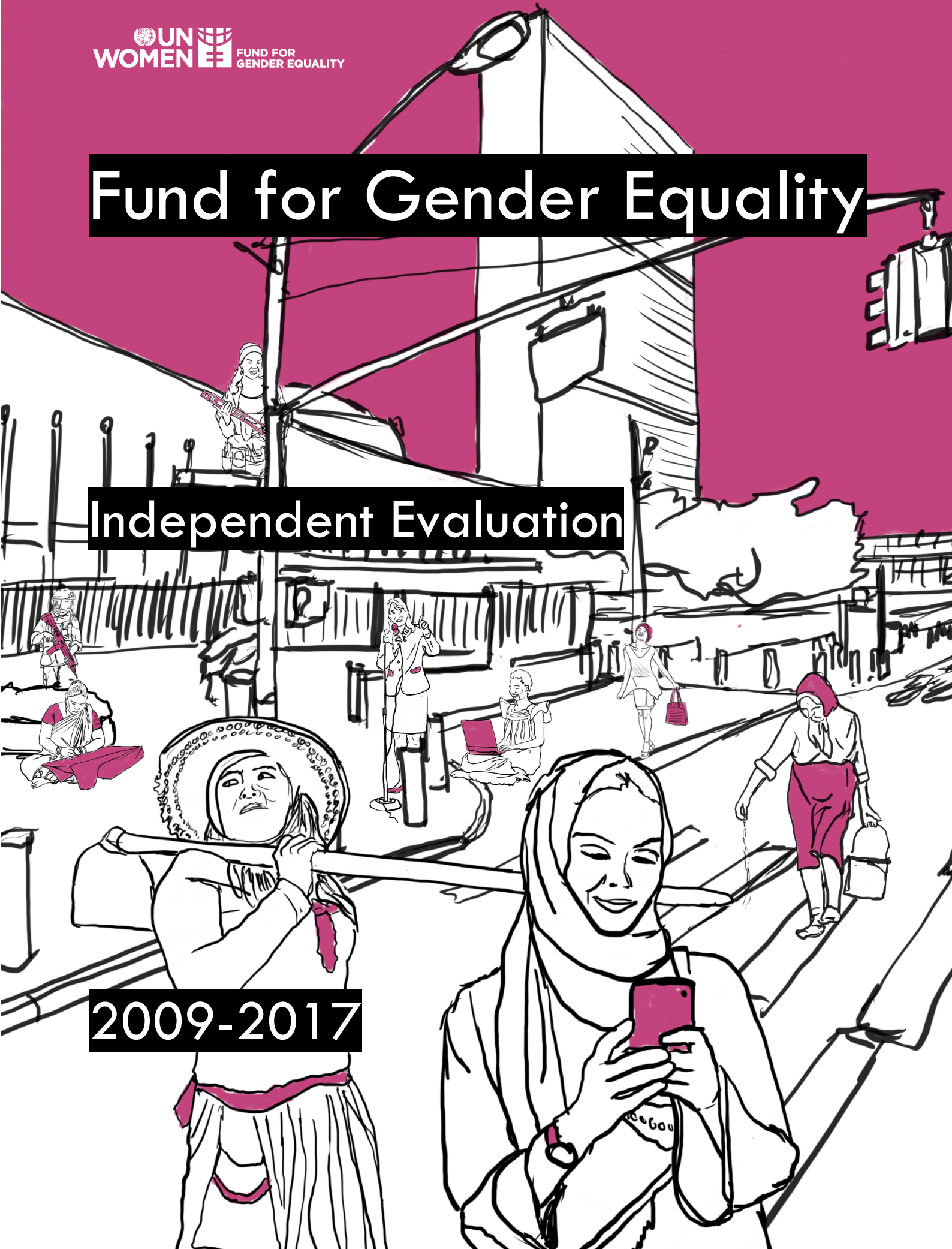


# Fund for Gender Equality

## Independent Evaluation

2009-2017



# UN WOMEN

## Independent Global Programme Evaluation of the Fund for Gender Equality, 2009-2017

### Volume 1

# FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

2018

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## List of acronyms

BPA	Beijing Platform for Action
BMC	Business Mapping Canvas
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CO	Country Office
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRF	UN Women Development Results Framework
FGE	Fund for Gender Equality
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
HQ	Head Quarters
HRBAP	Human Rights Based Approach to Programming
ICT	Information Communication Technology
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
M&R	Monitoring & Reporting Specialist
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OEEF	UN Women Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework
P#	Professional Level Staff in the UN system
ProDoc	Programme Document
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
RBM	Results Based Management
RMS	UN Women Results Management System
RO	Regional Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDG-F	SDG Fund
SP	UN Women Strategic Plan
UNDG	UN Development Group
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women (Predecessor entity to UN Women)
UNTF (EVAW)	UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WPE	Women's Political Empowerment

# Executive Summary

## Overview of the evaluation

This evaluation assesses \$84 million USD invested in accelerating the implementation of gender equality commitments through the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE). Of this amount, \$64 million was granted directly to civil society organisations in 80 countries through 121 grants made over three rounds of grant-making; the remaining funds covering capacity building, technical support, knowledge management, and management activities. The Fund encompassed two Programme Documents (ProDocs) starting in 2009 and ending in 2017.

FGE was an ambitious undertaking, not just in its aims but also in its design. The original ProDoc was pioneering in several ways that built on lessons from the past and sought to implement these quickly and at scale.

1. Demonstrating the hypothesis that women's organisations can absorb, manage and leverage large scale funding for gender equality
2. Managing programmes in sensitive political and economic spaces through requiring coalitions of CSOs and government to discover and build on common ground
3. Establishing a technical committee with women from all over the world as members
4. Investing early in an online presence to maximise reach and efficiency of calls for proposals

## Evaluation objectives and intended audience

This evaluation was commissioned because the FGE ProDoc 2014-2017 is coming to an end. Such an ending marks a natural point of transition to assess past performance and identify recommendations for the future. It assesses the Fund's achievements, working methods, management and overall performance to learn lessons for women's political and economic empowerment through working with civil society, and provide input for UN Women's Senior Management to make informed decisions about future civil society grant making approaches.

The primary intended users for the evaluation are:

- 1) **FGE staff and grantees**, to capture the performance story and lessons of FGE, and to support mutual accountability for implementation of the aims and objectives of the Fund.
- 2) **UN Women Senior Management Team**, to inform decision-making on a sustainable, effective, relevant and efficient approaches to direct-financing of civil society for women's empowerment.
- 3) **FGE, UN Women, women-led organizations, development actors, and gender advocates**, to share learning that can improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of future grant-making; and to support advocacy and awareness raising on the value derived from funding and capacity development of women-led CSOs.

The evaluation seeks to answer 15 questions arranged under standard OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Each evaluation question was answered through the development of 1-3 hypotheses to test. Hypotheses were assessed using a scale of 3 levels of qualitative progress markers based on: 1) the minimum standard expected of FGE, 2) a benchmark standard of comparable funds and programmes, and 3) the ideal goal of FGE. Hypotheses and progress markers were validated by the broad reference group.

## Evaluation methodology


The feminist design of the evaluation drew on a combination of two approaches:

**Democratic Evaluation** focuses on inclusive practices which foster participation and collaboration. However, it is also used as a means of ensuring public accountability and transparency.

**Outcomes Harvesting** is an evaluation approach in which evaluators, grant makers, and/or programme managers and staff identify, formulate, verify, analyse and interpret 'outcomes' in programming contexts where relations of cause and effect are not fully understood.

Four main levels of analysis were undertaken.

- 1) A portfolio analysis that drew on 23 global-level interviews, quantitative analysis of 160 indicators for each grant, benchmarking against 15 other funds and programmes, and a grantee survey with 96 responses.

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- 2) An organisational review that drew on a desk review of 1,005 documents, and interviews with 9 FGE staff.
  - 3) Participatory grantee reviews and social learning, synthesising 44 complete multimedia self-review submissions from FGE grantees and 33 detailed submissions to an [Empower Women discussion forum](#).
  - 4) Country case study visits to India and Bolivia representing 7 grants, and \$6,549,856 in investment, that drew on focus group discussions with representative from all grants, meetings with UN Women country offices, and site visits to grantees work.

## Most important findings and conclusions

### Did the fund do things right?

**The Fund for Gender Equality implemented everything it set out in Programme Documents covering 2009-2017.**

The evaluation found that FGE has *directly* touched the lives of at least 535,800 women from 80 countries through increased awareness and visibility of women's human rights, stronger CSO networks for gender equality, and establishing local partnerships for women's empowerment. Policy-level impacts are likely to have benefitted millions more. As a result it is viewed by women's civil society as **an important and necessary mechanism for advancing gender equality**.

The financing gap for gender equality CSOs (based on demand) is close to \$60 million USD per year (equivalent to 1/3 of the non-core resources mobilised by UN Women in 2016<sup>1</sup>). Addressing this gap was an original ambition of the Fund. FGE launched with a \$65 million USD contribution in 2009; by the time of the ProDoc 2014-2017 this had reduced to a steady biennial income of \$6 million USD. Nevertheless, the early results of the \$7.5 million Round 3 grants indicate the enormous value this support represents to the structurally-underfunded women's CSO that received it.

Set up under intense time pressure, and with a large initial contribution to manage, the initial programme design paid attention to realising the vision of a strategic fund grounded in feminist principles and the lessons of the past. It was not considered to be the creation of a permanent entity, and did not give significant consideration to resource mobilisation (neither did the subsequent ProDocs). As a result, the Fund itself has struggled to achieve sustained high-levels of financial support.

The Fund has, however, successfully mobilised around 0.7% of the global funding for gender equality that it is targeting. As gender is a marginalised area in terms of development funding, there remains a large untouched potential pool of funds through better gender mainstreaming in other sectors, such as climate or global health.

As the operating landscape and funding environment evolved, the primary focus of FGE has adapted: shifting towards a tight focus on addressing the structural inequality experienced by local NGOs and women-led CSOs. Recognition of this focus on inequality between organisations – between large scale 'general NGOs' and women's CSOs in particular – is critical to understanding the unique value proposition of the Fund.

**FGE grant-making has contributed directly to the development results and organisational effectiveness priorities in UN Women strategic plans covering 2011-2017.**

At the global level, the evaluation found that **FGE grant-making has been clearly aligned with UN Women development goals**, normative frameworks, and the priorities of key stakeholders. Within the areas of political and economic empowerment, FGE has systematically targeted, and strengthened the voice of marginalised groups of women. Since these groups are often not on the national agenda of governments, they mostly feature only on the fringes of UN Women country level strategic notes. This gives an impression of loose alignment at country level. However, the evaluation found multiple examples of issues and organisations first identified by FGE being mainstreamed into core UN Women programming because of increased awareness and demand built among national stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://annualreport.unwomen.org/en/2017/financial-statements>

While the actions of FGE has been guided by a consistent theory-of-change that is fully pretexted on establishing civil society leadership, tensions have sometimes emerged in cases where UN Women country offices perceive that FGE is not supporting the implementation of country Strategic Notes that were developed in consultation with women’s civil society representatives. Establishing a **shared understanding of what ‘demand-led’ civil society financing means** – as has been achieved in some countries – is critical to the future performance of the Fund.

**Despite the original design of FGE giving insufficient consideration to sustaining the fund; FGE has managed inputs and outputs economically, attained an appropriate level of efficiency, and delivered overall value-for-money.**

Comparative analysis with 15 gender, civil society, and environmental funds and small grants programmes reveals that **FGE performance benchmarks well in most of the institutional enablers identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021**. This includes: monitoring and reporting of FGE projects has been systematic, reliable, and detailed; a positive reputation among most women’s civil society representatives for its efficient and effective stewardship of resources; and extensive evidence of FGE practicing a culture of ‘accompaniment’ – supporting leadership, continuous learning, and performance improvement by civil society organisations.

Both the management of input/output value, and an overall value-for-money assessment, indicate that FGE has achieved a ‘good’ performance. While the weakest areas have been found to be the systematic assessment of impacts, and the consistent assurance of sustainability, these two dimensions do not substantively detract from the impressive overall achievement of a comprehensive and **robust level of value-for-money over the lifetime of the Fund**.

The strongest overall performance of FGE relates to the ‘potential for impact’ evaluation criterion, with the Fund achieving 80% of its ambition and 3/5 hypotheses rating as having fully achieved the intended ‘goal standard’. The second strongest area is ‘effectiveness’, with FGE having achieved 67% of its performance ambition, and all hypotheses achieving or approaching the ‘benchmark standard’ based on comparable funds and programmes.

By comparison, the only evaluation criterion in which FGE did not achieve the minimum expected standard for all hypotheses was in relation to ‘potential for sustainability’. This low score is primarily related to the strategic weakness of the Fund in sustaining its own financing base, and creating limited transformation in the sustainability of grantees; however, a strongly positive finding is that 96% of supported projects have continued in some form beyond the end of FGE funding. The remaining criteria, ‘relevance’ and ‘organisational efficiency’ rated in the mid-range of the ambition of FGE and comparing similar to equivalent funds and programmes.

Evaluation criteria	Achievement of performance ‘markers’
<b>Effectiveness</b>	67%
<b>Organisational efficiency</b>	45%
<b>Potential for sustainability</b>	22%
<b>Potential for impact</b>	80%
<b>Relevance</b>	57%

### Did the Fund do the right things?

**The comparative advantage of FGE has been addressing social norms to advance gender equality; the collaborative advantage is addressing inequality between the organisations that are needed to ensure no one is left behind.**

The evaluation found that the most frequent contribution of FGE to gender equality outcomes is in enabling women’s participation in political and economic spaces. In doing so, a key strength of the Fund is successfully **addressing social norms that define gender relations**. These directly contributed to output 2 of the UN Women Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework (OEEF) 2014-2017. It also complemented the work on UN Women and UN Country Teams on addressing legal, policy, and institutional norms relating to gender equality and women’s empowerment.



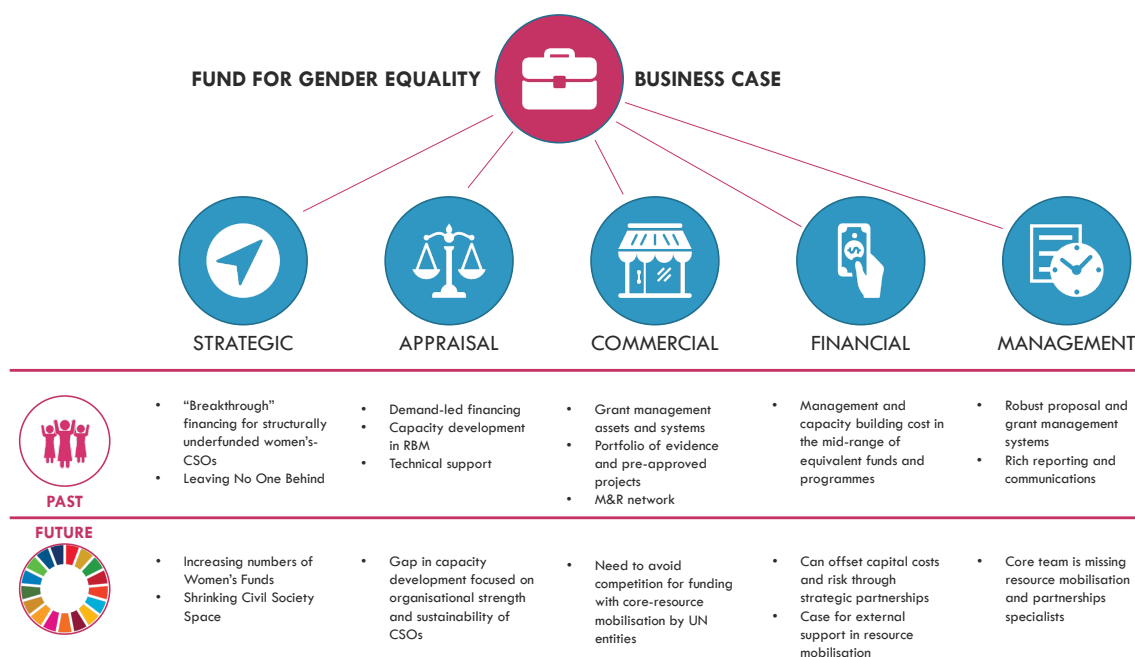
FGE remains uniquely placed within the international system to work with **organisations and issues in the margins to reach some of the furthest women behind first**. While FGE it has also contributed to several other objectives – including building civil society capacity, convening multiple stakeholders, and supporting policy implementation by institutions – it is not exclusive in delivering these results.

Despite this niche in ensuring the no one is left behind, corporate fundraising efforts have been unable to disentangle FGE from other UN Women programming in the minds of key audiences. Confusion exists within donor community about why financing FGE does not constitute a core contribution to UN Women; and why UN Women is not co-financing FGE as a mechanism to reach women’s civil society. Confusion has also existed within FGE and UN Women about where responsibility for resource mobilisation ultimately sits.

Alongside its global grant-making reach that has sought to achieve distributive equity, an important contribution that FGE has made to advancing UN Women goals for political and economic empowerment is to **establish the perceived legitimacy of organisations that reach people and issues who are forgotten**. The support to women doing manual scavenging in India – visited by the evaluation case study – is illustrative of the political, as well as financial and technical, support that an FGE grant can bestow.

**The most powerful 'business case' for FGE is to accelerate reaching the furthest behind first.**

Reaching underfunded women’s organisations is critical to reaching the marginalised constituencies and issues they serve. Under the umbrella of the UN (and with access to UN Women country offices) **FGE has more dependable access to more places than other funds and programmes**. The most powerful strategic case for donors to support the Fund for Gender Equality is this unique access to structurally underfunded women’s CSOs<sup>2</sup>.



The evolving decisions to progressively focus on reducing management and capacity development costs of the Fund – rather than seriously invest in resource mobilisation – is, in retrospect, likely to have been wrong. This resulted in a situation where uncertainty around a possible ‘reset’, ‘relaunch’, or responsible exit led to loss in human resources capabilities (knowledge management, monitoring and reporting, and capacity development) that were some of the main reasons donors invested in the Fund – putting further grants into question, and creating a negative spiral.

<sup>2</sup> This financing gap is estimated at \$2 billion USD over the lifetime of FGE, based on proposals submitted to the Fund.

Based on the DFID business case framework, the evaluation evidence indicates that **the case for ‘doing something’ remains strong and there is a need for a Fund for women’s civil society**. Despite the rise of multiple funding avenues for civil society, the trends in funding data suggest that the counter-case (to do nothing) will continue to “starve the roots”<sup>3</sup> of women’s civil society at a time that it is under increasing political pressure worldwide. This is particularly the case for the under-recognised and politically sensitive issues that need to be addressed to *reach the furthest behind first*.

While more-and-better fundraising would help FGE to meet more of the unmet demand for financing gender equality, this is unlikely to reach significant scale without **transforming FGE into a joint programme or UN system-wide fund**<sup>4</sup>. The existing portfolio of quality-assured but unfunded proposals from previous rounds could be a significant asset for such an initiative; as are UN Women’s experience and systems for administration and accounting.

**Most FGE project activities are sustained by former grantees; although coverage of convening, connecting and capacity building during grants was variable.**

Grantees have reported several important design features of the Fund that have contributed to sustaining at least half of activities beyond the completion of FGE grants. As a result, 96% of FGE projects continued in some form once grants were completed, with 19% of projects being scaled-up and expanded using new sources of finance. Most FGE grantees put in place tactics to sustain the project activities beyond the FGE grant by combining their own funds with other sources.

At the same time, and with some exceptions, the prevalence and intensity of the key contributions of FGE to sustainability were confined to projects and had **limited effects on wider organisational transformation**. For example, technical support received from the FGE has strengthened grantee ability to achieve results, but was consistently found to require a broader set of organisational capabilities in order to be transformative. This includes demands for capacities that FGE was itself weak in such as resource mobilisation and strategic growth. Nevertheless, and despite these challenges, **FGE benchmarks as comparable to – or, in the cases of RBM and grant-making, better than – similar funds and programmes (such as the Dutch MDG3 Fund) for sustainability**.

The evaluation case studies revealed the value that FGE grantees place on opportunities to connect and convene with other actors – in terms of both amplifying and sustaining their work. The evaluation found that **FGE provided concrete support to convening and connecting women’s CSOs and gender equality advocates** – including at a time before this role was consistently undertaken by UN Women country offices. A lot of potential for cross-country and regional exchange between FGE grantees and UN Women offices remains to be realised.

**FGE compares positively with other funds and small grants programmes in terms of the UN Women ‘institutional enablers’, with the exception of fundraising.**

Achieving a combined capacity-building and management overhead of 24% places the Fund right in the centre of comparable small grants programmes from the environment sector – most of which fund smaller and simpler projects than FGE. At the same time, current FGE systems and structures were designed to achieve this level of efficiency based on the initial level of funding from Spain, and require a minimum-level of annual resources mobilisation in the range of \$6m-\$10m to remain efficient. FGE had insufficient access to human capital (in terms of dedicated specialists, access to corporate capacities, or senior management representation) for partnership development and fundraising throughout its life. This compares poorly with funds that are successfully sustaining and growing; which have at least one professional fundraising or partnerships position.

A major overhaul in the branding and communications approach of FGE since 2014 has resulted in universally appreciated Annual Reports and knowledge products. Along with specific concrete examples of change, these have contributed to the visibility of UN Women more broadly – frequently being used to advocate for the wider mission of the entity. The main underutilised opportunity identified by the evaluation is the inconsistent integration between FGE and the other UN Women sub-brands, especially

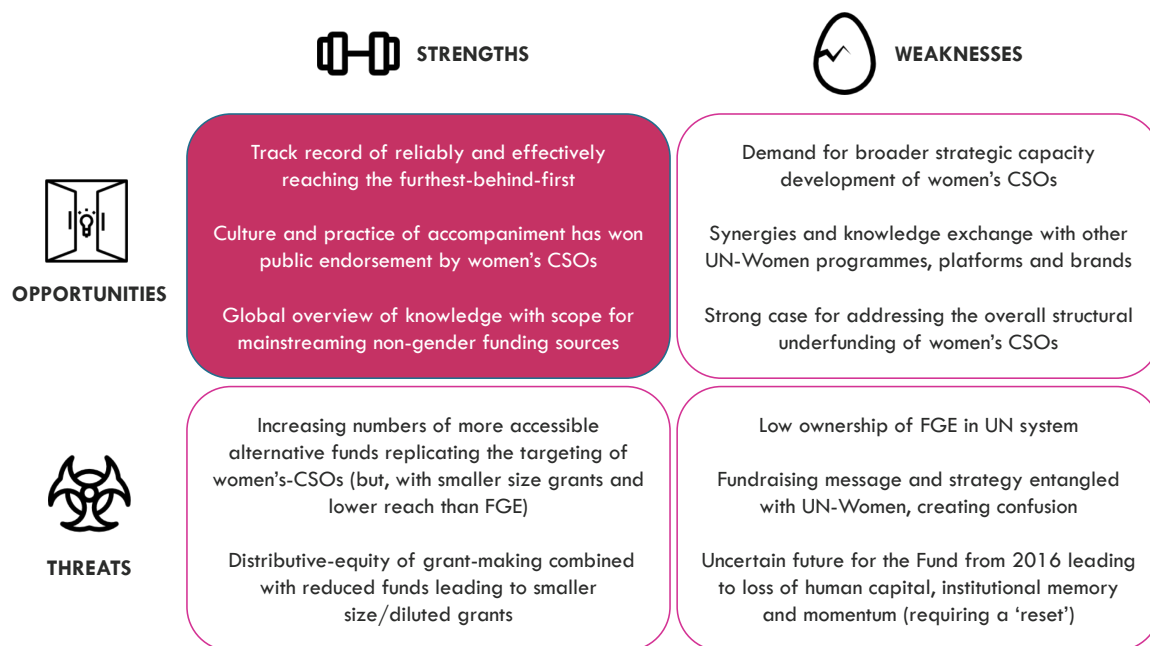
<sup>3</sup> AWID (2013) Watering the leaves: starving the roots.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/sg-report-on-unds-qcpr-june-2017.pdf>

Empower Women (for knowledge management) and the HeForShe Equality Line cause marketing brand (for resource mobilisation).

**The most promising opportunities for future grant-making are building on FGE strengths to enhance 'access to funding', improve 'reach' to target groups, and 'connect' different stakeholders to address the structural marginalisation of women's organisations.**

Combined with an analysis of the strategic case for FGE and mapping the innovation landscape, the evaluation evidence indicates that **enhancing 'access to funding', improving 'reach' to target groups, and 'connecting' stakeholders into communities of learning and practice are the most promising dimensions of innovation** if FGE wants to grow in the future. While these dimensions sit at the intersection of the Fund's existing strengths and opportunities, they also require that it overcomes some key weaknesses in order to avoid the main threats to its sustainability.



## Main recommendations

The following 8 high-priority recommendations have been developed to address the purpose of the evaluation through actionable management responses.

They are based on a systematic qualitative analysis of the evidence and conclusions, respond to all of the evaluation criteria, and were presented for validation by the Broad Reference Group as representatives of the relevant stakeholders.

### Prioritise innovation in access to funding and reaching the furthest behind first.

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and with Head, Fund for Gender Equality and Director, Strategic Partnerships
Recommended management action:	<b>Focus future grant-making and knowledge management on improving access to funding for women's CSOs to reach the furthest behind first</b>

The most powerful FGE business case is to accelerate reaching the furthest behind first in terms of marginalised groups of people who can only be reached by – or reached best by – women's CSOs. This requires building on existing FGE efforts to enhance access and reach fringe organisations, such as multilingual grant-making, independent technical assessments, and online grant management.

There is scope for future grant making to expand reach to marginalised groups beyond rural women, and to give more focus in future M&E to honest learning on what approaches have failed and what have

succeeded in terms of outcome-level changes. There is also considerable scope to work with UN Women operations sections to explore options for risk-based dispensation for low-capacity women’s CSOs from meeting all of the current grant management and financial reporting requirements during the initial phases of each grant (such as has been modelled by the UNICEF Small Scale Funding Agreement – SSFA).

**Leverage FGE’s comparative and collaborative advantages in addressing social norms to align with New Ways of Working across the UN system.**

Target group:	Deputy Executive Director, Policy and Programme Bureau, and Director, Strategic Partnerships <i>with UN Women Senior Management Team</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Advocate with UN Development Group members – including but not limited to UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, ILO, IOM, UNEP, and UNHABITAT – for a joint fund for gender equality that will address social norms to advance women’s political and economic empowerment</b>

The evaluation evidence clearly indicates that the comparative advantage of FGE has been to address social norms to advance gender equality in political and economic empowerment. Strengthening the connections of FGE with the wider UN system offers the complementary collaborative advantage of reaching women’s CSOs almost anywhere in the world, and accessing additional pools of gender mainstreaming funding from other sectors.

As it is currently constituted, there is no significant ownership of FGE in the UN system aside from UN Women. This is inconsistent with, and misses the potential of, both UN Women’s coordination role and New Ways of Working under the current initiatives of the Secretary General. At the same time, the evidence of FGE contributions to multiple SDGs demonstrates that significant scope exists to encourage projects at the intersections between economic and political empowerment, and the mandates of other members of the UN Development Group.

Taken together, the evaluation evidence suggests that a joint UN mechanism – with UN Women as the managing agent – is likely to benefit a fund for gender equality in the same way the joint arrangement helps sustain the UN Trust Fund on Ending Violence Against Women.

**Shift future programming from ‘picking winners’ to ‘connecting innovators’.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality <i>with Director, Civil Society</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Conduct a scoping study into the viability, implications and potential of a multi-sided platform ‘business model’ to better address the structural underfunding of women’s organisations</b>

The most compelling strategic case for FGE is to address the structural marginalisation of women’s CSOs that has been evidenced by OECD GenderNet and AWID research, among others. The design and eligibility requirements of FGE have been progressively refined to target grants to achieve this aim. However, the scale of FGE financing is currently 5% of the level required to have a meaningful impact on this problem.

Examining the problem of inequitable financing of women’s civil society through the RSA<sup>5</sup> innovation lens of ‘*think like a system, act like an entrepreneur*’<sup>6</sup> reveals that nearly all similar funds and programmes are taking the same approach as FGE. In each case, potential investors are offered a mechanism for selecting a number of women’s CSOs that is differentiated primarily in its process, eligibility and approach to grant-making. No fund or programme is tackling the structural nature of the problem.

Addressing the structural gap in gender equality financing requires a shift from a ‘project’ mindset to a ‘platform’ approach – from competing to do civil society financing better than other funds, to connecting

<sup>5</sup> Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce; <https://www.thersa.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/from-design-thinking-to-system-change>

and enabling an ecosystem of institutional investors, funding mechanisms for gender equality, and women's CSOs. Exploring a platform business model could reveal alternative perspectives to innovating connecting different parties, reaching new audiences, and expanding access to more resources for women's CSOs.

“A platform business model creates an ecosystem that promotes shared value in place of traditionally transactional relationships”

(Brown, 2016. *3 Questions to Ask Before Adopting a Platform Business Model*. Harvard Business Review.)

Fully scoping the opportunity, and the associated costs, of a platform approach requires a more substantive body of work than this evaluation can provide. Nevertheless, the evaluation evidence does indicate that FGE has already got access to many of the ingredients required by a multi-sided platform (MSP) model. These include an initial supply of pre-assured projects, data to empower both sets of users, a trustworthy grant-management mechanism, a process for identifying high-potential projects, and a monitoring and reporting system.

However, establishing a platform would also require some changes. These would include introducing an element of donor-advised funding that allowed donors to provide restricted eligibility criteria (such as geographic constraints) for at least a portion of their contributions. It would also require curation of proposals, filtered results data and tailored communications through a user-friendly interface (such as Kickstarter or Kiva).

#### **Incubate the strategic and organisational capacities of women's CSOs and networks.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality with Director, Civil Society
Recommended management action:	<b>Build on the FGE support and strengthen pillars to create an incubator programme for women's CSOs</b>

The evaluation findings indicate that FGE was right to include a significant focus on capacity development of CSOs through two of its pillars (supporting with technical assistance, and strengthening RBM). Both dimensions of the FGE design were valued by grantees. However, the evaluation evidence also reveals gaps in the coverage and intensity of capacity development, and lessons for enhancing sustainability.

Two issues stand out in terms of improving the performance achieved by FGE:

1. Broaden the coverage of capacity development to include strategic planning (for example, transitioning leadership beyond a founder or expanding areas of operations), resource mobilisation, communications, and other demand-led capabilities.
2. Intensify the transformative potential of capacity development by extending the length of support to high-performing grants – for example through continuity (up-or-out) financing for grants that have demonstrated potential to deliver significant impacts.

These changes would shift the design of FGE closer towards an intensive incubator programme (a structured process of support that grantees graduate through) that aimed to combine transformative finance with transformative organisation development<sup>7</sup>. In addition to broadening and intensifying capacity development, an incubator approach could also more consistently connect grantees with UN Women networks, convening mechanisms, and flagship programmes through regular sessions to meet practitioners, experts and UN Women networks.

#### **Redesign the experience of donorship in FGE to build engagement, long-term support, and knowledge exchange.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division, Head, Fund for Gender Equality and Director, Strategic Partnerships
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<sup>7</sup> An example of a social venture incubator is run by University of Cambridge Judge Business School: <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/faculty-research/centres/social-innovation/cambridge-social-ventures/social-venture-incubator/>

Recommended management action:	<b>Commission a dedicated specialist position to engage existing and potential institutional donors in a revitalised partnerships strategy</b>
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The evaluation findings clearly indicate the value of the strong commitment in FGE to demand-led grant-making. At the same time, it identifies some unintended consequences of this approach on the engagement with, and ownership of, donors to the Fund. Other funds and programmes that are currently demonstrating growth tend to be associated with a stronger role for donors and high-level patrons in governance and steering mechanisms.

Giving donors a more proactive role does not imply sacrificing the independence of FGE grant-making. Hybrid models for governance have been demonstrated by emerging funds, such as AmplifyChange, in which donors are engaged in setting benchmark ranges for the targeting of Fund resources – while the fund managers are free to make decisions within these benchmarks.

There are other ways that Fund donors can become engaged. Some of the smaller donors to FGE have emphasised an interest in working with the Fund not only to broaden their reach, but also to engage in a grant-making community of practice from which they can learn. FGE could do more to nurture this community of exchange on good civil society donorship as a value proposition. Presently, it is inhibited from doing so by the absence of a partnership specialist within the organogram, and the continued vacancy of the Deputy Fund Manager position.

**Invest in a ground-up revitalisation of FGE fundraising strategy and human resources.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality <i>with Director, Strategic Partnerships</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Secure continuous access to professional fundraising capabilities dedicated to continuously replenishing the Fund with a target in the range of \$10m-\$60m per year</b>

The evaluation firmly concludes that the original design of FGE and subsequent changes gave insufficient consideration to sustaining the fund in the long term. As a result, the current level of finance available to the Fund covers only a marginal portion of the expressed demand from civil society. FGE requires a fundraising strategy that is complementary-to and not competitive-with other UN Women global resource mobilisation efforts.

Given that the Fund requires a fundraising minimum of \$10 million per year to maintain competitive efficiency, and that the funding gap to meet most of the demand from eligible women’s CSOs is \$60 million per year, the target for a fundraising strategy should be between these amounts. Furthermore, the fundraising strategy requires disentangling both the fundraising messages and the fundraising strategies of FGE and UN Women HQ. Doing so could unleash synergies, such as reducing UN Women transaction costs by passing all small donations (below a set threshold) to FGE; or supporting contributions from country-level donors by allowing country-specific targeting for funds contributed from the Global South.

Having access to dedicated fundraising expertise is a critical gap in the capacity of FGE to make this strategy happen. Securing this expertise is therefore a priority in terms of both sustaining and growing the Fund. Evidence from other funds indicates that public-private partnerships for securing talent and strategic flexibility have been used to good effect in terms of specific capabilities. Scoping the viability of such a consortium-supported fund could offer an alternative and less capital intensive approach to securing the fundraising talent that FGE needs.

**Preserve the operational assets established by FGE.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality
Recommended management action:	<b>Prepare an asset management plan to preserve and benefit from the considerable and successful investments that have been made by FGE</b>



The evaluation analysis found that FGE has managed its inputs and outputs economically, attained an appropriate level of efficiency, and delivered overall value-for-money across multiple indicators. It has done so in part because of a set of operational, programmatic and strategic assets that have been built over the lifetime of the Fund. This series of assets can support of future grant making to women’s civil society. However, the uncertain sustainability of FGE places them at risk of being lost.

The evaluation has identified six key grant-making assets that have the potential to benefit future grant-making to women’s civil society if they are suitably managed:

1. **The FGE brand:** its legacy of results, visible commitment to women’s civil society, and legitimacy of association.
2. **A portfolio of evidence:** the track record of grants, with outcomes data, evaluation reports, and knowledge insights about what works and what does not.
3. **A motivated and functional team:** that achieved ‘*esprit de corps*’, maintains institutional memory, and has a network of global relationships with civil society.
4. **An online grant management system:** linked to UN Women accounting and audit standards (shared with UNTF).
5. **A book of quality assured next-in-line proposals:** previously reviewed, but as-yet-unfunded, quick start projects to fund.
6. **Reduced transaction cost reporting:** an established mechanism for the provision of a single accessible annual report to all FGE donors, rather than individual donor reporting.

**Acknowledge, document and institutionalise the good practices approach, inter-personal dynamics, and contributions of the FGE team.**

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality
Recommended management action:	<b>Commission a UN Women learning note on lessons and results from the ‘accompaniment’ approach with grantees and internal FGE team dynamics</b>

The evaluation identified extensive primary and secondary evidence that, within creative space afforded to it, the FGE secretariat developed a functional, motivated, and responsive team. The dynamics of this team mirror many of the principles that FGE established for its grant-making, and it thus ‘led-by example’. This manifested itself in the ‘accompaniment’ approach of the FGE team, and FGE focal persons, towards grantees: an empowering style that contributed to the extremely high satisfaction ratings of 96% of grantees being ‘*highly satisfied*’.

Overshadowed by the challenges of fundraising and sustaining the Fund, this positive team dynamic has not always been recognised more widely by UN Women as an example from which positive lessons can be derived for the rest of the organisation. Taking time to reflect on and document this experience in the form of a UN Women (not just FGE) learning note would contribute to both acknowledging the work of a committed group of staff, and help to institutionalise the approach more widely in UN Women.

# 1. Object and Context of the Evaluation







## 1.1 The Fund for Gender Equality

### Purpose and goal

The Fund for Gender Equality is UN Women's global grant-making mechanism dedicated to the economic and political empowerment of women worldwide. Since being formed under UNIFEM, the Fund has provided technical and financial support to innovative initiatives from women-led civil society organizations that demonstrate concrete results on the ground, especially for women in situations of marginalization. As of 2017, 535,823 women and girls are estimated to have benefited *directly* from FGE projects; with the Fund making \$64 million USD in total grants (around \$122 per woman reached).

“The Fund for Gender Equality was originally an experiment: what could large, multi-million-dollar (up to \$5m) grants over the course of 3-5 years do to transfer women's policies into actual changes in women's rights?”

(PhD analysis of FGE by Kellea Miller (2016), provided to the evaluation by FGE)

Two strategic goals have been articulated for FGE (ProDoc 2014-2017):

1. Help close gaps in local, national and regional implementation of gender equality commitments under the MDGs and Beijing Platform for Action (2009-2014; cycles 1 and 2).
2. Front-load tangible results and measurable progress toward Post-2015 goals (2015-2017; cycle 3).

### Components

FGE made competitive grants under two broad thematic areas: women's political empowerment, and women's economic empowerment. Within these, six sub-themes were covered: 1) catalyzing legislative and policy change, 2) expanding & strengthening women's leadership, 3) engaging women in electoral politics, 4) supporting rural women to access & control resources and assets, 5) ensuring decent work & social protection, 6) fostering sustainable entrepreneurship.

Grants were made initially to NGOs and government bodies, in later rounds narrowing to only women-led CSOs. Three rounds of grant-making were completed, in 2011, 2013, and 2015. Round 1 consisted of very large implementation grants (~\$1-3 million) aimed at breakthrough transformational results, and smaller catalytic grants (~\$100,000 - 500,000). Rounds 2 and 3 made a smaller range of grant sizes, between \$200,000–\$1 million. All grants were multi-year, covering 2-4 years; and the average grants size across all rounds was \$529,000.

### Geographic context and boundaries

Figure 1 illustrates the total FGE portfolio of grants, covering 80 countries and reaching 134 grantees (including 130 CSOs) between 2009-2017. Only projects in OECD DAC recipient countries were eligible for FGE funding. Across all rounds, 3,648 concept notes were received<sup>8</sup> (an average of 1,216 per cycle), from which 143 semi-finalists were provided with technical support, and 121 projects eventually funded (3.3% of concept notes). These met 1.8% of the financial amount requested by civil society.

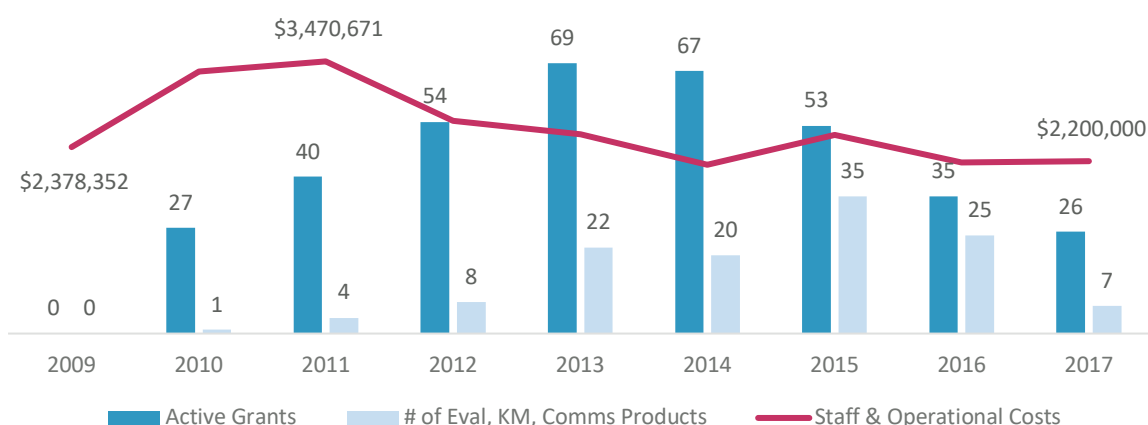
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<sup>8</sup> Since concept notes were intentionally brief and responded to existing demand, the evaluation estimates that it cost less than \$2,000 in staff time to complete each proposal. This is based on interviews with grantees that emphasised the reasonable cost of applying to FGE compared to other grant sources; and around 10 days to complete all tasks. The total investment of civil society in the process is thus around \$7.3 million.





Figure 4 Level of FGE activity vs expenditure on management costs (Source: FGE data)



## 1.2 The logic model and the expected results chain

The overall Fund evolved from having only a results framework in ProDoc 2009-2014, to several inter-related elaborations of how change was expected to be realised in the ProDoc 2014-2017: 1) a theory of change for WPP and WEE outcomes, 2) the three-pillar approach to grant making (including capacity development), 3) four strategies<sup>9</sup>, 4) four empowerment outcomes for women<sup>10</sup>, 5) a development results framework<sup>11</sup>, and 6) an organisation effectiveness and efficiency framework. Of these, the three pillars (sustain, support, strengthen) feature most prominently in wider FGE literature:

1. **Sustain** gender CSOs through rigorous and competitive global grant-making combined with fundamental planning and programme design skills.
2. **Support** gender CSOs with a package of monitoring and technical support services.
3. **Strengthen** the capacities of gender CSOs in results based management.

Assessment of the overall FGE 'theory of change' from the ProDoc 2014-2017 reveals that it is largely externally focused on how the work of CSOs is expected to contribute to changes in the capabilities of women as rights holders, and women and men as duty bearers, to bring about changes in the economic and political lives of women. An empowerment-centred approach to advancing gender equality is evident from the explicit reference to 'capabilities' and 'opportunities' (from Sen's conceptualisation of 'development as freedom').

The end goal in the 2014 theory of change, of women and girls exercising their political and economic rights, is framed in terms of both their own benefit as full and equal participants, and their contribution to achieving the SDGs. Allowing for the assumption that this theory of change also reflects the first phase of the Fund, FGE thus embraces both transformative (realising women's human rights) and instrumental (enhancing women's participation in development) descriptions of change.

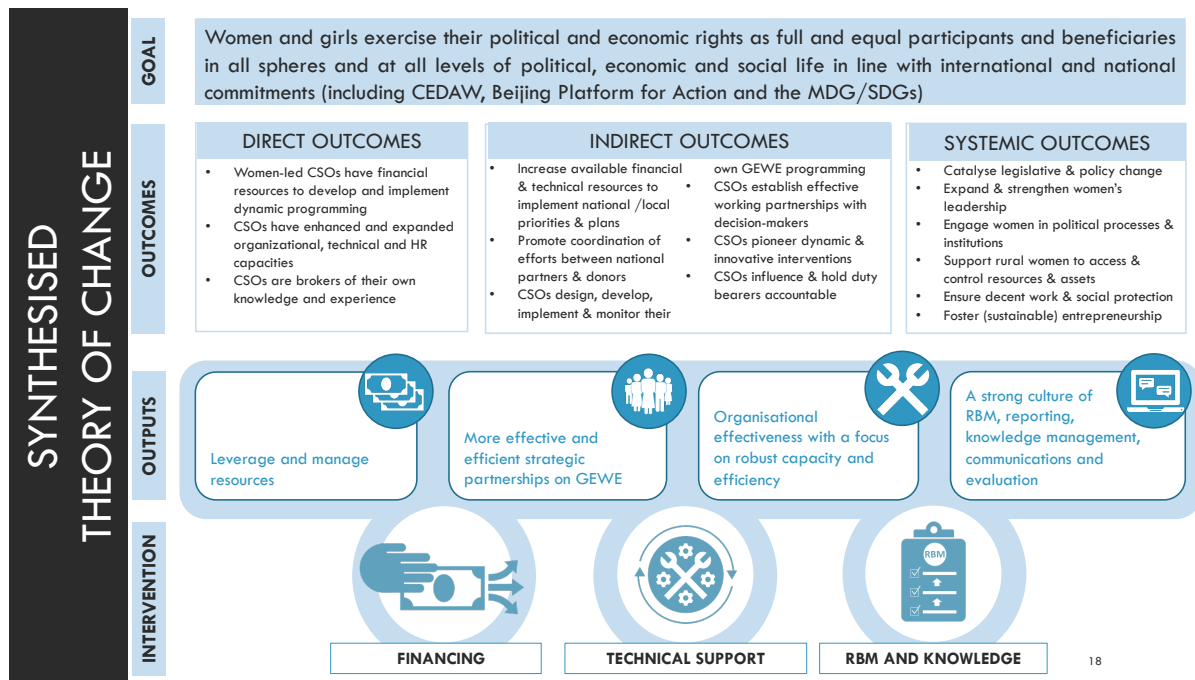
For the purposes of the evaluation, a more comprehensive theory-of-change-and-action was reconstructed from documents and in consultation with stakeholders. This elaborates the unique way in which FGE works, as well as its intended results. A summary version of this is presented in Figure 5 (below); a full version is included in the annexes, and an analysis of the theories of change behind the Fund is included in Section 4.2 of the report.

<sup>9</sup> CSOs with capacity to: design, develop, implement and monitor gender equality and empowerment programming; maintain effective working partnerships with government institutions and decision-makers; pioneer dynamic and innovative interventions; influence, educate and hold duty-bearers accountable.

<sup>10</sup> Capabilities and opportunities for decision making in all areas of life; capabilities and opportunities to contribute substantively to the political life and leadership of their societies; access to and control over productive resources and opportunities that enable long-term economic viability; agency and autonomy as part of improved gender relations, social norms and behaviours.

<sup>11</sup> The development results framework for ProDoc 2014-2017 is included in the annexes.

Figure 5 Synthesised theories of change for FGE reconstructed by the evaluation



### 1.3 Global context

Extensive work by CIVICUS (2017 Global Monitor) and AWID (2013, Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots; and 2017 presentation shared with the evaluation team) illustrate an increasingly challenging environment for women's civil society around the world. Upwards of 60 states have sought to **legally restrict NGOs** through laws governing the registration, funding, and reporting requirements of civil society organisations.

States have also introduced **restrictions on foreign funding**, cutting off the primary source of funding for majority of NGOs and shutting down foundations and funding agencies that used to have very prominent roles in those contexts (i.e. USAID in Russia; Ford Foundation in India). This criminalization of activism is 'costly' to organizations in financial and other terms, increasing resource demands and posing a major burden to their viability.

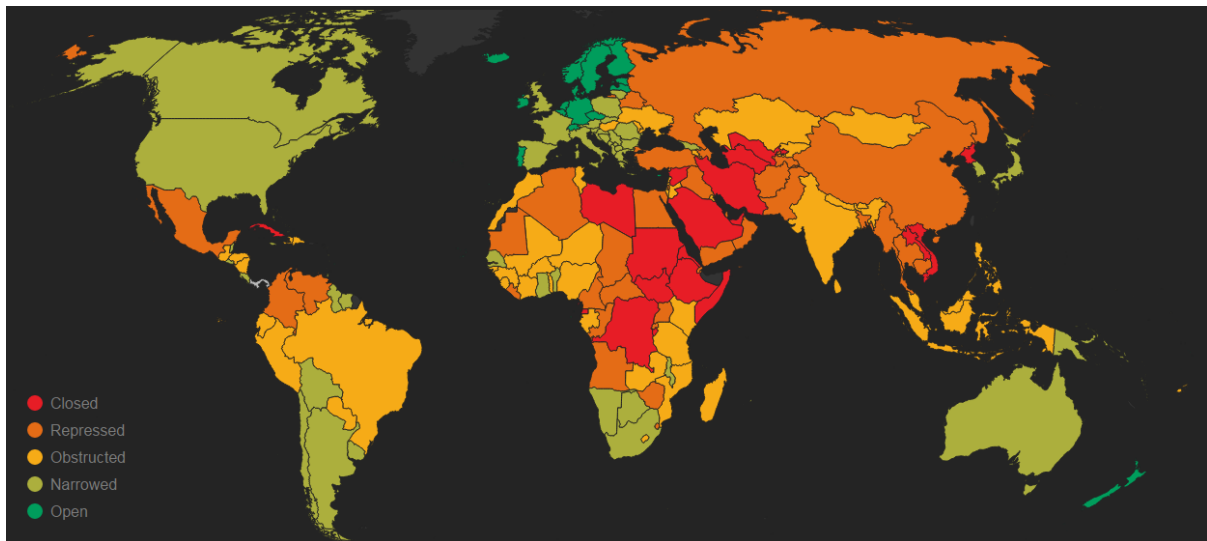
In parallel to the shrinking space for civil society illustrated in Figure 6, is a deepening normalisation of the private sector's role in development and corporate philanthropy, an urgent search for new forms and models of financing, and growing global attention and funding to climate change, migration, & refugees. Emerging responses of civil society include more widespread use of crowdfunding, a shift towards income generation and away from grant dependence, new forms of organizing aside from the traditional NGO model, and nurturing fundraising efforts in communities.

Often very small, Women's CSOs are particularly vulnerable to these trends. AWID (2013) found that the median annual income of over 740 women's organizations around the world is only \$20,000 USD. While overall bilateral aid for gender is increasing, AWID research finds that it is not reaching women's rights organizations. This is partly due to increasing donor partnering with private firms for the management of Requests for Proposals and Monitoring & Evaluation.

*"While women and girls are increasingly a focus among donors, this support is not translating into increased resources for women's rights activism, organizing, and movement building. In this climate, women's funds provide critical and much-needed support to women's and girls' groups across the globe"*

(AWID, 2013)

Figure 6 People power under attack: findings from the CIVICUS monitor (2017)



Aside from traditional ODA, the AWID analysis finds that International NGOs (INGOs) increasingly act as ‘regranters’, with local CSOs now treated as implementers rather than partners. Responding to this trend, new ‘women’s funds’ are emerging, providing small grants (c. \$10,000 – \$50,000) focused on cross-movement work and collaborative fundraising. These seek to leverage the growing interest of private foundations and a new generation of young wealthy women philanthropists in ‘movement-building’ and ‘intersectionality’. Along with a rapid growth in corporate giving, the main challenges with harnessing these resources are siloed funding, aversion to risk of controversy, and a trend toward funding fewer groups with larger grants.

Globally, only 0.5% of global aid goes to women’s organizations from the global south. In 2014, 92% of ODA financing for gender equality (\$9 billion) went to international or donor-country based NGOs. Only 8% went direct to developing-country CSOs, nearly all from country-level administered budgets. Most donors are under domestic political pressure to ensure financing also benefits organisations linked to their own countries.

## Policy framework

UN Women has a robust mandate for supporting its constituencies to address the financing gap of women’s civil society under GA Resolution 64/289 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:

**GA/RES/64/289 on System-Wide Coherence:** Article 54. “Recognizes that civil society organizations, in particular women’s organizations, play a vital role in promoting women’s rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women”; Article 55. “Requests the head of the Entity to continue the existing practice of effective consultation with civil society organizations, and encourages their meaningful contribution to the work of the Entity”; Article 74. “Requests the Under-Secretary-General/head of the Entity to establish appropriate mechanisms to assist and support the realization of all the strategic objectives and actions agreed upon in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the national and international commitments stipulated in the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly”; (emphasis added).

**Beijing Declaration:** “We are convinced that ... The participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women’s groups and networks ... in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action. ... Encourage the establishment and strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships/cooperation at all levels among international and intergovernmental organizations, with relevant actors of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and trade unions, and women’s organizations ... [and] Governments should create a supportive environment for the mobilization of resources by non-governmental organizations, particularly women’s organizations and networks, feminist groups ... The capacity of non-governmental organizations in this regard should be strengthened and enhanced.”

## International development goals, strategies and frameworks

FGE responds to multiple international frameworks, strategies and goals. Grant-making rounds 1 and 2 were designed to accelerate achieving MDG3, while round 3 was designed to contribute to SDG5 and mainstreaming gender in other goals. Other overarching influences in the ProDocs are the UN system-wide commitment to Human-Rights Based Approaches to Programming, Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW; while the programming environment reflected the Paris Agreement, Rio+20, HABITAT III, and Addis Ababa Agenda (financing for development).

## Corporate goals and priorities

The FGE implementation period covers multiple strategic plans: UNIFEM Multi Year Funding Framework; and UN Women Strategic Plans 2011-13, 2014-17, 2018-21. The Fund is included within all UN Women strategic plans, including the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Table 1 illustrates the major changes that have taken place, trends that have become apparent, and new challenges that have emerged for both FGE and UN Women over the lifespan of the Fund.

*“UN Women also enjoys a long-standing and defining relationship with the women’s movement ... to give voice and reach out to those the most likely to be left behind. UN Women also manages grant-making mechanisms that develop capacity and support women’s organisations’ work for and with the most marginalized women, including: the Fund for Gender Equality ... UN Women’s relationship with civil society enables it to support more localized assistance.” (UN Women SP 2018-2021)*

**Table 1 Changes, trends and new challenges for UN Women and FGE during the lifetime of the Fund**

	Changes	Trends	New challenges
<b>UNIFEM MYFF 2009-2011; UN Women Strategic Plans: 2011-2013 2014-2017 2018-2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition from UNIFEM to UN Women</li> <li>• Establishment of flagship programmes</li> <li>• Establishment of the regional architecture and results tracking system</li> <li>• Development of civil society advisory groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening coordination role within the UN system</li> <li>• Emergence of catalytic and movement-building civil society strategy in programme-presence countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downward pressure on core funding from member states across the UN system</li> </ul>
<b>FGE ProDocs 2009-2014 2014-2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of new UN Women mechanisms including GAI, regional funds, and programmes with direct-financing components</li> <li>• Transition in Senior Management Team; with questions about viability of the Fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergence of new women’s funds</li> <li>• Diversification of donors and a wider gamut of donation size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New bilateral mechanisms for funding gender equality alongside a stronger instrumentalism in development partner discourse</li> </ul>

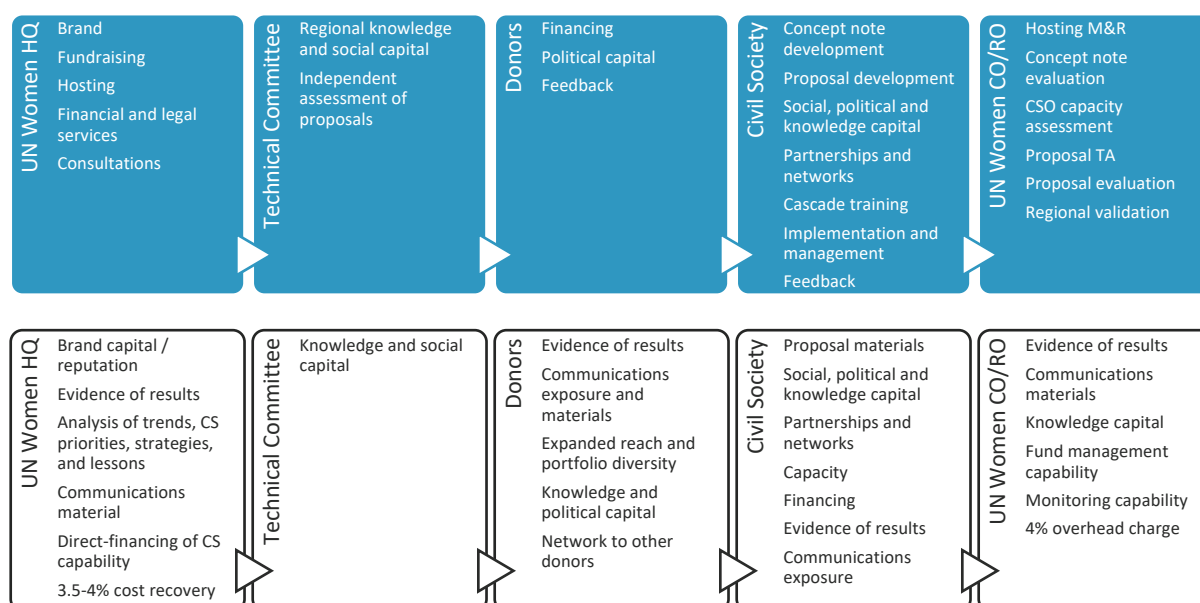
## 1.4 Key stakeholders

FGE was designed to empower local and women-led civil society organisations, along with the rights holders – women and girls – that they seek to support. International NGOs and CSOs with governing boards of less than 50 per cent women have not been eligible for funding. FGE-supported projects

targeted 18 different constituencies of marginalised people, with significant coverage of rural women, young women and adolescents, informal and domestic workers, indigenous women, and socially-and-economically-vulnerable women. The leadership of civil society organisations (in many cases staffed by women from the target groups) that reach these rights holders was emphasised throughout the grant-making process, from demand-led selection of projects to flexible and responsive implementation.

FGE has five main institutional duty bearers with direct contributions to, and benefits from, the Fund. These include: 1) UN Women headquarters, 2) UN Women regional and country offices, 3) women’s civil society organisations, 4) development partners (donors), and 5) technical committee members. Figure 7 illustrates the main contributions and benefits for these stakeholders. Other institutional stakeholders with an indirect role in the Fund are UN system entities, International NGOs and CSO networks, local CSOs and networks, national and local governments, and other gender equality funds and programmes.

Figure 7 Main contributions from (top), and benefits to (bottom), FGE stakeholders



## 1.5 Current implementation status

FGE had three main phases of implementation, corresponding with grant cycles. These are illustrated in Table 2. Cycle 2 (\$18.2 million) was the most efficient in terms of proportion of applications funded and timing. Overall, the Fund made 121 grants, and met 1.8% of the total \$3.5 billion requested. It is currently in the process of completing implementation and reporting on Round 3 grants that were made in 2015. All current grants are scheduled to be completed by 2019.

Table 2 The three main phases of FGE implementation (Source: Kellea Miller, 2016, and FGE data)

Phase	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
<b>Dates</b>	2009-2015	2011-2016	2015-2019
<b>Entity</b>	UNIFEM	UN Women	UN Women
<b>Main grant-making focus</b>	Policy implementation; catalytic networks	Root causes of gender inequality; commitments	Structural change; policy accountability within SDG framework
<b>Guiding frameworks</b>	MDGs, CEDAW, Paris/Accra	UNW Strategic Plan, global crises	Post 2015; SDGs
<b>Eligible grantees</b>	NGO, Partnerships	Gov, Women’s NGOs, Partnerships	Women-led CSOs
<b>Grant size and duration</b>	\$1-3m (2-4 yrs); \$100-500k (1-3 yrs)	\$200k-\$1m (1-3 yrs)	\$200-550k (2-3 yrs)



<b>Number of proposals received</b>	1,256	1,006	1,386
<b>Percent of proposals eligible</b>	75%	57%	35%
<b>Finance requested</b>	\$2.4b	\$542m	\$531m
<b>Number of grants made</b>	40	56	25
<b>Finance granted</b>	\$38.2m	\$18.2m	\$7.5m
<b>Coverage of demand</b>	1.6%	3.4%	1.4%

## 2. Evaluation Purpose, Objective(s) and Scope

### 2.1 The purpose of the evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned because the FGE ProDoc 2014-2017 was coming to an end. Such an ending marks a natural point of transition to assess past performance and identify recommendations for the future. An additional reason for evaluating FGE at this point was recent (since 2016) questioning by UN Women senior management of the future scale and ambition of the Fund within the corporate priorities for UN Women. The evaluation was intended to provide input to evidence-based decision-making in this context.

“The evaluation will assess the Fund’s achievements, working methods, management and overall performance as per its two ProDocs (2009-2013) and (2014-2017) ... to allow UN Women’s Senior Management to make **informed decisions about the Fund’s future** beyond the current ProDoc’s expiration in 2017.”

(Terms of Reference)

Given the lead-time required for key management decisions on FGE, the timing of the evaluation process was, ultimately, too late to inform these. Thus, the inception phase refined the purpose of the evaluation to address the main need for new evidence expressed by decision-makers. Alongside accountability for past performance, the main demand was to determine whether the general value proposition represented by FGE has a place in the future; and, if so, to understand better how to sustain it.

The primary intended users for the evaluation are:

- 1) **FGE staff and grantees**, to capture the performance story and lessons of FGE, and to support mutual accountability for implementation of the aims and objectives of the Fund.
- 2) **UN Women Senior Management Team**, to inform decision-making on sustainable, effective, relevant and efficient approaches to direct-financing of civil society for women’s empowerment.
- 3) **FGE, UN Women, women-led organizations, development actors, and gender advocates**, to share learning that can improve the design, effectiveness and efficiency of future grant-making; and to support advocacy and awareness raising on the value derived from funding and capacity development of women-led CSOs.

### Evaluation objectives

The terms of reference established six specific objectives that were fully implemented through the selection of relevant evaluation design and methods:

- 1) Assess the relevance of the Fund and grantees’ approach and contributions to promoting gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment since its creation in 2009 in alignment with UN Women’s Strategic Plan, and under a human rights and gender responsiveness modality.
- 2) Assess the added value of the Fund’s contribution to UN Women’s mandate and desired results with regards to: 1) enhancing WPE and WEE, 2) strengthening civil society organizations through a demand-driven approach, and 3) serving as a complementary modality to UN Women’s regular programming.
- 3) Assess the Fund’s organizational efficiency to achieve results, build capacities, generate knowledge and build networks, including the extent to which the size of grants has a particular effect.
- 4) Assess how the Fund’s work has informed and influenced UN Women’s decision-making, planning and programming in the areas of women’s economic and political empowerment, civil society strengthening/engagement, and other cross-cutting issues (i.e. gender and climate change, women and ICTs, youth, and engaging men and boys).
- 5) Document good practices and lessons learned to inform and strengthen future UN Women’s policy and programming for WPE and WEE and from an institutional perspective on leveraging UN Women trust funds most effectively.
- 6) Provide actionable recommendations with respect to the Fund’s strategy, approaches and UN Women’s overall approach to the Fund.



## Evaluation scope

The evaluation considered the full lifetime of the Fund so far, 2009-2017. It assesses the work of both the Fund for Gender Equality and the 121 grants made. It also includes an assessment of the intersections FGE has with UN Women strategies, operations and programmes as an important element of context. However, the evaluation excludes any assessment of the merit and worth of policies, management and performance of elements of UN Women or third parties outside of FGE.

In assessing the contribution of FGE to the implementation of UN Women SP Impacts 1 and 2 through its global grant-making and capacity development, the evaluation pays particular attention to the 3-pillar grant-making model (sustain, support, strengthen) used by the Fund.

## Evaluability

The inception phase of the evaluation considered evaluability and risk. It assessed that evaluating FGE was low-risk in terms of ethics and physical security; and medium risk in terms of political sensitivities in the context of shrinking space for civil society. The evaluation team had no conflict-of-interest.

The project design was assessed as having good evaluability. FGE has two ProDocs with results frameworks. It has a clearly-elaborated approach that is testable. The Fund mechanism is also comparable to similar mechanisms. Information availability was also considered to be good: FGE has extensive and pre-analysed RBM datasets for nearly all grants, a meta-analysis of evaluations, and internal analyses of future options. By comparison, the institutional context was considered to have only medium evaluability since the timing of the evaluation is a challenge for utility given the decision-making timeframe for the future of FGE.

## Evaluation questions

The evaluation terms of reference included 20 evaluation questions. In addition, 22 questions were synthesised from inception stage interviews with stakeholders. The inception phase was used to review, focus and prioritise this list of 42 questions, resulting in 15 final questions. These questions cover the following issues: strategic positioning, alignment, value propositions, reach, capacity development, direct outcomes, indirect outcomes, systemic outcomes, knowledge management, risk management and brand, results based management and communication, business model and human capital, financing, institutionalization, and catalytic partnership.

Typical theory-based evaluations start by looking for change where it is expected to be found. This has strengths and limitations: it is efficient and gives relevant insights, but can be narrow and miss wider implications. The actual outcomes from FGE may be different from what theory suggests, and the evaluation must remain open to finding these throughout the process. Achieving this requires transparency about assumptions.

To achieve a high level of transparency about assumptions, the evaluation has developed a **hypothesis-based evaluation framework**, based on a combination of standard theory and FGE-specific assumptions identified during the inception. Since theories and assumptions may or may not be 'true', establishing a clear set of hypotheses allows the evaluation to test the level of evidence that both supports and refutes the propositions underpinning the existing and proposed designs for FGE<sup>12</sup>.

Each evaluation question was answered through the development of 1-3 hypotheses to test, resulting in a total of 28 hypotheses to test. Hypotheses were tested using a scale of 3 levels of qualitative progress markers based on: 1) the minimum standard expected of FGE, 2) a benchmark standard of comparable funds and programmes, and 3) the ideal goal of FGE. Along with the final questions, these are included in the evaluation matrix in the annexes.

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<sup>12</sup> If hypotheses are found to be not (totally) true, it may be because the intervention underperformed, because the theory is wrong, or a combination of both. The evidence collected to test the hypotheses should also give insight into this question.

## 2.2 Evaluation criteria

The evaluation applied the performance standards of the UN Women Evaluation Policy and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), including the application of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. Two of the standard criteria, sustainability and impact, were adapted to assess the potential for these characteristics, rather than the ex post achievement of them. This change was in acknowledgement of the ongoing nature of Fund activities.

**Relevance:** The extent to which the objectives, design and implementation are strategic, aligned to comparative strengths, and consistent with: promoting gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment, the requirements of marginalised groups, civil society, donor and country needs, global goals, and human rights norms and standards.

**Effectiveness:** The extent to which immediate objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance; and the added value of the Fund’s contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

**Efficiency:** The extent to which management capacities and arrangements put in place support the achievement of results, build capacities, generate knowledge and build networks that advance gender equality and women’s empowerment.

**Potential for sustainability:** The likelihood that the gender equality results of the intervention are durable and can be maintained, scaled-up or replicated; the likelihood that the Fund has a stable and reliable financial base.

**Potential for impact:** Strategic orientation towards making a significant contribution to broader, long-term, sustainable development and transformative gender relations.

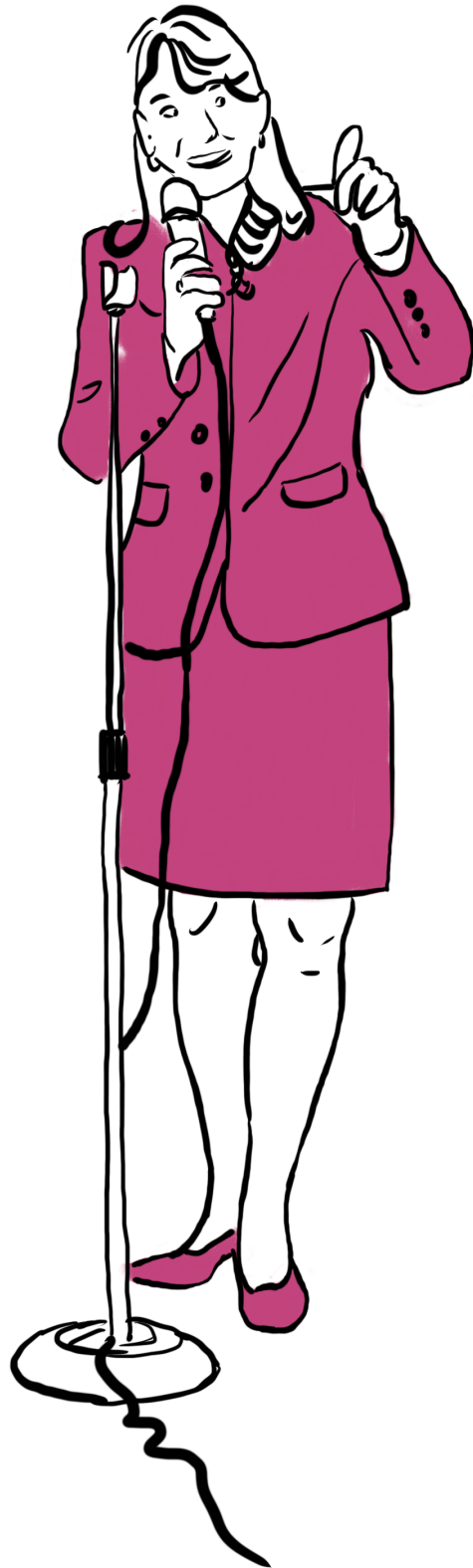
**Gender equality and human rights** considerations were mainstreamed into the evaluation questions and hypotheses to avoid being isolated by a standalone criterion. Evaluation questions specifically address how gender equality and the empowerment of women (GEEW) has been integrated into the design, planning, implementation of the intervention and the results achieved, while the scope of analysis and indicators are designed in a way that ensures GEEW-related data will be collected.

To further enhance the usability of the evaluation, the final evaluation matrix was also mapped to the UN Women development results framework (DRF) and organisational effectiveness and efficiency framework (OEEF). Table 3 indicates the specific findings, conclusions and recommendations that relate to the intersection between these frameworks and the standard evaluation criteria.

*Table 3 Evaluation matrix illustrating the intersection between UN Women strategic frameworks and OECD-DAC evaluation criteria*

	Development results	Organisational effectiveness and efficiency
<b>Did the Fund do things right?</b>	Effectiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>findings 1-8</li> <li>conclusions 1-2</li> </ul> Potential for sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>findings 20-25</li> <li>conclusions 3-4</li> </ul>	Efficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>findings 9-19</li> <li>conclusions 7-8</li> </ul>
<b>Did the Fund do the right things?</b>	Potential for impact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>findings 26-28</li> <li>conclusions 5-6</li> </ul>	Relevance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>findings 29-33</li> <li>conclusions 9-10</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations for the future</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recommendations 1-4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recommendations 5-8</li> </ul>

### 3. Evaluation Design and Methods



### 3.1 Methodological approaches

#### Evaluation principles

The evaluation principles are based on a **feminist evaluation lens**. This meets or exceeds the basis of the UN Women guidance for management of gender-responsive evaluations, and the UNEG guidance on integrating human rights and gender equality in evaluation. Feminist evaluation (FE) emphasizes participatory, empowering, and social justice agendas. It recognizes the role of evaluation as an intervention in people’s lives, and positions the evaluator as an advocate of social justice. **The purpose of the evaluation is to empower its participants to better advance women’s human rights.**

Feminist evaluation is well suited to the Fund for Gender Equality, since it recognizes civil society participants as legitimate actors in their own right, emphasizes the development of their agency, and acknowledges that inclusion in processes of dialogue and action is a form of power. To implement a feminist evaluation lens, the evaluation combines a set of complementary evaluation designs and methods into a tailor-made process. These result in an empowerment approach<sup>13</sup>, which includes providing communities with the tools and knowledge that allows them to monitor and evaluate their own performance.

#### Evaluation design

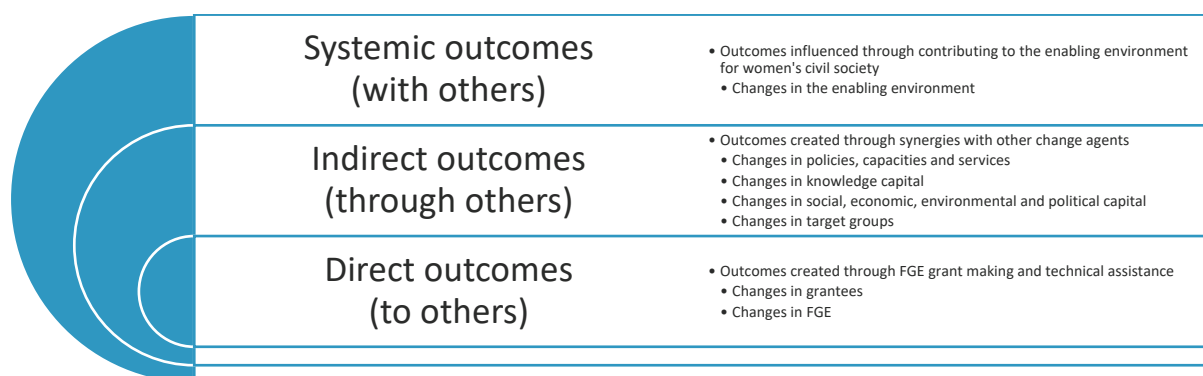
The design of the evaluation drew on a combination of two approaches:

**Participatory Democratic Evaluation** is an approach where the aim of the evaluation is to serve the whole community. This allows people to be informed of what others are doing and sees the evaluator as someone who brokers the process. It generally focuses on inclusive practices which foster participation and collaboration. However, it is also used as a means of ensuring public accountability and transparency.

**Outcomes Harvesting** is an evaluation approach in which evaluators, grant makers, and/or programme managers and staff identify, formulate, verify, analyse and interpret ‘outcomes’ in programming contexts where relations of cause and effect are not fully understood. Outcomes are defined as changes in the “behaviour writ large” (such as actions, relationships, policies, practices) of one or more social actors influenced by an intervention.

The evaluation mapped and assessed three levels of outcomes. These are illustrated in Figure 8, and includes systemic outcomes (done with others), indirect outcomes (done through others), and direct outcomes (done to others).

Figure 8 Three levels of outcomes mapped in the evaluation matrix



### 3.2 Data collection methods and analysis

The selected methods mix qualitative and quantitative data and analysis, and are designed to allow for comprehensive triangulation (comparison, validation, investigation, extension).

<sup>13</sup> Empowerment evaluation was first developed by David Fetterman who describes it as “the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination.”



## Country case studies

Two country case studies were undertaken informed by **Collaborative Outcomes Reporting Technique (CORT)**. CORT is a participatory approach to impact evaluation based around a performance story that presents evidence of how a program has contributed to outcomes and impacts, that is then reviewed by both technical experts and program stakeholders, which may include community members.

Country case studies included key informant consultations (through **focus group discussions** and **semi-structured in-depth interviews**), **World Cafes** (group dialogue focused on the consideration of relevant questions and themes) and observational **site visits**. Within-case qualitative analysis was based on the FGE theories-of-change and performance stories elaborate during country visits.

## Social learning

A combination of **podcasts, webinars and multilingual online conversations** were hosted on the UN Women economic empowerment platform, [Empower Women](#)<sup>14</sup>, and a dedicated [Facebook page](#)<sup>15</sup>. Questions and moderated discussions on these forums were used to engage a wider audience in the evaluation. Collaborative analysis of inputs was achieved through the moderated discussion process (including follow-up questions), with further **realist synthesis** by the evaluation team.

## Grantee guided self-reviews

The evaluation engaged grantees directly through digital platforms including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and email. All FGE grantees were invited to prepare and submit short reflective self-reviews based on a series of prompting questions. Technical support was provided by the evaluation team through email and WhatsApp. Self-reviews were submitted by grantees using any medium of their choice (voice, video, written). These were analysed using **realist meta synthesis** and the **outcome harvesting** framework.

## Portfolio analysis (across-case analysis)

The evaluation assessed mixed quantitative and qualitative data from all 121 grants made by FGE, plus the Fund itself. This included finance data, geographic and temporal data, aggregated RBM data, and a comprehensive mapping of each grant to relevant frameworks (FGE sub-themes, programmatic strategies, target groups, most significant outcomes, SDGs). Methods of analysis for this data included:

- Qualitative assessment informed by the DFID '4E's' value-for-money framework<sup>16</sup>.
- Business-model-canvas analysis<sup>17</sup>.
- Desk based comparative benchmarking analysis using 15 other UN and non-UN grants programmes and civil society funds.
- Innovation matrix analysis<sup>18</sup>.
- Realist synthesis of secondary analysis of FGE from verified independent sources.
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and predictive analysis of 160 binary indicators for each grant using EvalC3.
- **Contribution analysis**, including strengths and weaknesses based on the outcomes hypotheses.

The evaluation mapped the FGE business model using a common industry tool called the *Business Model Canvas* (see Annexes). This has been successfully adapted for social purpose organisations, including by the New Economics Foundation. The evaluation then benchmarked the 9 areas of the FGE business model defined in the canvas against 15 comparable funds and small grants programmes. This comparison was based on desk research and selected stakeholder interviews.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/community/discussions/2017/10/how-can-grant-making-better-support-womens-civil-society>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/FGEGlobalEvaluation/>

<sup>16</sup> Effectiveness, Efficiency, Cost Effectiveness, Equity.





<sup>17</sup> The Business Model Canvas (BMC) was developed by Alex Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur, and co-created with an array of 470 practitioners from around the world. It offers a proven approach to design, innovate and assess social business models.

<sup>18</sup> Based on work by Melissa Shilling (Harvard Business Review July-August 2017) to determine where best to invest in further innovation based on historical evolution along key dimensions. Can be used to compare Funds, predict areas of future innovation, and identify comparative advantages.

### 3.3 Data sources

The evaluation achieved triangulation through comparison, validation, investigation and extension of emerging findings of analysis by combining multiple lines and levels of evidence. Table 4 illustrates the level of evidence collected for each component of the evaluation. The units of analysis for the evaluation were: 1) FGE grants (through the portfolio analysis, grantee reviews, and country case studies), 2) FGE as a programme (through the portfolio analysis and country case studies).

*Table 4 Level of evidence collected for each component of the evaluation*

Component	Breadth	Depth	Level of evidence
<b>Portfolio analysis</b> 	High	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Global interviews: 7 (5 female) partners, 16 (13f) UN Women HQ and ROs and COs</li> <li>Administrative data: 160 indicators for each grant</li> <li>Benchmarking data: 15 other funds and programmes</li> <li>2016 grantee survey results (96 responses)</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational review (in portfolio analysis)</b> 	Med	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Desk review: 1,005 documents</li> <li>Interviews with 9 (8f) FGE staff</li> </ul>
<b>Grantee reviews and social learning</b> 	Med	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>43 complete multimedia self-review submissions from FGE grantees</li> <li>33 detailed submissions to the EmpowerWomen.org discussion forum</li> </ul>
<b>Country case studies</b> 	Low	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case study visits to India and Bolivia representing 7 grants, and \$6,549,856 investment.</li> <li>Focus group discussions with representative from all grants.</li> <li>Meetings with UN Women country offices.</li> <li>Site visits to grantee work.</li> </ul>

### Sampling frame


The sample frame for the evaluation case studies was all 80 countries with recipients of support from FGE in cycles 1-3. The evaluation identified 14 countries that had 3 or more grants. The final sampling frame is included in the annexes. This maximised: 1) regional and context diversity, 2) distribution of WEE and WPE projects, 3) range of grant sizes, 4) range of funding rounds covered, 5) opportunities for learning. Given the limited coverage of the sample, the case studies were only used to identify illustrative issues that were then triangulated with other sources of data to assess prevalence.

### Stakeholder participation

An extended inception phase was used to identify the best opportunities for the evaluation to maximise utility, including through enhancing participation in – and ownership of – the evaluation. The inception phase sought to identify the most critical questions that the evaluation process and final report could address given a context of uncertainty around the future shape of FGE. In addition to a SlideDoc report, the evaluation produced two Podcasts to report the findings of each phase of the evaluation to stakeholders.

**Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH)** was used to identify the main roles and stakeholders pertinent to FGE. CSH offers the advantage of being based on systems theory (embracing complexity) and acknowledging power dynamics between groups (compatible with feminist evaluation). The evaluation engaged principle, primary, secondary and tertiary duty bearers directly through interviews, case studies, and social learning. Rights holders were engaged at 3 levels: 1) direct consultation with grantees and CSOs





that are rights-holders organisations, 2) meeting recipients of FGE supported interventions during country case studies, 3) collecting secondary documented evidence of rights-holders feedback. Details for how each stakeholder group was engaged in the evaluation are included in the annexes.

### 3.4 Ethics

The evaluation design was based on implementing UNEG ethical standards. These include:

- **Independence and Impartiality.** Clear reasons for evaluative judgments, and the acceptance or rejection of comments on evaluation products are given. Evaluation team members were required to report any real or perceived Conflicts of Interest.
- **Credibility and Accountability.** The evaluation team used best evaluation practices to the best of their abilities always. The evaluation Team Leader was responsible for ensuring all commitments were met.
- **Rights to self-determination, fair representation, protection and redress.** All data collection included a verbal process of ensuring that all contributors and participants gave free, prior and informed consent. Contributors were given multiple opportunities to refuse, grant or withdraw their consent.
- **Confidentiality.** All data is held on secure databases in the UK and Canada. All information has been used and represented only to the extent agreed to by its contributor.
- **Avoidance of Harm.** The evaluation team worked with CSOs and local UN Women offices to identify vulnerable groups prior to workshops, and to ensure that any participatory processes were responsive to their needs.
- **Accuracy, completeness and reliability.** The Inception Phase was used to test and refine data collection instruments. All synthesis is transparent and based on frameworks agreed in the Inception Report.
- **Transparency.** All data collection and analysis tools and processes are included in an annex to the final report.
- **Reporting.** The outcome of the evaluation is being communicated through a participatory validation process and multiple accessible evaluation products.

#### 4. Findings Part 1: Did the Fund do things right?



## 4.1 Effectiveness

### Achievement of results for gender equality and women empowerment

#### Performance

**Approaching benchmark:** Grantees are mobilising further funding to support and sustain essential gender equality programming

#### Sources of evidence



1. FGE has directly touched the lives over 535,823 women from 80 countries through increased awareness and visibility of women's human rights, stronger CSO networks for gender equality, and establishing local partnerships for women's empowerment. Impacts on policies are likely to have had positive effects on millions more women.

FGE has mobilised \$84 million to achieve its aims, channelling \$64 million directly to local NGOs and women-led CSO grantees<sup>19</sup>. Self-reported results from FGE grantees indicate that 535,823 women from 80 countries have been directly involved as intended beneficiaries of political and economic empowerment activities financed through the Fund, with 97% of resources being targeted to address the needs of marginalised groups.

**FGE funding enabled local partners to better identify and respond to the needs of marginalized women through existing and strengthened data.** For instance, FGE support to conduct a baseline study and a needs assessment enabled Amel Association International in Lebanon to analyse socio-economic information in order to better target vulnerable and marginalized women, including women refugees from Syria and Iraq. Grantee self-reviews identified the broad range of the marginalized groups that were targeted through FGE funding, which include ethnically marginalized groups (such as indigenous groups); women with special needs and disabilities; socially marginalized women (such as stay at home mothers, women with HIV/AIDS); women in situations of political transition or conflict; informal workers; or illegal migrants.

To triangulate the self-reported evidence from the programme, the evaluation ran a further series of consultations with grantees and the wider women's civil society movement through the Empower Women platform. This validated the research findings of AWID (2013)<sup>20</sup> that funding for women-led civil society seems to have the greatest effect when it engages marginalized women in the design and implementation of the initiative and supports women at the grassroots level.

“Supporting community based initiatives instead of top down institutions, allows for all voices to be heard. A vibrant civil society should be a priority for poverty alleviation; you can provide all the temporary ‘fixes’ but if citizens do not have a voice or a seat at the policy table, little will change”.

(Online contributor to the evaluation)

The three outcomes most frequently reported by grantees in a FGE-administered survey were related to enhancing the potential for civil society to create change for gender equality and empowerment of women:

1. Increased awareness and visibility of women's human rights, and related issues (62% of grants).
2. Creation or strengthening of networks for gender equality (48% of grants).
3. Establishment of strategic partnerships for gender equality (41% of grants).

The evaluation case studies emphasised the legitimacy bestowed upon grantees by participation in the Fund, in addition to these three outcomes. Changes related to political decision making (such as engagement, behaviour, temporary special measures, constitutional rights, and women's representation) were reported in around a third of grants, and changes to grantee profile and capacity in around one fifth of grants. The most frequent direct benefit for women was increased income (24% of grants), with smaller outcomes in access to land (6%) and literacy (3%).

<sup>19</sup> The remaining resources have enabled technical and administrative support from UN Women, capacity building for grantees, knowledge management, transparent and competitive grant-making, grant management, and – according to evaluation interviewees – high quality communication products.

<sup>20</sup> Srilatha Batliwala, Sarah Rosenhek, Julia Miller (2013). Women Moving Mountains: Collective Impact of the Dutch MDG3 Fund How Resources Advance Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

### **Box: Rapidly building a pioneering global mechanism based on lessons learnt**

FGE was an ambitious undertaking, not just in its aims but also in its design. The original ProDoc was pioneering in several ways that built on lessons from the past and sought to implement these quickly and at scale.

1. Demonstrating the hypothesis that women's organisations can absorb, manage and leverage large scale funding for gender equality.
2. Managing programmes in sensitive political and economic spaces through requiring coalitions of CSOs and government to discover and build on common ground.
3. Establishing a technical committee with women from all over the world as members.
4. Investing early in an online presence to maximise reach and efficiency of calls for proposals.

## **2. FGE is viewed by women's civil society as an important and necessary mechanism for advancing gender equality.**

Aside from the combined results of FGE grants, the evaluation found repeated examples of evidence that women's civil society views the Fund as an effective and important grant making mechanism. A confidential survey of FGE grantees undertaken in 2016 reported 94% of respondents indicating they were 'extremely satisfied' with the collaboration between their organisation and FGE.

The FGE team was praised by FGE grantees in the Bolivia case study for using a horizontal collaboration approach where women-led civil society can take the lead to set priorities and execute operations with the technical 'behind the scenes' support of the FGE team. As one stakeholder explained to the evaluation, "FGE allows women's civil society to assume the lead rather than taking direction from a UN agency. Working with the FGE team is an empowering experience". The India case study further validated this perspective, as did the social learning exercises undertaken by the evaluation to harvest the views of women's civil society.

At the global level, the Count Me In! Consortium published a statement<sup>21</sup> on the announcement of €500 million investment in ending violence against women and girls by the European Union, through the UN. It calls for support to women's organizations and existing specialized UN entities and funds, including FGE.

*"Do not create a new funding mechanism ... Instead, strengthen existing infrastructure and leverage lessons learned from current UN funds such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and the Fund for Gender Equality."*

(Count Me In! Consortium)

The only significant concern expressed by both civil society and some interviewed donors is based primarily on the large implementation grants from Round 1: a perception that FGE has mainly supported existing 'winners'. To a significant extent this was addressed through the smaller grants made to women-led CSOs in Round 3. However, during the case study visit in Bolivia, women-led civil society raised the concern that FGE funding is allocated primarily to those organizations that can demonstrate sufficient organizational capacity to effectively administer the funds.

While UN Women implementing partners are relied on for supporting the delivery of results. FGE grantees are not in the same position, as results are considered their own. This is a strategic niche for the fund in terms of supporting a wider range of organizations and building national capacities that in turn also allow UN Women (and others) to have a broader range of choices in terms of implementing partners that meet capacity requirements.

However, by focusing exclusively on organizations with existing capacity to manage \$200,000–\$500,000 projects, smaller initiatives and organizations that make part of the women's grassroots movements are consequentially excluded from accessing FGE funding directly. However, this restriction continues to meet a gap within the global context of women's funds that provide smaller size grants with lower compliance requirements for micro and small CSOs. Furthermore, FGE has funded women's funds,

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/raising-womens-voices-recommendations-european-commission-united-nations>

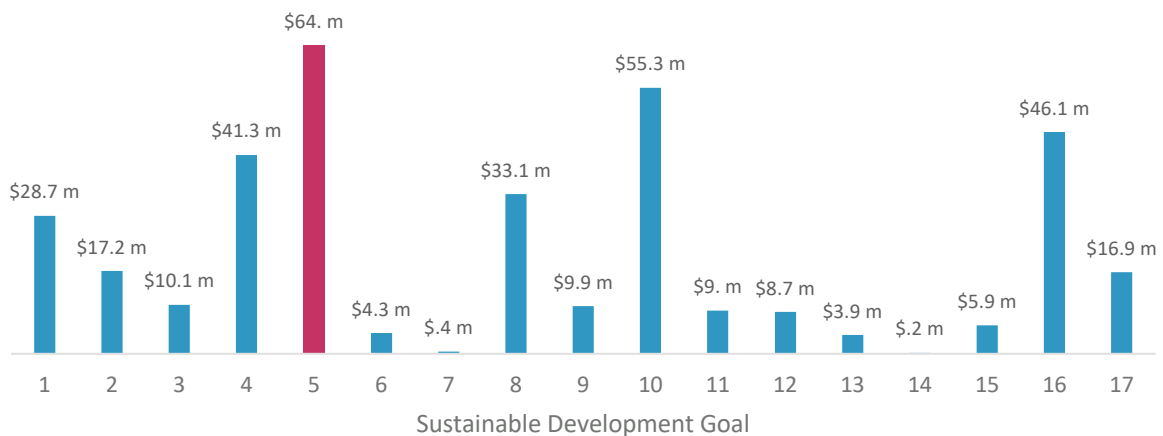
national NGOs and networks that provide smaller grants to grassroots organisations; such as in Palestine and Brazil.

An example of this is support to grassroots organisations is the women’s construction union, ASOMUC, in Bolivia that is an emerging organization bringing together women construction workers from the informal sector. Currently, funding for ASOMUC is going through the established NGO ‘Red Habitat’. The main challenge with this approach, however, is the need for a transition strategy to direct support. In the case of ASOMUC, several stakeholders in Bolivia, including ‘Red Habitat’, believe that future funding would be more effective if it were to go directly to the women’s union. They suggest FGE would benefit from establishing different funding categories for grants – that reflect the various capacity levels of women-led organizations – in order to include a wider variety of grantees. This is a common approach across global civil society funders.




### 3. FGE has used its grant-making investment to make contributions beyond SDG5 (gender equality).

In a recent exercise for a paper on leaving no one behind, FGE mapped the links between funded projects and the Sustainable Development Goals at indicator level. The evaluation has used this data to give an indication of the level of investment that FGE has leveraged to ‘front-load’ the achievement of each of the SDGs. Figure 9 illustrates this contribution, noting that each dollar can contribute to more than one Goal. As expected, the highest investment is for SDG 5 (Gender Equality). However, Figure 9 illustrates that FGE has also leveraged significant investments (\$29m – \$55m) towards ‘Reduced Inequalities’ (SDG 10), ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’ (SDG 16), ‘Quality Education’ (SDG 4), ‘Decent Work and Economic Growth’ (SDG 8), and ‘No Poverty’ (SDG 1).

Figure 9 Level of FGE investment (2009-2017) with plausible contributions to ‘front-loading’ the achievement of each of the SDGs (Source: Calculated from FGE mapping and grant budget data)



### Contributions to gender equality and women empowerment outcomes

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Achieved benchmark:</b> Networks and collective structures created and supported with the skills, capacities and opportunities of/for women and girls to access, own, inherit, participate in, and benefit from economic development and political spaces at all levels.	  

### 4. Enabling women’s participation in political and economic spaces at the local level is the most common contribution of FGE to gender equality outcomes.

Over the course of 3 rounds of grant-making, FGE has generated a rich portfolio of individual, collective and organisational stories of change. These have been presented both individually, and – more recently – aggregated through a systematic process to map aggregate contributions made by the Fund (the evaluation did not attempt to statistically validate this results data). Independently validated data is available through independent evaluation reports for 25 of the total 121 grants.

The 2014-2017 ProDoc for FGE establishes five outcome areas in which the Fund has sought to contribute to gender equality outcomes:

1. **Norms:** Women benefit from strengthened laws, customary frameworks, policies, budgets, development plans, and poverty eradication strategies that enshrine gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. **Political Agency:** Women enjoy full and equal participation and leadership in all spheres of public, political, and economic life, and decision-making in all spheres and at all levels.
3. **Social Security:** Women enjoy equal and equitable rights and access to gender-responsive social protection services, which support sustainable livelihoods and well-being.
4. **Economic Independence:** Women enjoy access to and opportunities for decent work, sustainable livelihoods and income generation, and equitable use of and control over productive resources through ownership, inheritance, or other transfer.
5. **Economic Participation:** Women enjoy opportunities to use skills and resources to establish and maintain sustainable livelihoods and income generation as participants in and beneficiaries of equitable and inclusive growth and development.

Using data from the sub-themes of grants, the evaluation mapped the number of countries, number of FGE projects, and level of investment (direct grants) where a contribution to each of these gender equality outcomes has been made. Table 5, below, illustrates the balance of investment in each of the five outcome areas from the 2014 ProDoc theory of change: noting that each project and each dollar invested can contribute to more than one outcome area. The most widespread contribution has been to economic independence for women (in 35 countries and 44 projects), whilst the highest level of investment contributing to outcomes is for women's agency (\$20.6 m) and participation in economic development (\$19.2 m).

*Table 5 Levels of FGE projects, countries and financing making plausible contributions to five gender equality outcomes. (Source: Calculated by the evaluation from the Master Programme Matrix)*

Outcome area	Number of countries with contributions to the outcome	Number of projects with contributions to the outcome*	Level of investment contributing to the outcome*
<b>Norms</b>	22	22 (18%)	\$14,676,178 (23%)
<b>Political Agency</b>	28	38 (31%)	\$20,603,950 (32%)
<b>Social Security</b>	22	24 (20%)	\$9,505,090 (15%)
<b>Economic Independence</b>	35	44 (36%)	\$18,871,236 (29%)
<b>Economic Participation</b>	27	37 (30%)	\$19,203,767 (30%)

\*Each project and each dollar can contribute to more than one outcome

The investment in contributions to gender equality outcomes was similar for 'political agency', 'economic independence' and 'economic participation'. However, it was substantively less in terms of investment in influencing 'norms' (policies, regulations, laws), and significantly less in terms of addressing 'social security'. This pattern echoes the wider budget allocation of UN Women programming guidance<sup>22</sup>.

Evidence from synthesis of independent evaluations of the results of FGE projects indicates that the main strength of the Fund is in enabling participation in political and economic spaces at the local level. For example, in Yemen the Youth Leadership Development Fund used FGE funding to create a Women's Network that links members of government, political parties, and NGOs. The network is also connected to other similar women's networks in other neighbouring countries.

“Evaluations of FGE projects consistently concluded that the greatest results achieved through FGE interventions have been manifested at the local level. Although impressive gains were made in a number of countries at the national-level, through increased representation of women in

<sup>22</sup> See UN Women Annual Work Plan Guidance, 2018.

politics and the adoption of laws and policies, local-level interventions were generally assessed by evaluations to have had the most immediate results and impact in the lives of women.”  
(FGE Meta-Analysis, 2015)

In another example, the Cultural Humanitarian Fund Sukhumi (CHFS) in Georgia used FGE funding to articulate why gender-sensitive policies are necessary at the local level. The project established gender equality councils and demands were made to advance laws on GEEW. The project also supported research around gender needs, which have helped to demonstrate why more gender statistics are necessary. As a direct result of the project, more sex disaggregated data is collected at the local level. Local government budgets are now more sensitive to gender and support initiatives to stop gender-based violence, and to support women and children (based on a Grantee submission to the evaluation).

“More engaged and involved participation of women in political spaces at the local level has meant increased recognition, leadership and making a difference in their own lives and supporting other women to claim their rights”.  
(Evaluation of “Making Women’s Voices and Votes Count” project in India.)

Based on mapping the results included in FGE Annual Report data, Table 6 presents a series of available indicators that are illustrative of scale of FGE contributions to advancing each of the five outcome areas. Excluding the broad indicators of ‘sensitization’ of stakeholders about norms and ‘claiming rights’, the two outcomes with the largest ‘numbers of people’ indicated as having experienced change are ‘political agency’, and ‘economic independence’. These align with the highest levels of investment in terms of both funding and the number contributing projects.

*Table 6 Available indicators that illustrate the scale of FGE contributions to five gender equality outcomes (Source: Aggregated FGE result indicators for the 93 programmes that closed in 2014 or later).*

FGE area	outcome	Level of change		
		Institutions	Social norms	Services
<b>Norms</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>642 laws and policies adopted, and 8 reformed, as a result of programme intervention recognizing and promoting gender equality and/or women's rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>928 legislative and policy recommendations proposed in public governance forums</li> <li>772,548 indirect beneficiaries sensitized on gender issues and women's rights through workshops, events and campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1,239 consultation spaces created to influence decision-making, with 91,104 women participating to influence policies</li> </ul>
<b>Political Agency</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>741 networks created or supported, and 607 organizations joined networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20,196 men were engaged as allies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>56,258 women trained on leadership, communications and advocacy, of which</li> <li>145 women were subsequently elected to national or local representation bodies</li> <li>6,478 women assuming leadership roles in civil society</li> <li>6,856 women achieved leadership positions in</li> </ul>

				institutions that affect their lives
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30,508 women gained literacy skills</li> </ul>
<b>Social Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27,258 beneficiaries with increased access to healthcare and education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 78,044 women claimed their rights as a result of the interventions</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4,854 women benefitted from social protection measures and services</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28,217 women increasing incomes thanks to access to sustainable incomes and markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7,426 women reporting increased control over decision-making regarding household resources</li> <li>• 21,109 women accessed sustainable income</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 62,941 women gained technical and vocational skills</li> <li>• 38,690 women accessed legal services and assistance</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 741 new collective structures created</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12,597 women engaged in income-generation activities and accessing markets</li> <li>• 6,247 women became land owners</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14,191 women accessed productive resources (land, credit, natural resources)</li> <li>• 4,254 women with access to credit</li> </ul>

The implications of these indicated outcomes for the day-to-day lives of women (such as the value of new laws to women, the impact of successfully claiming social security payments on women’s lives, or the additional value release through collectivised structures) cannot, however, be quantified due to the lack of systematic evidence available for assessing impact on the realisation of human rights. This consideration is further addressed under the discussion on efficiency and results based management.

The evidence that is available on the value of changes to women’s lives is mostly qualitative: with many illustrative stories-of-change submitted by grantees or collected by the FGE team. These have proven to be a rich source of examples for use in the FGE Annual Report, UN Women Annual Report, thematic briefings, and by the UN Women Executive Director’s Office. However, the challenge that FGE has not yet succeeded in overcoming is to capture and communicate the combined value of these diverse stories into a case that is compelling to donors: a unique contribution that could only be made by the Fund. For example, this could be in terms of the ‘network effects’ of a global knowledge-and-practice community of grantees; contributions to original evidence of ‘what works’; or quantified evidence of the transformed reach and influence of FGE grantees.

### 5. Addressing social norms around gender is the key strength of the Fund.

The meta-analysis of FGE evaluations highlighted that, whilst changes to constitutions and laws are critical in removing formal barriers to women’s political and economic participation, implementation is frequently inhibited by regressive social norms.

“Grantmaking to grassroots women’s rights organizations is key to long-term sustainable development as they have the knowledge, experiences, and expertise needed to most effectively change behaviors and promote integrated development initiatives that actually address their needs”.

(Quote from an online discussion contributor to the evaluation).

FGE has generated numerous examples of success in tackling social norms at the local level. For example, the organisation ‘Solidaritas Perempuan’ in Indonesia has partnered with religious organisations, media organisations, and women’s rights organisations to work together to challenge gender discriminatory laws. In another example, after the organisation ‘Coordinadora de la Mujer’ created spaces with FGE



funding for women to meet to discuss what a future without patriarchy would look like, men started taking women's groups more seriously in Bolivia.

“Before when women used to get together men thought that it was insignificant, that we were only meeting to gossip and paint our nails. Now when we meet, the men around us take us seriously and understand that we are working on serious issues and are making changes to our local political systems.”

(Bolivia case study interviewee)

With FGE support, the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (ECWR) provided capacity development support to young women living in difficult to reach areas like the Northern Sinai region. With the mix of technical training and emotional support, young women were able to challenge local tribal leaders to allow young women to participate in local politics (based on FGE grantee submission to the evaluation).

Overall, the evaluation has identified three main contributions to addressing social norms:

1. An increased **positive perception** towards women's political and economic participation at the local level through projects that empowered and capacitated women with skills, knowledge and confidence to participate effectively in decision-making processes.
2. More gender-responsive and **participatory governance** structures and decision-making processes through initiatives to connect elected local leaders with women's networks and representatives.
3. Overcoming resistance to women's participation and **building champions** to influence change in communities through engaging men and local opinion leaders at the local level.


The emphasis of FGE projects on impacting social norms is illustrated by a comparison with the proportion of projects that reported different types of outcomes in an anonymous survey of grantees in 2016<sup>23</sup>. 38% of grants reported raising the visibility of a target issue, with 20% leading to change in attitudes. By comparison, 11% led to legislative change, and 11% generated income for women.

#### Box: Providing legitimacy and support to mainstream the cause of manual scavenger women in India

The India case study highlighted the example of Jan Sahas, a CSO working to liberate manual scavenger women from a form of slavery. Because it is illegal in India, manual scavenging (which consists of women from the Dalit caste cleaning dry latrines in exchange for housing, used clothing and minimal pay) was a highly sensitive issue with certain levels of government – to the point where it was not acknowledged in public.

FGE supported Jan Sahas to mobilise women scavengers to draw public awareness and attention to the issue. This led to more than 60 local resolutions to stop scavenging, and requests by government to mainstream UN programming to help address the issue. Over 8,000 women have now been liberated from this form of slavery, with over 6,600 finding alternative employment with increased income.

### Contributions to the capacity of women's civil society organisations

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Achieved benchmark:</b> FGE-supported CSOs have the capacity to design, finance and implement breakthrough and/or essential gender equality programming	

6. Capacity building support received from the FGE has strengthened grantee ability to achieve results; but would need to address a broader set of organisational capabilities to be truly transformative.

<sup>23</sup> Out of the 96 programmes funded in the first and second cycles, representatives from 71 organizations involved in 67 programmes answered to a short questionnaire sent in early 2017 (70% response rate).

Over the evolution of FGE – from an MDG acceleration instrument placing ‘big-bets’ through NGO and government partnerships, to working solely with women-led CSO’s to leave no one behind – capacity development has emerged as a defining characteristic of the Fund’s grant-making approach. At the heart of this is the 3 pillar model – encompassing financing (sustain), accompaniment and assistance through the process (support), and training in results based management (strengthen).

“The Fund advances UN Women’s mandates by **sustaining, supporting and strengthening the capacities of Civil Society Organisations** – a key UN Women constituency – to implement high-impact, multi-stakeholder programmes that help transform local, national, and regional law and policy commitments into tangible services, freedoms, and opportunities that improve the everyday lives of women and men, boys and girls.”  
(FGE ProDoc, 2014-2017, emphasis added)

In implementation, two of the pillars (‘support’ and ‘strengthen’) have been funded from the 25% of the FGE budget accounted for under ‘management costs’, while ‘sustain’ accounts for the remaining 75%. Consequently, ‘support’ and ‘strengthen’ have encompassed not just specific activities (such as training or guidance), but the design of FGE processes, the culture of its approach and strategic guidance to grantees on programme implementation, mitigation measures, and change management to adapt to shifting, unstable and changing contexts. These capacity development features of FGE include:

1. Maintaining regional Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) specialists providing direct technical support to successful grantees.
2. Providing detailed guidance for proposals, in multiple languages, including frequently asked questions.
3. Providing one-to-one feedback to enhance shortlisted proposals.
4. Organising multi-grantee networking and support meetings at the beginning of grants.
5. Providing RBM training.
6. Developing calls for proposals and results frameworks that emphasis CSOs’ own priorities, and thus channel inputs towards their core missions.

“FGE’s support helped us to strengthen our M&E capacities, which helped us to better manage the project and communicate results. A stronger understanding of M&E also helped our organisation to stay focused on the goal of the project. We are now using these new M&E skills to better design, manage, and evaluate our work in other areas”.


(Submission to the evaluation by Community Life Project in Nigeria).

The country case studies indicated that these activities, such as getting together at the beginning to network, were seen to be very important by grantees. For example, a member of the FGE team travelled to Bolivia to meet with and support grantees; and in India grantees found that having a clear plan and the partnerships to achieve it were important contributions to their capacity. Grantees were also invited to an FGE regional workshop at the beginning of the second funding cycle to bring FGE grantees together to network and to learn from each other. Grantees in Bolivia expressed a high level of satisfaction from these workshops and stated that they were very useful. These examples are representative of the overall grantee experience: in an anonymous 2016 survey of FGE grantees, 70% of respondents reported that the technical support received from the FGE has strengthened their ability to achieve results.

“The FGE team provided support on how to improve our project’s performance framework. The M&E capacity building provided by FGE (i.e. how to phrase the indicators, etc.) has helped us to become more results focused. This is one of the capacity building needs for women’s civil society in Egypt”.

(Submission to the evaluation from the Egyptian Centre for Women’s Rights)

However, due to resource allocations, activities such as visits by FGE staff only happened once during a grant cycle – and the evaluation identified significant demand from grantees for more investment in capacity development. Grantees appreciate that capacity development is central to the FGE mission statement, but the 2016 survey analysis revealed that “generally, grantees found the technical support appropriate during planning, monitoring and reporting, but lacking during the actual implementation.”



Evidence from evaluation interviews, however, suggest that this apparent gap was not the case across all grants and regions; and the case studies provided a mixed perspective.

Whereas there is evidence to suggest technical assistance was variable, 91% of the grantees found the FGE extremely flexible in adjusting work plans to changes in circumstances. The independent survey analysis concluded that *“grantees consistently reported how the FGE demonstrated full understanding and acknowledgement of the changing situation of programmes, which often took place in politically and economically instable countries. Grantees cited instances where they were encouraged to adapt and try new approaches, redefine activities, agree on new timeframes, and forge new partnerships.”* The evaluation case studies triangulate with this finding of strong ongoing support to grant management.

Where limitations of FGE capacity development activities were identified in interviews, case studies and survey data, these were generally grounded in four factors:

1. The timeframe of FGE grants (2-3 years) is sufficient only to improve capacity within the scope of the FGE-financed project – wider organisational impacts on the supported CSOs were very limited.
2. Availability constraints of Monitoring and Report Specialists following multiple (15+) projects; and UN Women focal persons.
3. FGE itself is seen to have critical weaknesses in its own capacity – especially in terms of fundraising and marketing – and these gaps are reflected in insufficient support in these areas to meet the sustainability needs of CSOs.
4. Subsequent reliance of FGE on existing capacity with CSOs (illustrated by the introduction of a capacity assessment in Round 3) or scaling-up existing projects limits scope for addressing the needs of the furthest behind CSOs.

*“We need multi-year funding that supports transformational change grounded in processes rather than specific projects”*

(Quote from an FGE grantee director).

These limiting factors align with broader concern within women’s civil society networks that capacity building of CSOs is being largely confined to the technical or administrative requirements to deliver donor-driven results (AWID, 2015). Investment in capacity for strategy development, leadership, governance arrangements, human resources management, fundraising, communications, advocacy, and network-building is often missing. During case study visits, FGE grantees suggested that women’s civil society could be strengthened by funding spaces for women’s groups to get together to build alliances and strategies to challenge patriarchy. These spaces are seen as essential for building a strong women’s movement.

*“Currently, international support for civil society is focused on building administrative capacity when it should focus on creating organizational transformation”*

(Quote from a political ally of an FGE-funded NGO).

The impact of these gaps is not critical – only 4% of grantees entirely closed project activities once FGE funding ceased – but it does limit the scale and ambition that CSOs can reach: just 20% of grantees went on to implement a full second phase of the project after FGE funding ended. There is clear demand, therefore, for future capacity building support to address a much broader set of organisational capabilities.

At the same time, individual examples do illustrate the potential of FGE support to transform CSOs in unexpected ways. In 2011, when it was selected to participate in a Round 1 Implementation Grant, the Indian NGO Pradan was an organisation focused on livelihoods. Through the interaction with FGE, engagement with the UN Women Country Office, and the experience of implementing the project, Pradan has transformed itself – both in terms of its human resources and its mission – into an organisation focused on gender. It is now a regular implementing partner to the UN Women Strategic Note in India, and an important ally in the women’s movement.

### Box: Illustrative quotes about strengthening RBM capacity from grantees

*“The support around results-based management was very useful and developed our appreciation around this”.*

*“Staff have been capacitated in result-based management and finance. This has helped our daily running and results are put at the centre stage of the programme”.*

*“Now we can count on monitoring and evaluation tools as well as planning tools which better reflect the reality of the participants of our programmes”.*

Source: 2016 anonymous survey of FGE grantees

## 7. The FGE staff culture of accompaniment supported continuous learning and performance improvement by grantees

Throughout the evaluation process, interviews with grantees revealed that the approach and culture of the FGE team to working with civil society can best be described as ‘accompaniment’. FGE grantees consider that they were supported, as peers and equals, by the FGE team to lead the process of change within their communities. According to the 2016 anonymous survey of grantees, there was consistent appreciation of responsiveness, enthusiasm, a collaborative style, and close and personal involvement of FGE team members and UN Women focal persons throughout the grantmaking cycle. For example, one survey respondent stated that *“very personalized contact between ourselves and the FGE team members was very helpful in ensuring that decisions on the project were made quickly and with limited further follow-ups”*. FGE commitment to CSO leadership is reflected in this grant-management approach of accompaniment by FGE staff.

*“Grantees recognized the role of the FGE as a catalyst of key innovations in their programmes and organizations. Almost all respondents of the survey provided at least one example of key innovation introduced with the collaboration with the FGE. The innovations ranged from new alliances and partnerships, to improved linkages between research, policy advocacy, service delivery, and community action.”*

(2016 FGE survey report)

FGE grant-management emphasised iterative and evolutionary programming – supporting adaptation, learning and continuous improvement. The same 2016 survey found that 70% of grantees had involved intended beneficiaries in feedback processes throughout the programme design and implementation to help improve performance. This was by far the most prevalent form of programme improvement, compared with 53% of grants that adapted programming based on assessments of lessons from other organisations, and 25% grants that pilot tested interventions prior to implementing at full scale.

## Contributions to global knowledge

### Performance

**Approaching benchmark:** Lessons from FGE supported interventions about what works and what does not work for gender equality are captured and published in the public domain. An FGE community of knowledge and practice is becoming active.


### Sources of evidence



## 8. FGE promoted direct knowledge sharing by grantees through their own networks and national institutions; with some key lessons also being documented and published centrally by the Fund. This was a logical and feasible strategy given available resources.

FGE has included knowledge generation and management as a core strategy since its inception. Every year since 2009, an Annual Report has been published that includes key statistics, stories of change, and lessons learned from FGE-supported grants, in addition to lessons from the fund itself about effective support to women’s civil society. Several series of knowledge products have been published including:

1. Research Series on “Supporting Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in Fragile States” funded by the Government of Japan
2. “Voices from the Field” series of stories about example grants
3. Results brochures to accompany annual reports

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4. Fact sheets covering links between FGE, climate change, peace and security, and leaving no one behind
  5. Briefs on the Arab States grant making cycles covering several years
  6. Donor briefs about FGE
  7. “Impact Stories” short briefs on examples of change
  8. A meta-analysis of 22 independent evaluations of FGE projects assessed as meeting UN Women/UN Evaluation Group quality standards.

These knowledge products have been used extensively within UN Women, including as a source of material for public speeches made by the Executive Director, to provide examples in support of fundraising events with corporate sector and individuals of wealth (including for the Women Peace & Humanitarian Fund), and as a source for UN Women Annual Reports. Furthermore, material such as the 2015 Meta-Analysis has been used by DFID researchers as input into wider analysis of gender equality financing to women’s political empowerment<sup>24</sup>.

**Box: Recommendations for enhancing knowledge management from the 2015 Meta-Analysis Report**

- Further strengthen the quality of programme design by developing a database of the practice, models and results of FGE interventions – and using this to help establish clear quality requirements for future proposals.
- Deepen the analysis of the most common theories of change used in programmes in order to test these (and to contribute to refining the UNW Flagship theories of change in the process).

An independent 2017 review of knowledge management undertaken by an FGE consultant, Steven Beckert, suggested that *“UN Women uniquely benefits from these close relationships [with FGE grantees] as it gains invaluable insights from the close collaboration during programme implementation and from the many knowledge products produced, which allows UN Women to broaden its expertise in national and regional contexts, in specific vulnerable populations, to expand its database of best practices for the empowerment of women in different contexts, and to establish new partnerships with local governments.”*

However, the evaluation found that wider use of knowledge generated through FGE-supported projects has depended largely on the relationship between grantees and the local UN Women Regional, Multi-Country or Country Office. At the regional level, convening of grantees was highly valued as a means of knowledge exchange, but this only happened on an ad hoc basis: depending on the regional office willingness, without clear corporate guidance on engaging with FGE alliances and networks.

At the global level, meanwhile, the Fund abolished the “Knowledge Management Specialist” position in 2014 (the Fund sought to integrate knowledge management and communications, and share knowledge management activities between HQ and regional FGE staff). Evaluation interviews indicate that there is a lingering sense within both donors and FGE itself that a wealth of knowledge sits underutilised within the experience of the project portfolio. This is confirmed by the findings of FGE independent evaluations.

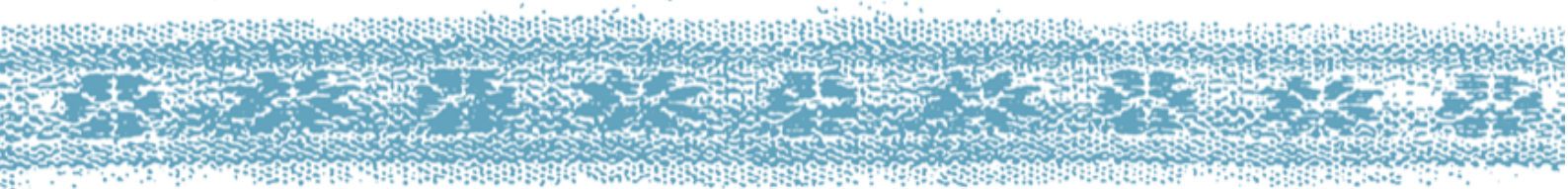
*“There is scope for analysing and sharing practices and models of FGE-supported interventions across the world. Although there are regional trends in terms of programme conceptualisation, many activities are found to be similar around the world. Another challenge is in linking FGE interventions to broader efforts so as to best contribute to changing deeply rooted social structures and norms.”*

(2015 FGE meta-analysis)

For this reason, much of the recent work on knowledge management in FGE speaks to the potential contribution to UN Women, rather than to concrete systems of knowledge harvesting, clearing and exchange. This is illustrated in the 2017 independent review by Beckert: *“the enormous amount of lessons learned and impacts achieved from the FGE should not go to waste, but be collected and analysed to inform strategic planning and annual working plans ... One of the most important recommendations refers to*

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.gsdr.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Donor-interventions-on-womens-political-empowerment.pdf>



*increasing communication and exchange of information between current and past grantees.”* Evidence from FGE staff emphasised the importance of addressing this within the bigger context of UN Women knowledge management systems.

Notably, FGE did not attempt to establish itself as an interactive community of practice for its grantees so as not to replicate other UN Women platforms, such as Empower Women. While the Fund facilitated content and resources, including grantee experts and practitioners, in support of Empower Women activities and dialogues, it was not seen as a platform for interaction and network-benefits by its donors or grantees. Instead, the FGE team promoted knowledge sharing directly by grantees through their own networks and national institutions; with some of these lessons being documented and published centrally by the FGE team for exchange with other grantees and FGE partners. Given that the human resources available were saturated with other roles and responsibilities, this twin-track approach was a logical and feasible strategy.

The case study evidence on grantee-led local knowledge sharing was split, with some examples of generated knowledge influencing national processes; but not all grantees experiencing the same level of relationship with, or access to sharing knowledge through, UN Women Country Offices and networks. Similarly, the interview evidence on centralised documentation of evidence was also split, with some development partners indicating that it exceeded their expectations, while others hoped for more detailed insights – including about what was found *not* to work as expected.



**Box: Creating spaces for women's civil society to challenge patriarchy through the School of Depatriarchalization.**

In Bolivia, the organisation “Coordinadora de la Mujer” used FGE funding to bring women together from across socio-economic divisions from around the country to participate in “The School of Depatriarchalization”. This initiative, designed by Coordinadora de la Mujer with FGE funds, provided a space for women to share their personal experiences living in a patriarchal society and offered workshops to help women identify characteristics of the patriarchal system. Women were then given the space to imagine what a society free of patriarchy would look like as a means to envision an alternative future. Several lessons learned emerged from this initiative, which include:

**1. The terms used to discuss gender inequality are important and can affect how both women and men engage in advancing women's rights.**

Coordinadora de la Mujer realized that the term “depatriarchalization” was easier for Bolivian women to grasp and less threatening to Bolivian men than the terms “feminism” or “gender equality” due to the particular social and political context taking form within the country. Men in particular found it easier to promote feminist principles through a discourse of depatriarchalization, as it allowed them to personally distance themselves from this system of oppression against women.

**2. It is crucial to assess the appropriate time and space for men's involvement in advancing women's rights.**


Coordinadora de la Mujer made the decision to invite only women to The School of Depatriarchalization in order to create a safe space for women to exchange their experiences and to envision an alternative future. Even though this women-only space was crucial for the women's movement at that particular point in time, the organisation explained that there is also a need and an interest from Bolivian men to better understand patriarchy and how to challenge its mechanisms. Therefore, there is an opportunity to engage men in discussing patriarchy as a follow-up process to the initial women-only sessions.

**3. Funding of successful initiatives that bring women's groups together to challenge patriarchy can be leveraged into larger results.**

The School of Depatriarchalization was seen as a huge success in terms of providing capacity development and strengthening the women's movement. These types of spaces can be effective tools to inform and empower both women and men around how to challenge patriarchy. Unfortunately, FGE funding was only available to support the development of the school curriculum and the implementation of some women-only workshops. There is potential to leverage the results of this successful model to expand it across Bolivia and to use it to engage men.

## 4.2 Efficiency

### Economy of the FGE business model

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Approaching benchmark:</b> The management overhead of FGE is within the same range as equivalent small grant programmes. FGE team achieves “esprit de corps” and performs greater than the sum of its parts. FGE partnerships with grantees have robust governance mechanisms in place.	

### 9. FGE benchmarks well against funds and small grants programmes with comparable business models.

The benchmarking<sup>25</sup> of 9 areas of the FGE business model canvas against 15 comparable funds and small grants programmes reveals that there is relatively limited diversity in the core business models of most funds and small grants programmes. The main differentiators are between entities that are publicly-funded (open to investment by multiple governmental and private donors), and those that are privately-funded (by high net worth individuals, single corporations, or endowments and legacies).

Reflecting the differences in predominant governance arrangements between these funding sources (i.e. the level of control of individual donors), the emphasis of grantmaking varies in terms of its priorities.

- Publicly-funded entities, such as UN funds and programmes, tend to emphasise expanding access and programming innovation through competitive processes. This is emblematic of both their responsibility to demonstrate to donors a transparent and fair process, and the theory that competitiveness drives innovation and efficiency.
- Privately-funded entities, such as Foundations, tend to emphasise maximising impact using either exclusive intelligence (about well-placed actors) or high-risk grantmaking to drive an agenda within a particular niche. Many of these entities intentionally restrict access to financing by not accepting unsolicited proposals.

The approach, mission, and operating context of privately-funded entities are not comparable to FGE, even if they are also considered to be ‘Funds’. Whilst some lessons may be drawn from private funds and foundations, FGE must therefore only be benchmarked against other publicly-funded entities. For example, FGE key partnerships, activities and resources are shaped by the continuous need to mobilise investment from an open field of potential donors; whereas by comparison, funds with an assured source of finance (such as an endowment or recurring sponsorship) can focus all their energies on building partnerships that support implementation and/or influence.

**Key partnerships:** FGE partners with a diverse range of supporting organisations – including bilateral donors, private and corporate foundations, UN Women National Committees, and even individuals. Like UNTF, FGE also benefits from partnership with a broad range of recognised experts as part of their technical advisors to the competitive grant process. This diverse set of partners is a strength. However, these relationships have not been structured in a way that promotes ‘stickiness’ – especially regarding long-term repeat donorship.

- Larger bilateral donors are accustomed to having an advisory role in funding decisions. This is restricted in FGE to verification of the grantmaking process, lowering active engagement. By comparison, [AmplifyChange](#) (a multistakeholder public-private partnership between a management company, civil society funds, and government donors) includes a Board that sets ‘fund distribution benchmarks’. The fund has freedom to manage within benchmark ranges (such as geographic distribution) to respond to civil society demand.
- Private foundations are looking to learn about good global grantmaking from both FGE and other FGE-donors. They value interaction between the FGE donor group, but have had few opportunities to do so limiting this aspect of the ‘return on investment’.

<sup>25</sup> The evaluation mapped the FGE business model using a common industry tool called the *Business Model Canvas* (see Annexes), which has been successfully adapted for social purpose organisations, including by the New Economics Foundation. The comparison was based on desk research and selected stakeholder interviews.



- The SDG-Fund actively funds UN joint programmes – aligning the interests of multiple UN agencies to the success of that Fund, and solidifying this support with a very high-level Board to advocate for contributions. By comparison, UN entities do not directly benefit from the success of FGE (only indirectly through potential funding for CSOs that they champion).
- Establishing these donor-facing structures might reasonably be considered to be within the role of the Chief or Deputy Fund Manager. However, one or other of these posts has consistently been vacant since 2013, and no other partnership or fundraising staff are included in the organogram.

**Key activities:** FGE has received and reviewed 3,648 concept notes, and has funded 121 of the 143 shortlisted notes. Once the full amount of FGE funds are allocated for each round, the FGE undertakes a second round of fundraising for the ‘next in line’ proposals, including encouraging donors to support these projects directly under their own programmes. This still leaves a significant number of proposals unfunded, although interviews with representatives of the women’s movement do not suggest that this is a major point of contention (most women’s CSOs are very aware of the restricted level of funding available).

- By comparison, the [BIG Lottery Fund](#) in the UK also deals with a very large number of proposals, most of which go unfunded. To address this concern, the Fund has established a structured process of relevant feedback, advice and connections to all unsuccessful proposals with the aim of improving the capacity and other resource mobilisation efforts of these organisations.

**Key resources:** The FGE secretariat carries out or supports nearly all management functions of the Fund. This is backstopped by technical reviews and monitoring by UN Women focal persons, technical advice from Policy Division, and the UN Women finance and results tracking systems. The Fund does receive limited inputs from UN Women fundraising, partnerships, and communications teams – but these are primarily tasked with promoting support to UN Women ‘core’ fundraising.

- **In-house grant management.** Like FGE, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme has invested in an in-house grant management system and set of regional advisors. It also has a comparable cost overhead, that includes capacity development of grantees. Whilst UNTF uses the same online grant management system as FGE, its regional portfolio managers are based in New York rather than being out-posted to UN Women Regional Offices.
- **Outsourcing.** The management of the DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund was entirely outsourced to a private consultancy firm. The cost of this approach is not disclosed, but is higher than in-house management. However, it provided DFID with strategic flexibility (the option to rapidly expand or reduce the Fund) and risk mitigation in exchange for a cost that included a portion of private profit.
- **Hybrid or blended management.** The UN SDG-Fund is a hybrid of these models – with a core team that focuses on fundraising and grantmaking, while outsourcing the management of implementation to UN agencies and financial management to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office hosted in UNDP.
- **Joint programmes.** The evaluation has found no evidence to critique the choice of a global programme modality as being suitable for the purpose of FGE during the two ProDocs, but notes that **under ongoing UN reform a joint programme with other relevant UN entities would more strongly resonate with good-donorship discourse.**

**Constituency segments:** FGE constituency segments have narrowed over the evolution of the Fund – from established NGOs and government (for implementation grants) and networks of small CSOs (for catalyst grants), to small-but-established women’s CSOs and networks (for Round 3 grants).

- Many private foundations exist that offer micro-grants for gender-related projects to very small CSOs, but these tend to be geographically focused, lacking the global reach or size of grants offered by FGE.
- There is a growing landscape of women’s networks, women’s funds, or large NGOs that combine private and ODA funds and channel these to local partners for gender equality work, reducing the transaction costs for donors. Examples of these include the [Global Fund for Women](#) and [MamaCash](#). While some of these can operate globally, they do not have the advantage of working under the UN umbrella in politically narrowed or high risk contexts.

- Most bilateral ODA financing of gender-focused CSOs and networks is directed and managed at the country level; and can only be contributed to pooled funding mechanisms within the country<sup>26</sup>. FGE is not an eligible mechanism to channel this finance.
- Non-gender small grants programmes, such as the Global Environment Facility-SGP (Small Grants Programme), have greater flexibility than FGE in being able to channel funds through government and UN agencies, as well as direct to civil society. Investment vehicles in other sectors also tend to have a broader scope, being able to target individuals (such as entrepreneurs), or even small businesses.
- Because they are system-wide UN funds, UNTF ERAW, SDG Fund, Women Peace & Humanitarian Fund (formerly known as the Global Acceleration Instrument – GAI), and UN Trust Fund for Human Security all benefit from supporting the constituencies – and thus interests – of multiple UN entities.

**Channels:** Among gender-focused funds and programmes there is limited diversity in the target constituencies (organisations) and the channels for reaching them. Nearly all funds for CSOs accept proposals through open calls (like FGE) or through the offices of intermediaries (such as UN agencies, women's funds, or CSO networks).


- By comparison, private foundations such as the [Children's Investment Fund Foundation \(CIFF\)](#) do not openly accept proposals, choosing to identify and directly approach CSOs that they consider to be well positioned.
- Most grantmaking processes are designed as a classic 'funnel' – steadily reducing the number of proposals as the level of communication increases and engagement deepens. This reflects the reality of most funds that correspondence with applicants and donors is generally maintained on a one-to-one basis through email. By comparison, the [Catapult](#) website has developed a 'platform-based' model to engage large numbers of small donors through a web interface, replacing bespoke communications with automated systems and community networking.
- The evaluation observed that an alternative channel for engagement – using events such as conferences or campaigns to identify and communicate with constituencies – is very rarely used by any Fund. As a consequence, most Funds are limited to reaching those organisations 'in the network' of grantmaking processes: leaving unexplored scope for reaching a new generation of emerging women's organisations.

**Constituency relationships:** FGE undertook direct capacity development of short listed proposals and grantees through technical support, and grantees through RBM training. Furthermore, the accompaniment approach of FGE intentionally supports leadership by CSOs within their contexts. This is largely unique to FGE, with other funds and programmes adopting a more instrumental approach to communication and capacity building.

- The SDG Fund works through UN agencies as intermediaries, while the Dutch MDG3 Fund was revised over its course to direct more support through women's funds as intermediaries.
- The DFID Civil Society Challenge Fund – the management of which was entirely outsourced – further commissioned UK-based NGOs to build the implementation of NGOs in the Global South that received financing.
- [Access](#) – The Foundation for Social Investment, operates a Reach Fund and an Impact Management Programme to prepare NGOs to receive larger tranches of social investment finance, including support from approved service providers.
- By contrast, and more in line with the empowerment philosophy of FGE, [FRIDA](#) and the [Central American Women's Fund](#) operate participatory grant-making mechanisms to engage civil society in the democratic allocation of resources.
- As a comparison, other types of investment-making organisations were found to maintain a wider range of relationships than just potential and current grantees. In addition to its social entrepreneurship grants, [Acumen](#) actively builds a growing network of fellows and alumni to extend its impact. While UN Women does maintain links with FGE alumni, this is largely unstructured and dependent on the local country office. A more structured approach is taken by

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<sup>26</sup> De-centralized models limit the knowledge analysis that can be done on global level and may increase the risk of funding already-known actors in the country.



the start-up accelerator, [Founders Institute](#), which places start-ups into an intensive incubator programme and uses the pay-it-forward principle where alumni support subsequent participants.

**Cost structures:** The evaluation found very little evidence is published around specific cost structures to compare directly with FGE. Based on levels of activity and some organograms, nearly all funds and small grants programmes appear to be weighted heavily towards management and capacity building activities, with smaller elements of communications and knowledge management. Thus, there is relatively limited difference in the core business models of most funds and small grants programmes by comparison with FGE.

- By comparison with FGE, the SDG-Fund and the AmplifyChange consortium have dedicated staff members to build public-private partnerships as a source of investment.
- Women's funds place most of their resource mobilisation emphasis on individuals as donors, with greater investment in their websites as fundraising and communications tools – including through sponsored search ads to drive traffic to their pages<sup>27</sup>. Catapult has taken this furthest, making a large capital investment in a crowd funding website (similar to KickStarter or Kiva) and public campaigns to drive engagement.
- Outsourced management functions include an element of profit as a cost overhead. However, staff time of private firms and funds is generally priced lower than the full cost of UN staff positions (which include benefits).

**Value proposition:** The FGE value proposition is global reach to directly support women's civil society through finance and capacity development. This exclusive targeting of civil society through the coverage of the UN umbrella is offered by very few funds. All of these instruments place emphasis on expert-informed objective targeting informed by demand.

- By comparison, a new wave of feminist funds, including FRIDA and Catapult, emphasise participatory and democratic decision making through open voting about which organisations receive funds.
- Although a few FGE projects have targeted groups marginalised based on their sexual identity, civil society women's funds are far more explicit about funding work in support of sexual diversities.

**Investment streams:** With exceptions, there is a trend towards the largest publicly-financed funds being supported by a 'cluster' of core donors, rather than a single lead donor.

- There is increased emphasis among funds such as the SDG-Fund and AmplifyChange on private sector partnerships, with human resources dedicated to developing these. SDG-F also leverages co-financing by UN entities.
- FGE has successfully diversified the number of its donors, but not the type of investment it targets<sup>28</sup>. An example of investment diversification include the [\(PRODUCT\)RED](#) cause marketing brand for the [Global Fund](#). This has focused on increasing financial investment, but has also been critiqued for failing to build the relationships required for a movement.
- UNTF has enhanced its exposure to potential donors by leveraging the UNiTE 16 Days of Action campaign.

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<sup>27</sup> This cost structure is similar to the UN Women National Committees.

<sup>28</sup> FGE has done cause marketing on a small scale with L'Occitane and Esprit (through the UN Women National Committee)- but they are one-off initiatives. Other potential partners were too small scale since UN Women guidelines for these campaigns require a \$200k minimum investment.

### Box: AmplifyChange – a comparable example of innovation in Fund design

AmplifyChange is a joint funding mechanism that enables donors to support civil society in the south directly, on a large scale. The fund has already proved attractive to DAC donors, securing an increase in its funding base from EUR 16.1 million in 2014 to approximately EUR 44.2 million in 2016 as new donors have come on board, including SIDA and DFID.

Denmark, the Netherlands and two private foundations launched the initiative in September 2014, in response to an identified gap in funding for southern civil society advocacy on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). It is managed by a public-private consortium that includes a private company as well as two women's funds: Global Fund for Women and the African Women's Development Fund.

AmplifyChange provides four types of grants, which cover core and/or project costs:

- **Strengthening grant:** capacity-building grants of up to EUR 100,000 for small to mid-size organisations for up to two years (around 50% of the portfolio).
- **Network grant:** between EUR 150,000 and EUR 350,000 for two years to coalitions and networks that have been established for more than three years to dialogue with policy makers and support convening, lesson learning, and capacity building for smaller civil society organisations (around 20% of the portfolio).
- **Opportunity grant:** seed grants of up to EUR 10,000 for up to one year for smaller and/or newer organisations or themes to test innovative approaches (around 5% of the portfolio).
- **Strategic grant:** up to EUR 1.2 million per year for up to three years for international organisations' work in the south, including capacity and alliance-building among local CSOs.

There is a particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The fund allocates a share of its resources to more difficult or controversial issues and harder to reach groups and 'not to be missed' countries – those with the worse SRHR indicators. Performance benchmarks are set by the Board on the range of types of grants and distribution of funding. Within these benchmarks, the fund responds to demand through competitive calls for proposals.

Some factors that have supported growth for AmplifyChange are:

1. Access to donor 'health' budgets (not just gender).
2. Specific focus on an issue of concern given the US 'Global Gag' on SRH funding.
3. Consortium management that combines a strong portfolio of capabilities, networks and legitimacy.
4. Positive initial reviews by donors.
5. Balanced governance, including donors and experts.

Some lessons and limitations of AmplifyChange are:

1. While working on sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality, it is not intended specifically to target women's rights organizations.
2. Is limited to funding SRHR and does not fund other women's human rights issues.
3. Has some delays in processing smaller grants as a result of due diligence processes.
4. Grants can be used for organizational core activities but are not flexible.
5. Some grants are very short-term – as short as 1 year for small organizations.
6. New organizations and those with smaller budgets and a shorter record are less likely to be funded.
7. Some donors would prefer to prioritize grassroots organizations rather than also funding INGOs.

Lessons from AmplifyChange relevant to the Fund include the hybrid governance arrangements that gives donors a stronger sense of ownership, partnering between several entities in a coalition to access greater core capacity, and operating multiple types of grant.



## 10. FGE systems and structures require at least \$6m-\$10m in resources per year to achieve optimum operating efficiency

Open data on the operating costs of gender-related funds is very limited. However, there is some equivalence with an analysis by the Global Environment Facility (2007) of small grants programmes with a ceiling of \$300,000 per grant. Among the 12 assessed programmes the GEF-SGP had an adjusted programme management cost of 31% (including capacity building activities), and programme management overheads across all programmes ranged from 11%-34% when adjusted for capacity building activities<sup>29</sup>.

The average overhead cost was 26%. By comparison, FGE had an adjusted management overhead (including capacity development) across both programme phases of 24%, placing it in the middle of the range assessed by GEF. With a current cost base of circa \$2m year, FGE is thus required to mobilise \$6m-\$10m per year to fit within the expected range of an international fund or small grants programme.

In another comparison, the example of the AmplifyChange mechanism is broadly equivalent to FGE in mission and scope. Whilst no detailed accounts or public evaluations are yet available, the rate of overhead can be estimated from the difference in DFID budget allocation (£11m) vs the level of funding reported as being available to CSOs from the DFID partnership (£8m). This implies an approximate programme management overhead of 27% – also in the range of the GEF assessment.

Applying this example 27% cost as a ceiling to the levels of new FGE resource mobilisation in the period 2014-2017 reveals that a management budget of \$810,000 per year would have been appropriate. The evaluation thus finds that FGE would need to either double the most recent levels of resource mobilisation, or halve the most recent management costs, to maintain a competitive level of efficiency. As discussed later in the evaluation report (under sustainability) international evidence suggests that focusing on increasing resource mobilisation (rather than reducing costs) is likely to be more sustainable in this situation as a long term strategy.

### **Box: FGE as a mechanism for lowering UN Women transaction costs**

As a programme that pooled funds from multiple donors, FGE was designed to lower the transaction costs of reporting – a single common annual report and statement of accounts is issued to all donors to the programme. This feature has been identified by senior members of UN Women operations staff as representing an opportunity to channel large numbers of smaller-scale contributions (for example <\$200,000) in an operationally efficient way.

Under this hypothetical arrangement, UN Women could reduce its overall reporting costs by channelling all contributions below a certain threshold through the Fund – replacing large numbers of individual donor reports with a single FGE annual programme report. Based on evidence gathered by the evaluation, agreeing this arrangement within the organisation as a complement to the Flagship Programmes would most likely require a realignment of incentives for country and regional representatives by allowing them a stronger voice in the grant making process.

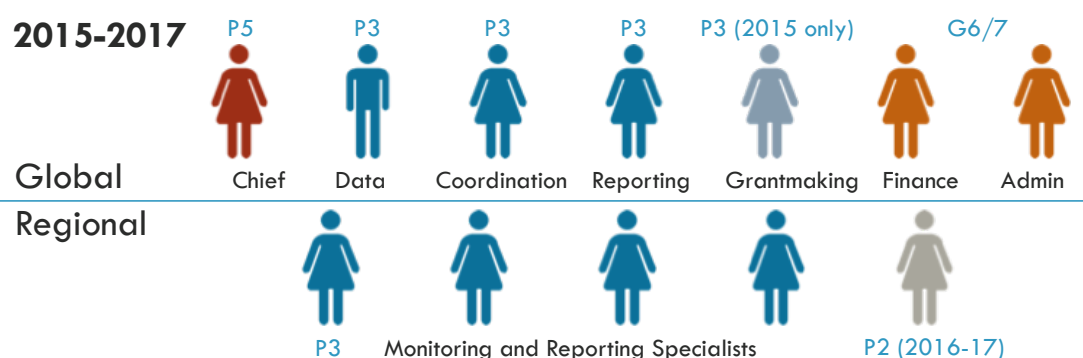
## 11. FGE had insufficient human capital for partnership development and fundraising

At the beginning of 2017, FGE had 11 staff (reducing quickly to 9), with 1 senior role (Chief). There has been no deputy fund manager since 2014. At its height (in 2011), FGE had 15 staff positions in the staff organogram, with 12 of these occupied. There is a single staff member dedicated to reporting, who also covers the communications and knowledge management functions. Resource mobilisation and partnerships are covered by the Chief and the Fund Coordinator. Thus there are no specialist human resources for knowledge management, communications, fundraising or partnerships. Outside of the FGE secretariat, senior management oversight is provided by the Deputy Director of Programme Division, while additional monitoring and reporting support is provided by focal persons in UN Women decentralised offices.

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<sup>29</sup> The lowest overhead was achieved by the World Bank Small Grants Programme (maximum grant of \$15,000) with 850 grants per cycle, requirements for co-financing, and placed limited emphasis on capacity development

Figure 10 Human capital available to FGE for most of the period 2015-2017\*



\*Red=P5, Blue=P3, Orange=General Staff

By comparison, the SDG-Fund (initiated with a \$45m grant from Spain) has a secretariat of 11 staff. It outsources financial management to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office hosted in UNDP, and national programme monitoring to participating UN agencies. It has one director, and 10 associates, analysts and specialists. There are dedicated staff for resource mobilisation and partnerships, working with private sector, media, and communications. In another example, AmplifyChange draws on a management team of 32 people from 3 consortium partners, with 6 people holding senior roles. There is a dedicated team of 3 communications specialists, and a senior board that develops relationships with prospective donors.

The gap in fundraising specialists for FGE, in particular, was also noted by grantees and members of the women's movement during evaluation case studies and interviews. These skills are seen as a weakness in the capacity of women's CSOs more broadly – and several grantees hoping for capacity development in resource mobilisation observed that FGE could not support this because it did not have such capabilities even to meet the Fund's own needs. The evaluation notes that attempts by the Fund to hire resource mobilisation specialists were either blocked or restricted to a short term consultancy. This was based on the case that traditional sources of finance (member states) remained a viable source of funds without committing to additional costs. Comparison between FGE and growing funds suggests that, in retrospect, the investment in resource mobilisation and partnerships specialists would have been the more optimal strategy.

#### Box: A challenging fundraising environment

FGE (like UN Women) was founded at the dawn of what was to be a decade of global austerity following the great financial crisis of 2008/09. As a consequence of both the economic crisis and a change in the domestic political landscape of Spain, the initial contribution from the Government of Spain did not receive follow-up support. In this context, institutional contributions to UN Women have also been restricted; and so fundraising for FGE has been a second-tier priority for corporate resource mobilisation.

Whilst several other bilateral development partners have contributed to FGE, this is not a comparable level to the initial ambition of the Fund, and most other donors have their own mechanisms for supporting gender equality. For example, the Government of the Netherlands established the Dutch MDG3 Fund, and later the Flow Funds; and recent commitments by the Government of Canada will also be channelled through their own mechanism. At the same time, a number of regional and global Women's Funds have emerged, which are able to flexibly and efficiently direct money to extensive networks of CSOs and CBOs.

All of these factors have contributed to a demanding fundraising space. Nevertheless, evidence presented to the evaluation by Women's Funds does suggest that monies for gender equality are available, and some significant commitments are expected to follow in the wake of continuing political attention around gender based violence against women and girls.

## 12. Efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities between FGE and local UN Women offices started to be effective late in the lifetime of the Fund.

Several sources of evidence – including one of the evaluation case studies, the 2015 Meta-Analysis of FGE evaluation reports, and the 2016 global survey of FGE grantees – indicate that mutual responsibilities between FGE and UN Women have not always been clear in the implementation and supervision of interventions. This has been compounded, in some cases, in a sense of dislocation by the local country office staff from the decision-making process to select grantees (an arrangement intended to ensure FGE grants reach CSOs with no previous connection to UN Women).

“In the earlier part of the programme, there were many reporting changes and contradictory directions coming from the different offices (UN Women/FGE local, regional, HQ) that significantly impacted the time required for reporting and reconciliation, as well as increased outsourcing costs for our organization for accounting work. This smoothed out in the second half of the programme, and FGE went above and beyond to help the organization”.

(FGE Grantee submission to 2016 anonymous survey)


Some independent evaluations of FGE projects, cited the need for greater coordination and communication between FGE management, grantees and UN Women decentralised offices. In general, these concluded that greater involvement of the local UN Women office would have made:

1. better synergies and networking possible with other UN system projects and gender equality initiatives.
2. a greater impact through more timely coordination with FGE and UN Women to disseminate results and lessons in response to wider events.
3. greater technical support available to grantees from the inception period throughout programme implementation.

The evaluation found that these lessons were taken on board by the FGE secretariat, and activities were established to address better coordination. For example, FGE projects were integrated into country-level and regional UN Women strategic notes (including Development Results Frameworks). This integration for FGE projects into UN Women strategic notes was reported as having a positive effect on the project effectiveness in independent evaluations of FGE grants from Kenya and Kyrgyzstan.

Nevertheless, the evaluation evidence does indicate that scope remains to strengthen communication channels, and to keep local UN Women offices informed and engaged with FGE grants through more clearly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations of FGE, grantees, and the UN Women offices themselves. According to evaluation interviews and meeting minutes, FGE regional monitoring and reporting specialists – out-posted to UN Women Regional Offices – have played a critical role in establishing and maintaining this type of communication. Ensuring that these positions remain staffed is thus important to the overall integration of the Fund with UN Women.

## Results based management

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Approaching goal:</b> The FGE “RBM infrastructure” creates positive return on investment for grantees, FGE, UN Women offices and donors. Baseline and endline data is of a high quality and is regularly collected and used to enhance FGE-supported interventions. FGE communication on results and evidence enables stakeholder learning.</p>	

## 13. Monitoring and reporting of FGE projects has been systematic, reliable, and detailed; but with changing donor interests, has struggled to aggregate outcome data into a ‘bigger story’ that more donors will commit to funding

There have been two main phases of monitoring approaches for the Fund.

1. Within the ProDoc 2009-2011 and the extension of this to 2014 there was a Result Framework for the programme (not linked to the UNIFEM RBM system). This was later extended to a **standalone M&E strategy**. Data for the indicators in this framework were collected directly from grantees and reported in the narrative sections of annual reports to donors (for 2011, 2012, and 2013), and in a standalone leaflet highlighting the examples of projects in different

countries. 2014 was the first year in which FGE published a ‘glossy’ Annual Report, with infographics that aggregated both central administrative data (e.g. number of grants) and grantee output data (e.g. number of women elected to office).

2. By comparison, monitoring within the ProDoc 2014-2017 was **harmonised with wider UN Women RBM systems**. Rather than standalone results and indicators, the ProDoc included a Development Results Framework (DRF) and Organisation Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework (OEEF) derived from the UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017 frameworks. Under this revised approach, FGE regional monitoring and reporting specialists worked with FGE focal persons (mainstream UN Women staff based in country and programme offices) to integrate monitoring of FGE grants into corporate UN Women results tracking system. However, no system was established at the corporate level to extract this data to report on the frameworks within the ProDoc. Annual reports (2015, 2016) continue to present aggregated figures from administrative sources, grantee reports, and several ad hoc surveys.

Across both phases, the Fund prioritised investments (through direct technical assistance from FGE staff, training or connecting to UN Women FGE focal persons) in the monitoring capacity of grantees. This included support to developing the results framework for each shortlisted grant, training opportunities for grantee staff, and follow-up from regional monitoring and reporting specialists to ensure detailed and accurate reports. This support is seen by both grantees and UN Women staff to have made a significant contribution to the quantity, coverage, and quality of results data that FGE has collated.

The monitoring system has not been without challenges, with the formats and requirements evolving over the course of both ProDocs to reflect emerging lessons. An independent assessment of grantee reports in 2016 found that *“The quality and to a certain extent the format of submitted final reports vary greatly from programme to programme and some steps can be taken to improve consistency of reporting.”* These steps include:

1. Mainstreaming good practices in reporting from particular cycles and regions (such as requesting grantees to summarise key achievements for outcome and output as piloted in Africa).
2. Providing language support to countries in Asia for reporting in foreign languages (other regions were generally found to have greater familiarity with one of the 5 languages used by the Fund, including Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish).
3. Clarifying the classification of direct and indirect beneficiaries to enhance coherence across programme reports, and to prevent double-counting of individuals participating in multiple activities.


Overall, the evaluation observed that the monitoring system has been sufficient to reliably, consistently, and affordably track the implementation of commitments made by grantees. It has gathered large numbers of stories of change, insights into project lessons, and aggregate figures for some key indicators. These have been used extensively in both UN Women and FGE communications.

Ensuring the systematic, reliable, and detailed reporting by grantees has been progressively improved over the course of the Fund; and benefited from the work of: 1) FGE monitoring and reporting specialists in the regions, 2) FGE programme, reporting and coordination specialists and analysts in New York, and 3) UN Women focal persons in decentralised offices. Cycle 3 introduced standardised indicators linked to the UN Women flagship programmes, Strategic Plan, and SDGs. This has improved the relevance of the monitoring system to donor interests; although has not yet fully bridged the technical challenge of communicating to donors the answer to the bigger ‘so what?’ question while continuing to respond to the needs and opportunities perceived by civil society (rather than imposing targets and criteria set from the outside).

#### **14. FGE has been guided by a consistent theory-of-change; this is based on a commitment to fully enabling civil society leadership at all stages of the process.**

The 2014 ProDoc theory of change helps to situate FGE within the wider gender equality and women’s empowerment universe – explicitly recognising the role of civil society in both direct action and in holding duty bearers to account. Where it can be critiqued, however, is in excluding a description of exactly how the specific actions and approach of FGE supports civil society in a way that is differentiated – and more effective – than other forms of investment. This hidden ‘theory of action’ can be derived instead from the strategies and approaches elaborated elsewhere in programme documents.





This assessment is triangulated with evidence obtained through stakeholder focus group discussions in Bolivia where FGE grantees suggested that FGE tailor its theory of change to better demonstrate its comparative advantage over other forms of support to women's civil society. Stakeholders identified a potential niche that could include serving as a knowledge hub regarding women's civil society and fostering south-south cooperation between women-led organisations.

The ProDoc 2014-2017 strategies that indicate the implicit FGE 'theory of action' include:

1. CSOs with the *capabilities to design, develop, implement and monitor* contextually-specific gender equality programmes.
2. *CSO-leadership* in spaces or contexts in which they are both fluent and personally *invested*.
3. Effective *working partnerships* between CSOs and institutional decision-makers, including governments.
4. Pioneering dynamic and *innovative approaches*.
5. Amplifying the *voice of the furthest-behind* women and girls.
6. *Alliances for change* with men and boys, non-traditional stakeholders, and informal power brokers.
7. Influencing, educating and *holding duty bearers to account* for implementing gender equality commitments.

From these strategies, it can be inferred that a combined theory of change and theory of action for FGE could be stated as follows:

1. *If*, CSOs have the capabilities, and opportunities to lead gender equality programming in contexts in which they are embedded;
2. *If*, these gender equality programmes are implemented in partnership with government, gender equality actors, and non-traditional allies;
3. *If*, these partnerships amplify the voice of the furthest behind women and girls to articulate their needs and strengthen the capabilities of women and girls to pursue the enjoyment of their human rights;
4. *If*, local and national duty bearers have the requisite capacities and are held to account by an independent civil society for implementing gender equality commitments in accordance with the needs and capacities of the furthest behind women and girls;
5. *Then*, the furthest behind women and girls will have the capabilities and opportunities to exercise their political and economic human rights, and thereby enable the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The effectiveness of FGE is thus entirely pretexted on establishing civil society leadership in contexts in which they are embedded. This centrality of CSO leadership to the implicit FGE theory of change (described in FGE literature as the '*demand-led approach*') explains the conviction described in evaluation interviews with which the independence of the grant-making process has been carefully preserved. For example, the Steering Board only oversee the quality of the process, rather than the outcome.

It is this strong commitment to civil society leadership from the beginning that sits at the root of tensions between some UN Women country offices and the FGE grant-making process. Since the implication of civil society leadership (or lack of) for impact is mostly implicit in the published theory of change, it is not immediately apparent to many UN Women staff about why the selection of grantees is decoupled from UN Women strategic notes at country level. This is a source of frustration for many offices.

The development of UN Women strategic notes, through the involvement of Civil Society Advisory Groups (CSAGs), should theoretically reflect the demands of women's civil society. However, the evaluation finds that this consultation of civil society demands is a different understanding of '*demand-led*' from the context-embedded leadership of civil society that is understood within the Fund.

Not recognising these diverse understandings of '*demand-led*' means that a degree of the ongoing debate between different viewpoints on how the Fund should operate (either directly, or through UN Women programming processes) has been driven by misunderstandings rather than genuine disagreements. A richer theory of change, that articulated the FGE theory of action, may have helped to identify and address these issues earlier – and laid the groundwork to explore innovative

arrangements for alignment with UN Women country-level programming whilst preserving CSO leadership.

**Box: Different understandings of 'demand-led' programming**

The evaluation found that FGE staff and some UN Women programme staff hold different understandings of what is meant by the Fund as being 'demand-led'.

- Some UN Women programme staff understand demand-led programming to mean 'reflecting the aims and priorities expressed by civil society'. It follows that if UN Women Strategic Notes are developed with the participation of civil society (through the Civil Society Advisory Groups), and reflect their expressed demands, then FGE could achieve demand-led programming by financing women's CSOs identified as implementing partners for a country strategic note.
- FGE staff understand demand-led programming to mean 'CSO-led programme design, development, implementation and review'; which is juxtaposed to UN Women-led strategic note processes that are, by mandate, responsive to the leadership of national gender equality mechanisms.

The prevalence of two different understandings of 'demand-led' (as either reflecting-demands-of-CSOs, or led-by-CSOs) has hampered the integration of FGE into mainstream UN Women programming and resource mobilisation processes.

During the evaluation focus group discussions, stakeholders emphasized that funding for women-led civil society must be as independent as possible to facilitate these important roles played by women's civil society. Stakeholders feel that FGE provides this level of independence that other UN entities, who are accountable to member states, are less likely to provide.

**15. RBM training was valued by, and useful to ,grantees; but it requires a process of continuous learning to fully mainstream it as a capability in CSOs.**

One of the three 'pillars' of the FGE approach is to actively strengthen CSO results based management (RBM) systems. At grant level, full proposals included development of 1) a results chain, and 2) a description of the logic of the intervention; they do not specifically include a 'theory of change' although the narrative sections of the proposal do elaborate some elements of this. RBM support and training was provided prior to implementation, in creating logframes and in results-chains, and throughout the project cycle in terms of monitoring, project adjustment and reporting.

An independent review by a consultant in 2016 found that *"numerous programme reports reveal that the FGE or/and national UN Women offices provided advice and support during the project cycle, even entirely reviewing projects when more serious problems surface."* RBM was applied flexibly, with scope for grantees to adjust logframes and strategy adjustment *during* implementation when, for instance, challenges were come across or new priorities identified. The evaluation finds this approach to be aligned with good practice in programme RBM, since it is infeasible to foresee all challenges and circumstances a programme will face prior to implementation.

The country case studies found the RBM training and support to have been valued by, and helpful to, FGE grantees. FGE was compared positively to other sources of CSO financing in this regard. However, beyond the immediate application of RBM to the FGE grant, for the case study interviewees in India RBM remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. Thus, FGE provided useful basic exposure and important practical assistance to RBM, but a process of continuous learning is required to ensure it is fully mainstreamed as a capability. In some cases, such as for Coordinadora de la Mujer in Bolivia, this was the case and it significantly strengthened the organisation's ability to manage large scale projects with multiple partners as a result.

**16. FGE grant data is transparent, accessible and interoperable according to agreed international standards.**

Monitoring and reporting of FGE grants has, since 2015, been integrated into the UN Women Results Management System (RMS), a corporate system and database. This has been achieved through the

inclusion of FGE grants in the UN Women development results frameworks (DRF), organisation effectiveness and efficiency frameworks (OEEF), and annual work plans (AWP) at country-level.

Since 2016, UN Women has published open source data on all global programmes in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) format, backdated to 2012; and since 2017 it has published open source data on all regional and country projects.

The full integration of FGE into the UN Women finance system and results tracking system since 2015 means that data on all FGE grants is automatically included in the UN Women IATI data set. This supports transparency and interoperability with data from other development organisations.

### 17. UNIFEM and UN Women senior management took a ‘hands-off’ approach to FGE managing for results.


Evaluation interviews suggest that there has always been a largely hands-off approach of Senior Management to FGE, first under UNIFEM and later under UN Women. Initially this responded to demands from the donor for a level of independence, later it was a result of the attention required to build up UN Women as an institution, and most recently it was due to the demands of addressing UN Women’s own institutional funding challenges.

In retrospect, whilst this hands-off stance has enabled a strongly independent, well-managed and highly-functional team to develop, it has not served FGE well in terms of sustaining the financing base. The FGE team did not have the in-team fundraising and strategy experience that it would have gained from more involved steering by senior management. Nor has it helped in accelerating the integration of FGE with UN Women mainstream programming: for example, around convening spaces for the women’s movement at country level.

Nevertheless, the Fund performs strongly on a set of business metrics that were identified during the evaluation inception as being of value to senior management:

- The **execution rate of FGE grants** (expenditure-to-budget ratio) across all rounds is currently 90%.
- FGE was successfully internally audited, and its **fiduciary management** was reaffirmed by successfully passing the EU Pillar Assessment.
- **RBM data coverage, quality and use** was comprehensive (as discussed above), with most UN Women staff members citing FGE as one of the top performing parts of the entity in this regard.
- **Level of demand met** (service levels) was the only mixed indicator. In terms of grant management, FGE met or exceeded the level-of-service expectations of both grantees and donors interviewed for the evaluation. However, in terms of meeting the demand for financing women’s CSOs, FGE covered only 1.8% of the requested funds in eligible proposals, and this ratio declined over the course of the programme. Fund mobilisation was thus the only weak aspect of the fund’s management.

### Managing risk

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Approaching benchmark:</b> FGE operates a robust, efficient and transparent grant-making mechanism compliant with UN Women standards and systems. The reputational benefits and risks to the FGE and UN Women brands are continuously assessed.</p>	

### 18. FGE management of fiduciary risk is strong from a donor perspective; but is unnecessarily cumbersome for many women’s organisations

To manage the fiduciary risk of grant making, the evaluation observed that FGE has progressively harmonised its operations with UN Women financial and management systems as these have evolved. This includes use of the same FACE reporting tools as required of CSOs holding Partnership Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with UN Women.

From the corporate perspective in HQ, this specific aspect of FGE is viewed positively in comparison with the more flexible approach to reporting implemented by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women<sup>30</sup> (UNTF) since it ensures full compliance with UN Women's internal data structures, management analysis, and reporting requirements. It is also assumed at the level of HQ to be easier to manage for country-level staff since it is consistent with the management of implementing partners.

However, interviews at country level reveal a different set of perspectives. As a consequence of aligning with UN Women systems, FGE financial reporting requirements exhibit the same set of known issues for low-capacity CSOs as UN Women PCAs (see the 2016 Evaluation of UN Women Strategic Partnerships). These especially included heavier financial submissions than for other UN entities. Both UN Women country staff and grantees thus expressed a preference for the more flexible approach of UNTF to financial reporting.

### 19. FGE represents a low source of reputational risk for UN Women.

Despite concern expressed in inception interviews that a potential closure of FGE is a reputational risk regarding UN Women's commitment to civil society, the evaluation has not identified substantive evidence to validate this concern at country-level. It is, however, evident from case studies and documents that a general perception of the reducing level of FGE funding has been prevalent in recent years – and that has contributed to making fundraising more difficult (see for example, the [OECD GenderNet Report, 2016](#)).

Other forms of reputational risk relate to the performance of the Fund. The level of risk associated with the large \$2.5m USD grant provided to the Bolivian NGO “Coordinadora de la Mujer” for the project *Mujeres bolivianas en el proceso de Cambio: por un marco normativo con igualdad y equidad de género* in the first FGE funding cycle was partially mitigated by funding a network of civil society actors rather than one solo organisation. This is a good example of how risk mitigation techniques can be applied to large grants.


As noted in previous findings, FGE has been de-risked over its evolution through the shift to smaller grant sizes. FGE communications also make clear use of UN Women language and treatment of subjects that are politically sensitive to some member states. Within the implementation of grants, although several grantees suggested improvements are possible to communications between FGE and UN Women, the generally good relationship with focal persons and the empowering approach of FGE staff have ensured that this has not affected overall perceptions of the organisation.

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<sup>30</sup> Unlike FGE – which is a UN Women programme – UNTF is a system-wide Trust Fund hosted by UN Women, it is thus not obliged to adhere to any single entity's systems.

## 4.3 Potential for Sustainability

### Sustainability of the Fund

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Approaching minimum standard:</b> FGE has secured a stable financing base.	 

#### 20. Fundraising from a limited pool of global finance has constrained the ability of the Fund to grow and sustain its resource mobilisation.

It is evident from analysis of received funds (Figure 11) that there have been significant challenges in sustaining investment in FGE after the initial \$65 million contribution from the Government of Spain in 2009.

Figure 11 FGE received funds shown using Log4 scale (Source: mapped by FGE May 2017)

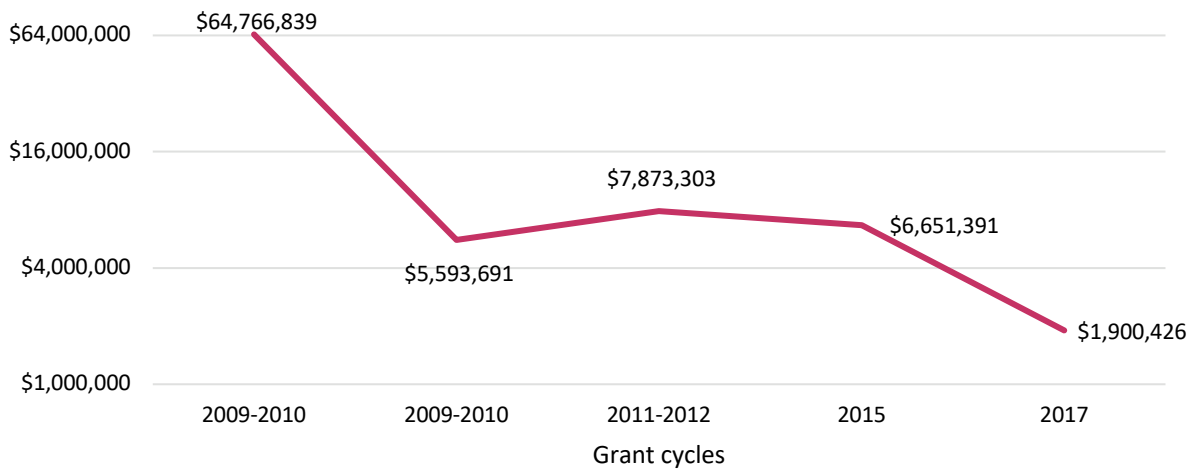
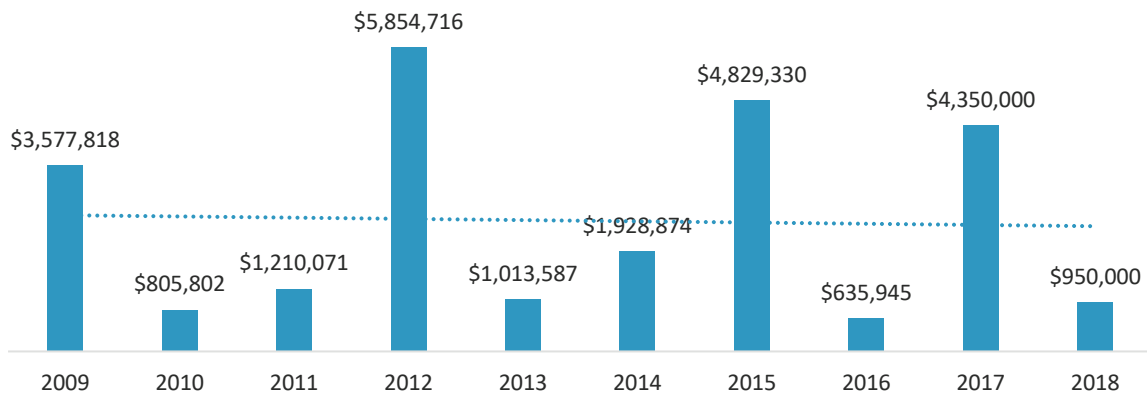


Figure 12 illustrates that FGE had an established financing foundation (i.e. excluding Spain) of \$2.5m-\$3m. This uses figures for commitments that were present at the start of 2017, since more recent commitments to FGE were affected by uncertainty around the future shape of the Fund (for example, some of those commitments have since been reconsidered in the absence of further participation by other bilateral donors).

Figure 12 Financing foundation excluding Spain (Source: calculated from FGE data that included commitments standing up until June 2017)



While FGE has an underlying financing base of \$2.5-\$3 million per year in new resource mobilisation, this is structurally different from the scale of the initial 'Spain grant' of \$65 million. FGE can thus be

considered as a \$6 million-per-biannual-cycle fund that has also administered a single \$65 million grant portfolio.

Five factors have restricted the pool of finance that FGE is attempting to mobilise, and thus constrained the ability of the Fund to grow and sustain its fundraising.

1. **Targeting global-level ODA budget-lines:** FGE mobilises investment primarily from global (HQ-administered) budget lines of its donors. There is no mechanism for transferring country-level administered budgets to a global programme, even though the majority of ODA financing is directed from the country-level. Furthermore, central ODA budgets also happen to be the source of core-financing for gender-mandated UN entities, including UN Women. This means FGE is competing for funds that might otherwise be contributed as core support to UN Women or another UN entity.
2. **State-focused fundraising reliant on ODA:** Aside from ad hoc agreements with private foundations and the UN Women National Committees, FGE does not have a system or team in place for mobilising diversified investment from new sources of finance (such as crowd-funding, individual gifting, or public-private partnerships).
3. **The commitment to independent demand-led fund allocation:** OECD GenderNet data (2016) indicates that the majority (80%) of ODA financing directed to CSOs for gender equality is dedicated to the implementation of donor-defined project outcomes. Donors tend to prioritise mechanisms where they have influence over the allocation of resources.
4. **Gender equality focused fundraising:** Most bilateral donors do not have a central budget line for gender equality. Furthermore, financing for gender equality is magnitudes smaller than for areas such as health, education, livelihoods, or climate. OECD GenderNet (2016) indicate that releasing more resources for gender equality requires mainstreaming gender into the budgeting of other sectors.
5. **A focus on women's CSOs from ODA-recipient countries:** Globally, only 0.5% of global aid goes to women's organizations from the global south. In 2014, 92% of ODA financing for gender equality CSOs (\$9 billion) went to international or donor-country based NGOs. Only 8% went direct to developing-country CSOs, nearly all from country-level administered budgets. Most donors are under domestic political pressure to ensure financing also benefits organisations linked to their own countries.

“Dedicated gender equality funds are essential but not enough, not least because their budgets pale into insignificance by comparison with investments made in larger mainstream funding mechanisms... Strategic engagement with [other] financing mechanisms ... is vital to ensure that mainstream funding mechanisms are gender-responsive”

(OECD GenderNet, 2016)

Despite these challenges, FGE has received contributions from 3 of the top-10 OECD DAC donors that channelled the largest proportion of their gender focused aid *through* CSOs in 2014 – i.e. for the implementation of projects. These donors are Spain (#1), Norway (#2) and Switzerland (#7). FGE has had less success in mobilising resources from donors that give the largest proportion of their gender focused aid to CSOs as core support: only 1 of the top-10 donors in 2014, Norway (#3). Donors that appear on both these lists, but that FGE has not received contributions from, are Sweden, Belgium, Ireland, Canada and Finland.

### Box: The size of the target market for past FGE fundraising efforts

OECD-DAC estimate that \$35.5 billion is committed to gender equality annually. Of this, around \$10 billion is allocated to CSOs, with most for implementation of gender-related projects. Only around \$800 million/year, or 8%, of ODA for gender equality is channelled through developing-country CSOs. Based on an annualised average, and excluding the initial Spanish contribution, FGE has secured the equivalent of 0.4% of this available funding (by comparison, UNTF accounts for 1.25%).

Most ODA channelled through CSOs is for project activities defined by donors. In total, around \$2 billion/year is allocated to gender-related CSOs as support to their own activities and operating costs. Since the first round of grant-making in 2011, FGE has channelled around 0.7% of this global finance for the express purpose of supporting gender equality CSOs from the global south. By comparison, the Global Fund alone mobilises \$4.3 billion/year for AIDS, TB and Malaria.

*“Gender budget lines at headquarters are typically very small and often non-existent... At present there is little attention to the gender-responsiveness of mainstream civil society funding streams, nor much consideration (or tracking) of whether or not women’s rights organisations are benefiting equally... The big win would be to influence the central pot of civil society funding.” (OECD GenderNet 2016)*

### 21. FGE has attempted to be competitive by reducing its management costs; but international evidence suggests that strengthening resource mobilisation would have been a more sustainable strategy.

As the level of funds being managed by FGE reduced, it faced the important strategic choice to prioritise raising more resources or reducing more costs. Research by Raynor and Ahmed (Harvard Business Review April 2013) found that businesses that successfully sustained and grew over time consistently applied two rules:

1. **Better before cheaper**—in other words, compete on differentiators other than cost. In the context of the Fund this means providing donors with a higher quality (more effective and sustainable) interventions to support, rather than shaving a few percentage points off the management costs.
2. **Revenue before cost**—that is, prioritize increasing revenue over reducing costs. In the context of the Fund, this means investing in resource mobilisation and partnership capacities to increase fundraising, rather than try to run the same programme with lower costs.

Based on Raynor and Ahmed’s rules, FGE needed to prioritise fundraising based on maximising its unique value proposition. To some extent, the Fund attempted to do both these things: producing a series of knowledge publications relating to the Post-2015 agenda, and undertaking a tour of selected bilateral donors. However, it lacked key capacities to accomplish this agenda, including not having a fundraising specialist and not featuring as a fundraising priority for other parts of UN Women (including senior management).

In parallel, the Fund embarked on a process of reducing its management and capacity building costs from \$3.4 m/year at its peak to \$2.2 m/year in 2017 (a reduction of 35%). However, cost cutting represents a risky approach to sustainability, since it reduces capacity, which reduces the value proposition that can be offered, which reduces the likelihood of mobilising new investment. This can, and did, become a negative spiral for FGE.

### 22. FGE continues to occupy a unique niche in the financing for gender equality universe.

Since the foundation of FGE in 2009, numerous other actors have emerged with the capacity to channel financing and capacity development to women’s civil society, especially in the form of women’s funds<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Women’s funds are public foundations that aim to fund women-led solutions to the root causes of social injustice. Their primary purpose is to mobilize resources to distribute to women’s rights organizations and movements, rather than implementing programmes or services directly. There are almost 40 national, regional and international women’s funds around the world that are experienced in administering grants to women’s rights organizations, including: MamaCash, Global Fund for Women, African Women’s Development Fund and Central American Women’s Fund.

One of the lessons donors took from the Dutch MDG3 Fund was the demonstrable benefits of devolving funding through women's funds, with women's funds eventually comprising 23% of the beneficiaries.

OECD GenderNet (2016) found that supporting women's funds is one of the most effective ways for donors to get resources to southern women's rights organizations and movements, especially those considered too small or risky by mainstream funders. Women's funds are well-connected with women's rights organizations at the grassroots level and can reach small and emerging groups that are less able to access larger sources of funding. FGE has itself supported CBOs through programmes (CAAW in Kyrgyzstan, Dalia in Palestine, Bisan in Palestine, PCPD in Palestine, Stars of Hope in Arab States) and women's funds (including Fondo Mujeres del Sur, Fundo Elas, and FIMI).

Women's groups often report that support received from women's funds tends to be more flexible, and that application and reporting procedures impose fewer burdens compared with other sources of funding. Also, some women's funds, such as the Urgent Action Fund, also play a critical role in providing rapid response or emergency funds in crisis situations where time is of the essence. However, as with FGE, women's funds are also vulnerable to the changing demands for control by donors in their fundraising strategies.

*“Some donors have become much more selective and directive in their donations, wanting to give more restricted funding instead of core support, and dictating themes or regions where women's funds can use their support. This is a moment that perhaps calls for women's funds to be even more precise and explicit in terms of their feminist discourse and agendas, making clear their “value-added” with sophisticated, movement-oriented support strategies for women's organizations and a non-instrumental commitment to women's rights.”*  
(AWID, 2013, Watering the Leaves)


Despite this changing universe of options for donors, the evaluation finds that several aspects of the original value proposition of FGE have actually increased since its inception. In particular:

1. In many countries, governments are introducing measures designed to limit the access of civil society organisations to foreign financing. In many of these cases domestic sources of funding are not yet sufficient to replace external support to gender equality; and financing human rights is particularly difficult in conservative contexts. As a UN entity, FGE can increasingly reach CSOs where alternative providers cannot.
2. Women's groups interviewed by OECD GenderNet (2016) challenged perceptions that women-led CSOs lack capacity, noting that they do not lack capacity per se, but lack the capacity to meet donor requirements. They recommended that donors develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks in partnership with them. FGE already does this.
3. Within OECD-DAC donor agencies, there is a trend for fewer staff managing more money in a more transactional way. Consequently there is a pressure to minimise costs by working with fewer partners, and to mitigate the risk of this by working with larger familiar partners. This trend favours NGOs based in donor countries, but also FGE.
4. Women's funds as an alternative to FGE do not offer donors the same scale of grantmaking, offer little or no control over decisions on the allocation of funds, and give no direct relationship with the groups they are supporting. Donors also have less direct control over the due diligence process than for the UN system, being required to put their trust in the women's funds and their processes which may be different from standards used by bilateral agencies.

Donors to gender equality are also diversifying, and AWID has identified six new sources of funding for gender equality: 1) crowdfunding, 2) impact investing, 3) multi-stakeholder platforms, 4) women of wealth, 5) young women leaders, and 6) celebrities. In response, new efforts are emerging to increase the volume and transparency of private giving to gender equality and women's CSOs.

For example, Catapult, a US-based crowd funding website and service that was incubated by Women Deliver, combines a platform, crowdsourcing and work with celebrities. In addition to its website, Catapult has developed the ability to integrate in live fundraising events, in addition to a campaigns strategy. As part of the Chime for Change partnership with Gucci and Beyoncé \$4 million was raised for gender equality projects. Projects are proposed by selected partners, including one successfully-funded project implemented by UN Women.





Whilst the level of funding through these sources is hard to estimate, it is known to be limited in comparison to governmental funding sources. The UN is also limited in terms of what work can be done through alternative finance mechanisms. For example, celebrities and women of wealth must pass through strict due diligence processes, and impact investing requires withholding a significant portion of contributions to establish working capital (the equivalent of an endowment).

Despite these limitations, FGE does maintain one very strong comparative strength in this landscape. Like the other UN administered funds, FGE has the established systems, practices and experience to channel finance from large institutions to almost any legitimate organisation, of any scale, anywhere on Earth; and to report back to internationally accepted and independently verified standards<sup>32</sup>.

**Box: Developing a marketing strategy**

Commercial marketing strategies are based on a three-pillar approach that can be adapted to the FGE context.

- Pillar 1: Win new investors
- Pillar 2: Secure repeat investment
- Pillar 3: Increase the size of each investment

Each pillar requires separate marketing considerations, and may focus on different segments of the target audience. In general, pillar 2 and 3 are the most efficient marketing strategies.

As examples, Pillar 1 could focus on either the 7 largest ODA gender donors that have not funded FGE or establishing an agreement with a crowd sourcing platform; whilst Pillar 2 and 3 could choose to focus on securing and upgrading the partnerships with private foundations.

**23. The original design of FGE was flawed in terms of long-term sustainability**

As noted above, FGE mobilises a meaningful proportion of the funding that it targets, but the portion of global development funds that FGE is seeking to fundraise is extremely marginal. This is one of several features, alongside the absence of fundraising and partnerships specialists in the organogram, that indicate FGE was not designed with consideration for sustainability at the outset.

Reviewing the history of the Fund makes the reasons for this clear. A large contribution was made by Spain, including conditionality on the time in which it could be spent. The priority focus at the inception stage was thus on designing, building and implementing a global grant making mechanism based on feminist principles that could allocate, disperse, and report on this contribution.

From its outset, FGE was envisioned as a radical statement of intent: to do things differently. FGE was originally located outside of the main UNIFEM HQ. The Steering Board validated the grantmaking process, but not the allocation of resources<sup>33</sup>. The host organisation could not channel funding to its own projects. The fund sought to mobilise more resources to gender equality from the central budgets of donors. All of these features explicitly reflected the central commitment to gender equality of the Fund. But, none of them supported sustainability.


Most especially, the original design of FGE places it into direct fundraising competition with other UN gender-focused global funds and programmes, as well as with core financing of UN agencies such as UN Women, UNDP, and UNFPA. Despite the unique niche that FGE occupies (none of the other entities or mechanisms are dedicated to addressing the structural underfunding of women's civil society as a legitimate actor to advance political and economic empowerment), this is not a sustainable position to be in.

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<sup>32</sup> In this sense, some of the value proposition of FGE can be compared to the MasterCard or Visa payment networks, which were originally established as non-profit entities to enable international transactions, before eventually being sold by their owners – the banks.

<sup>33</sup> Examples of successful publicly-financed funds are notable for having high-level boards with a strong stake in fundraising, including representation by donors. While this creates a challenge to the demand-led character of FGE, there are hybrid models of governance available, such as used by AmplifyChange.

## Sustainability of FGE grantees and projects

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Approaching minimum standard:</b> FGE grants represent 'additional' financing for gender equality CSOs.	

### 24. FGE provided concrete support to convening women's organisations and gender equality advocates.

The evaluation case studies, especially the example of Bolivia, revealed the value that grantees have placed on FGE funding supporting convening and opportunities for networking between women's organisations. Strong demand was reported for more emphasis to be placed on building connections to advance gender equality issues between women's CSO, community based organisations, non-women's NGOs, and government.

Overall, the 2016 survey of grantees reported that *"less than 20% of grantees found FGE support very helpful in connecting grantees with each other, or with other potential partners. The majority of the grantees reported that FGE support in making such connections was somewhat helpful or not helpful at all. Despite the low rate, many grantees pointed to the relevance of improving FGE performance in these areas. They suggested creating more opportunities for grantees to interact with each other, and actively introducing grantees to other potential partners including donors."*

Despite this demand for more emphasis on convening in case studies and survey data, and the historical examples from some FGE grants to women's networks, the wider evaluation evidence suggests that it is not a comparative strength for FGE. In particular, the 2016 UN Women Civil Society Strategy defines the role of convening civil society and movement building as a core role of UN Women country offices. Furthermore, the development of multi-stakeholder flagship programmes in UN Women strategy notes creates concrete platforms for connecting women's civil society to government, development partners, and the UN system.

Whereas these convening and connecting platforms may not have been present in the past in all countries and at all times when FGE grants were active, they will increasingly be so in the future. Thus, any future emphasis on civil society convening would overlap the value proposition of FGE with UN Women civil society strategy. However, FGE does have strengths that can complement, and further integrate with, UN Women strategies. Chief among these is a track-record in identifying and supporting fringe and previously-disconnected CSOs to enter and engage with mainstream gender equality networks. The India case study provided several examples of this.


### 25. Most grantees put in place tactics and combined their own funds with other resources to sustain some project activities beyond the FGE support.

Analysis of the 2016 anonymous survey of grantees found that *"62% of the grantees opted for engaging [the] same beneficiaries in other initiatives of the organization, and over 45% decided to continue several activities of the programme, involve existing partners in other initiatives they were doing, and incorporate the programme initially funded by the FGE into the organization's core functions."*

Overall, 96% of grantees continued at least one aspect of the FGE project after the grant ceased; 45% integrating FGE supported-activities into the core functions of their organisation. Most reported seeking funds from multiple sources to sustain the activities, and several recommended a greater involvement of the FGE in the process of financing for sustainability by connecting grantees to other potential sources of funds.

*"FGE supported us to finalize our project document and built our capacity on writing projects, communications, etc. This allowed us to apply and obtain other funds".*  
(Grantee submission to anonymous survey)

In terms of transforming civil society capacity, 26% of grants reported upscaling the FGE project after funding ceased. The UN system funded 26% of grants for continued work, half of which came from UN



Women Country Offices. Only 7% of grants received contributions from the private sector to continue, with most relying on their own funds combined with governmental and foundation donors.

For example, the organization ONEF from Côte D'Ivoire reported they were able to use FGE funding to leverage funds from PAD in Australia and the local UN Women office. Pakwomen in Pakistan was also able to use the FGE funding to create programming that enticed other donors and has allowed the organization to expand its resource mobilization. This included obtaining funding from USAID to provide subsequent support and capacity development to women parliamentarians.

Through the case studies and interviews, the evaluation found strong demand for the option of follow-on funding to continue or upscale successful FGE grants (this is an option being trialled by the UNTF and included for the new 2017-2019 FGE upscaling initiative). Follow-on funding to a selected number of grants is advocated by several stakeholders to be a means to ensure transformative change is secured in both the capacity of grantees and the lives of the women they work with: addressing the concern that 2-3 year projects are insufficient to achieve full sustainability. The wider evidence on effectiveness and efficiency seems to validate this proposal.

**Box: Lessons from the Dutch MDG3 Fund on the challenges of sustainability and outsourcing**

The Dutch Government's MDG3 Fund was a flagship funding model in its support to women's rights organizations and women's collective action. It provided core, flexible funding and supported organizations to scale up the organizing and rights work that they specialized in to reach women's rights organizations at the most grassroots levels

The Fund was explicitly designed to target women's rights organizations: 35 of the 45 MDG3 Fund projects were awarded to such organizations. However, an independent evaluation of the Fund in 2015 found that a clear vision to strengthen women's organizations was lacking, as was a focus on M&E.

The MDG3 Fund did not have a clear strategy on sustainability. Capacity development mostly focused on CSO technical capacity to deliver results. Broader development support covering topics such as policy development, strategic planning, resource mobilization, financial management, and the strengthening of leadership was limited.


Finally, the evaluation found that outsourcing fund management has pros and cons for donors. The downside is that it can hamper building up a knowledge base and developing relationships with grantees – overall outsourcing was found to reduce the focus on programme content and prioritise administrative issues instead.

## 5. Findings Part 2: Did the Fund do the right things?



## 5.1 Potential for Impact

### The strategic case for direct financing of women's civil society

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Achieved benchmark:</b> FGE-supported interventions reach vulnerable and marginalized women and girls not reached by others. FGE convenes and/or participates in learning communities around gender quality grant making.</p>	

### 26. The mission of FGE has evolved from implementing broad commitments to gender equality, to a focus on addressing the structural inequality faced by women's organisations.

Grant eligibility evolved between Round 1 and Round 3 – from NGOs and government, to purely women's CSOs. This is explicable by two significant trends:

1. **The establishment and development of UN Women** has progressively addressed the need for national-level and international leadership of efforts to address implementation of gender equality commitments by established actors, especially government. Because of this, it has made sense for FGE to progressively specialise into targeting women's CSOs as a group, to complement the work that UN Women offices do on implementation of commitments with various other national partners.
2. **Structural disadvantaging of women's CSOs** evidenced in international studies that reveal increasing marginalisation of human rights organisations around the world, both in terms of funding for their core mission and in terms of political space to operate. This has amplified the importance of financing that sustains such organisations as legitimate actors in their own right, and not just implementing partners for the international system.

In parallel with these trends, the diminishing grant sizes available in each round of FGE suited the shift from larger NGOs to smaller CSOs (keeping a similar number of grants in each round); as did the increasing importance placed on the SDGs and on no one left behind in the Post-2015 dialogue – for Round 3.

By definition, established institutions and organisations are failing to reach the most left behind, and thus new organisations need to be identified that can represent invisible issues. These fringe organisations are some of the most structurally under-resourced elements in an area of work that is structurally under-resourced overall. They are also likely to be found at the edge of, or outside of, formal networks. Over the course of two ProDocs, FGE has supported some of these 'fringe' organisations to organise, advocate, demonstrate, and attempt to enter mainstream gender equality processes and funding.

This commitment is reflected in evaluation interviews with women's civil society, that firmly reiterate the radical statement of intent that FGE represents: firmly grounded in feminist principles. Few other multilateral funds and programmes elevate the legitimacy of civil society as an independent actor so prominently in their design and execution; nor do they explicitly seek out organisations operating beyond the current orbit of established networks (in this case, UN Women's civil society platforms).

Thus, whilst there are many interventions and programmes seeking to address inequality between people, there are very few operating at the level of addressing structural inequality between organisations. Yet, women's organisations are the institutional vehicle that is needed to successfully reach out to the furthest behind: "evidence shows that women's rights activism and movements are the key drivers of legal and policy change to address gender inequality" (OECD, 2015). Over time, addressing this inequality between organisations has become the niche that FGE is seeking to address – even if it has not been fully recognised or articulated as a unique and powerful value proposition.

While multiple avenues are now available to donors to support ambitious breakthrough initiatives by women's civil society, including UN Women flagships and a growing list of private Women's Funds, the evaluation interviews and case studies indicate that a FGE remains strongly suited to address two challenges:

1. Channelling financial and technical support to a new generation of feminist organisations (and integrating them into UN Women's networks).

2. Helping to legitimise marginalised or sensitive issues to the point where mainstream programming can take over.

The evaluation observes that since 2015 FGE has sought to strengthen its narrative as a mechanism for achieving the SDGs: with publications such as the FGE Thematic Factsheet on no one left behind, and mapping of support to marginalised groups in the annual reports. Whilst this narrative is aligned by both international discourse and UN Women strategic priorities, it has not fully differentiated the unique value addition of FGE in the eyes of donors.

By comparison, emphasising the structural marginalisation of women’s CSOs is a powerful narrative, backstopped by data, that represents a proven niche for FGE. There is now a strong strategic case for an initiative that is designed to tackle the organisation-level inequality between women’s CSOs and other type of sustainable development organisations. Advancing this case would have required some redesign and rethinking of FGE – from a pure grant-making mechanism to a campaigning and connecting platform (i.e. connecting those who want to fund gender equality with new and emerging women’s CSOs – but would resonate with the level of ambition within the original ProDoc 2009-2011 “to meet a growing demand by organizations now ready to assume a role as drivers of gender equality but lacking the necessary resources”.

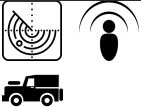
### 27. FGE is small compared to the large demand for funding gender from women’s organisations.

FGE grant-making has revealed huge demand for funding for women’s political and economic empowerment, receiving a cumulative total of 3629 proposals representing a total request of \$3.5 billion. Against this demand, FGE was able to fund 121 proposals, with total grant-making of \$64 million, or 1.8% of the requested amount. Even excluding ineligible proposals, the Fund would have required to raise an addition \$2.2 billion over its lifetime (\$248 million/year) to meet this demand. In other words, FGE would need to be 100 times bigger than it was in 2017 to reach the full scale of demand expressed by women’s civil society.


Although this challenge may seem insurmountable, several other factors put it into perspective:

1. Most of the funding gap identified in these lifetime figures is due to the large number of very large proposals that were included in Round 1. If the same assessment is undertaken based on eligibility criteria and data for Round 3 alone, the annual funding shortfall drops to around \$60 million per year (based on a 3-year grant cycle) to meet all eligible proposals.
2. By comparison, the 38 international, regional, and national women’s funds that are members of Prospera (a network of women’s funds) raise an average of \$66.3 million each year – illustrating that a certain level of gender equality funding is available in the international system to be mobilised.
3. Even if the full shortfall of eligible proposals across the lifetime of the Fund is considered (\$2.2 billion), it would take an average of 6 months for the Global Fund to raise this much money for work on HIV, TB and malaria. Whilst this is an extreme example it emphasises the issue raised by OECD GenderNet (2016) of the importance of leveraging non-gender finance. In another example, the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme operated at a similar level in the period 2011-2014 – \$52 million per year – the same as the level of demand expressed in FGE Round 3.

### Contributions to an enabling environment for women’s civil society

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Achieved goal:</b> FGE projects translate high-level laws and policy commitments into services, opportunities and social norms that improve the everyday lives of women, girls, men and boys. There is social norm change in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment in households, communities, institutions and public discourse. Women gain control over productive resources and assets, including social protection services.</p>	

### 28. The most important contribution of FGE to advancing UN Women goals is establishing the visibility of sensitive issues and the legitimacy of organisations that address them.



As noted under the chapter on effectiveness, FGE has generated large numbers of stories of change – at the levels of policies, institutions, groups and individuals. Cutting across these stories, across thematic areas, and across rounds of grantmaking is one common theme about the impact contributed by FGE: legitimising and catalysing work on marginalised issues. According to the 2015 meta analysis of FGE evaluations, “*projects that empowered and capacitated women with skills, knowledge and confidence to participate in decision-making processes at the local level contributed towards an increased positive perception towards women’s political and economic participation.*”

The combination of five factors meant that FGE systematically helped to establish legitimacy, and leverage mainstream support, for marginalised issues and organisations. These five factors are: 1) substantial finance, 2) multi-year programming, 3) UN brand equity, 4) working in coalitions, 5) flexible implementation.

“In certain sensitive areas, it is very hard if we use the name of our organization to approach key stakeholders. So saying that it is a UN programme under the FGE has given more legitimacy to our programme in the eyes of the stakeholders”.

(Submission of grantee to anonymous survey, 2016)

A number of examples illustrate this contribution. In India, the Dalit Women’s Livelihoods Accountability Initiative was developed to address the inability of Dalit women to claim benefits provided by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) due to the triple discrimination they faced related to gender, caste and class. The project was assessed in an independent impact evaluation to have contributed substantially to bringing about changes in the lives of marginalised Dalit by improving their leadership and capacity to access their entitlements under the Act.

Overall, the evaluation found that FGE projects demonstrated comparative strength in translating high-level laws and policy commitments into social norms that improve the everyday lives of women and girls. This was evidenced in social norm change in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment in households, communities, institutions and public discourse that was uniquely transformative because it situated women as equal agents (rather than entrenching existing patriarchal leadership systems).

The Palestinian Centre for Peace and Democracy and Jerusalem Centre for Women effectively utilized ‘social media’ in harnessing and disseminating knowledge about the project to support further action by a much wider public than they had previously reached. In Kyrgyzstan, the Women Support Center (WSC) and Women Entrepreneur’s Support Association (WESA) supported the development of dialogue between the women’s network and government officials, leading to sustained joint activities.

“The partnership with FGE was the first time that we collaborated with another prominent organization for an action spread over large geographies... This brought about confidence and appreciation in the organization about the value of collaboration and working with other resourceful organizations. Now we are collaborating with many [other] organizations and piloting new areas of work with women’s collectives”.

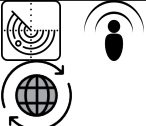
(Submission of grantee to anonymous survey, 2016)

In Egypt, Al-Shehab organization led the first thorough social and economic study on the situation of women domestic workers, providing evidence to support awareness and advocacy efforts to defend their human rights (and eventually leading to the establishment of the first legally registered NGO working on domestic workers rights). In rural Guatemala, Asociacion de Mujeres JUNAJIL & ASOPROGAL enhanced indigenous rural women’s leadership through schools for civil empowerment for young women and assisted 6,800 rural women to register in their municipalities and obtain ID cards, resulting in over 3,700 women able to vote and access social security for the first time.

In Peru, advocacy by CHIRAPAQ contributed to the adoption of a local policy recognizing indigenous women’s contributions to the economy and facilitating their access to economic rights; and Guatemala it led to the repeal of a legislative decree undermining indigenous families’ food security and sovereignty. Finally, in Burundi, UNIPROBA supported 1,000 Batwa women – an indigenous group that lacks legal status – to access identity cards and register to vote in the 2015 local elections. Over 500 young rural and low-middle income Batwa women gained skills to claim their rights in local institutions.

## 5.2 Relevance

### Strategic alignment to local priorities and global commitments

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Approaching goal:</b> FGE funded interventions contribute concrete results to advance the priorities of women’s civil society. FGE funded interventions contribute results to UN Women Strategic Plan priority areas. FGE direct and indirect outcomes contribute to meeting gender indicators for global goals.</p>	

#### 29. FGE has continuously sought to achieve distributive equity in its global grant-making.

The FGE independent grant-making process sought to encompass broad-based inputs to ensure that balance and fairness were applied during every step of the competitive allocation of funds. The process included two rounds of proposals – a lighter initial proposal to reduce the cost of participation, and a detailed full proposal only for shortlisted candidates.

Once eligible organizations were determined to have met basic requirements through a review by Eligibility Readers, members of a regionally-diverse independent Technical Committee assessed, rank and recommend top proposals. Technical Committee Members were regionally-based gender equality experts who were nominated and recommended by UN Women colleagues (for cycles 1 and 2)<sup>34</sup>, and who received training on proposal criteria and assessment by the Fund. In addition, UN Women focal persons comment and provide either a red flag, high priority, or neither on proposals.

After several rounds of review by the Technical Committee, validation meetings were held with UN Women Regional Directors, Programme Director and Deputy Director, policy advisors, and the FGE team. These UN Women colleagues reviewed a final docket of top proposals by region, and conclude with an agreement on the final pool of grantees. The process sought to result in an equitably distributed grant portfolio across regions, countries and thematic areas.

Across the lifetime of FGE, 45% of proposals were found to be ineligible using the basic criteria for the Fund. This increased from 25% in Round 1 to 43% in Round 2 and 65% in Round 3 as the targeting criteria used by FGE became much more focused. Although the number of proposals per region varied significantly (most from Africa, least from Arab States), the proportion of ineligible proposals was in the same range of 41%-50% for all regions.

In Round 1, the principle reasons for ineligibility related to either the requested grant amount or the focus on legal and policy work (rather than implementation). By Round 2, targeting smaller organisations, this shifted to ineligibility as a result of either or all of the following: a lack of an independent audit, insufficient legal status, and not being a women’s organisation. The specific focus on lower capacity women’s CSOs in Round 3 is evident from a high ineligibility rate due to audit, inadequate gender equality focus of the organisation, failure to submit required attachments, and lack of endorsement.

In interviews, the evaluation heard mixed perceptions regarding the distributive justice of FGE grant-making, especially in terms of the spread across regions and sizes of organisation. To examine in more detail the question of the results of the grant-making process on geographic distribution, the evaluation produced a map of the portfolio weighted according to grant sizes (see Figure 13). This uses density-equalizing cartograms to change the size of countries on the map based to the total amount of FGE grant received (in USD) 2009-2017.

Reviewing the results of this mapping reveals the following trends:

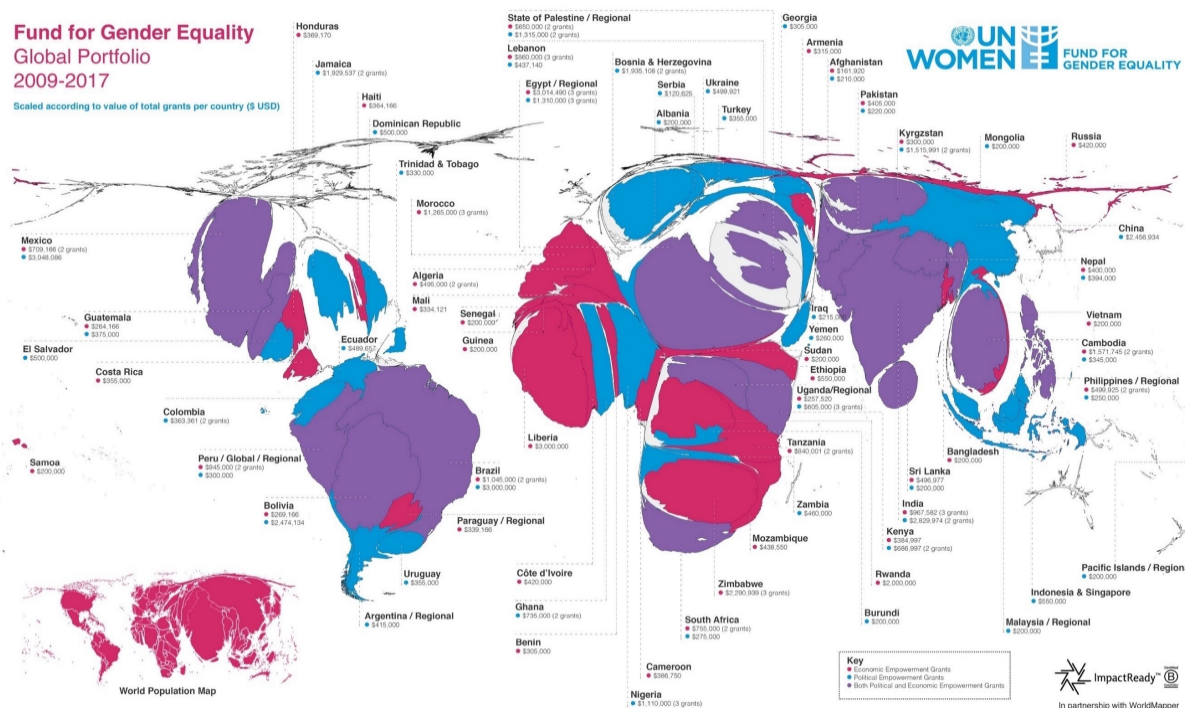
- Wide distribution of total FGE grants across UN Women regions, including a spread of very large grants (\$2m - \$3m).
- A weighting of grants towards political empowerment in Latin America, Europe and Central Asia, and Asia Pacific.
- A weighting of grants towards economic empowerment in Africa.

<sup>34</sup> Cycle 3 included a competitive, open call for experts process advertised on UNDP’s website



- Higher representation in grant-making compared to population in Central Americas, East Africa, and the Middle East. Lower representation in grant-making compared to population in India and China.
- Weak grant-making coverage on the West Coast of Southern Africa, the Sahel, and Central Africa.

Figure 13 Map of the FGE Global Portfolio 2009-2017 scaled based on total grants per country



This evidence broadly triangulates with interviews with members of women’s civil society organisations who consider that FGE grant-making has been equitable, fair, and limited mostly in terms of scale-to-need rather than geographical bias. At the same time, it also reveals some challenges for future grant making:

1. Based on the SDG challenge of reaching the furthest behind first, to consider introducing ‘not to be missed’ countries with the weakest indicators for gender equality. These could include some of the countries currently absent from FGE grant-making, such as in the Sahel.
2. Based on the reduction in funding levels experienced by FGE, to consider the impact of smaller numbers of grants compared to small sizes of grants. Several of the most powerful stories of change reported to the evaluation regarding political empowerment relied on the substantial grant size (over \$1m) to establish political traction alongside funding specific activities.

Given the level of coverage that FGE has achieved over the full period of the portfolio, the evaluation finds that there is now scope to examine the case for fewer but larger targeted grants to demonstrate the effectiveness of women’s CSOs in addressing entrenched challenges for the furthest behind people in the most challenging contexts.

### 30. FGE grant-making has been clearly aligned with UN Women development goals, normative frameworks, and the priorities of key stakeholders.

The Fund for Gender Equality is explicitly listed as a mechanism to which UN Women is committed in all Strategic Plans covering 2011-2021. In the first Strategic Plan (2011-2013), FGE was listed as a core commitment, a specific component of a diverse fundraising strategy, and as an intervention feeding into impact areas 1 and 2. The commitment in the second Strategic Plan (2014-2017) is looser, stating only that the activities of FGE are ‘complementary’ to development goals 1 and 2; although the commitment to fundraising through FGE remains. The third Strategic Plan (2018-2021) returns to stronger language integrating FGE into the core strategy of UN Women, with specific reference of the commitment to civil society, knowledge management, and innovation.

“UN Women also manages grant-making mechanisms that develop capacity and support women’s organisations’ work for and with the most marginalized women, including: the Fund for Gender Equality on political and economic empowerment.” (UN Women SP 2018-21)

As a consequence of this integration, FGE grant-making aligns firmly to both UN Women corporate priorities, and thus the international normative frameworks that UN Women contributes to (especially the Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing Platform for Action, and Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women). Figure 14 shows the intersectional alignment between FGE grants, UN Women impact areas on political and economic empowerment, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Figure 14 Alignment between FGE grants, UN Women outcomes on political and economic empowerment, and the SDGs



At the same time, the 2015 meta analysis of independent evaluations of FGE found that grants were consistently well aligned to the priorities of both government and civil society. Thus, the design of FGE can be found to have achieved a balance of strategic and grassroots alignment with the priorities of its key stakeholders, normative goals, and programme frameworks.

“The overall approach of the FGE as a grant-making mechanism that enables national and local actors to design innovative and demand-driven strategies and approaches to support women’s political and economic empowerment contributed to its impressive results and achievements. FGE interventions were consistently assessed as highly relevant to the needs of beneficiaries and well-aligned with the priorities and programmes of government and civil society. This contributed to greater ownership over FGE project results and sustainability.” (FGE Meta Analysis, 2015)

### Access-to and reach-of FGE grant-making

Performance	Sources of evidence
<b>Achieved goal:</b> FGE enables the UN system to support gender equality interventions in areas and with groups it would not otherwise be able to.	

#### 31. FGE has systematically targeted, and strengthened the voice of, marginalised groups of women.

An assessment of the groups of women targeted in FGE-supported projects, illustrated in Figure 15, revealed strong representation of two main groups – rural women (targeted by 67% of projects) and young women and adolescent girls (targeted by 50% of projects). Notably, 74% projects in Africa, and Asia and the Pacific targeted women living in rural and remote areas – correlating with the strong emphasis on economic empowerment programming in these regions. 97% of FGE grants targeted marginalised groups, and 70% targeted at least two marginalised groups.

A second-tier of marginalised groups, targeted by 14% – 18% of FGE projects, were informal and domestic workers (particularly in Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America), indigenous women (particularly in Latin America), and socio-economically vulnerable groups of women (particularly in Africa, and Asia and the Pacific). 13 other marginalised groups of women were targeted by less than 10% of projects; with caregivers, sex workers, and LGBTQ women addressed by 5% or fewer projects.

FGE projects in Arab States had a particular focus on refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrant women, with 21% of projects targeting these groups. There was also a stronger focus on women living

with disabilities in Arab States – 13% projects – compared with the overall FGE portfolio of 7%. By comparison, the strongest focus on women living with HIV was in Europe and Central Asia (17% of projects) and Africa (16% of projects), also in comparison to 7% of the global portfolio. Within these statistics are individual stories that illustrate the power of FGE to strengthen the voice, and advance the case, of marginalised groups.

Figure 15 Percentage of FGE grants reportedly targeting various marginalised groups of women and girls



## 5.3 Value-for-Money

### The value proposition of FGE

Performance	Sources of evidence
<p><b>Achieved minimum standard:</b> FGE direct financing of civil society avoids duplication with UN Women programmes. FGE reduces transaction costs for individual donors to reach a portfolio of gender equality civil society. FGE calls identify and finance areas of high civil society demand.</p>	

### 32. FGE has consistently delivered good value-for-money.

Based on the criteria for evaluating value-for-money identified through public consultation and research by Julian King and Associates<sup>35</sup>, the evaluation has synthesised evidence from all stages of the FGE value chain – starting with relevance and economy of inputs, through the management of effective outputs, to the achievement of unique and sustainable returns on the investment.

**Integrating value-for-money into management of inputs.** Overall, the evaluation found positive evidence for indicators of value-for-money, in terms of the management processes established for ensuring the economic use of resource inputs.

- Relevance of the resource use to **community needs and investor priorities** has been weighted strongly towards community needs (as expressed in demand from eligible proposals). This is characterised as a key differentiating factor of FGE. Once donors ‘invest’ in FGE, they have limited active influence over how monies are allocated (aside from the option to fund specific next-in-line proposals). While this may not impact value-for-money in real terms, it may be depressing the perception of, or sense of control over, value-for-money among donors.
- Affordability in terms of the **ability to deliver** within available resources has been ensured through progressive adaptations to each round of FGE grantmaking, to reflect both lessons from

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.julianking.co.nz/blog/value-for-money-criteria/>

previous rounds and the funds secured for proceeding rounds. Final grant monies have been allocated after an extensive competitive process, with direct technical inputs into shortlisted proposals to ensure affordability.


- **Ethical and legal** resource use for the intended purpose has been guaranteed through integration with UN Women operational systems, involvement of UN Women country level staff, and follow-up by FGE regional monitoring and reporting specialists. It has been evidenced as successful by audits.
- Economy in terms of **using resources frugally** to buy inputs such as staff, offices and equipment is a mixed indicator. FGE costs compare well with small grants programmes, but poorly with trust funds that have low management requirements. Savings have been made in terms of UN Women offices hosting FGE staff members, and provision of FGE focal persons from UN Women staff. FGE has also implemented all management tasks while never having a full complement of the staff positions allocated in the organogram. At the same time FGE has not systematically benefited from links to other UN Women brands. Bespoke investments have been made in a grant management system (with UNTF) and grantmaking processes that are not shared with the Women Peace & Humanitarian Fund; knowledge management links with Empower Women have been established but this has not gone so far as to curate a FGE community of practice; and marketing and fundraising have not established synergies with HeForShe<sup>36</sup>. Each of these would have helped strengthen the economy of expenditure on management.
- Riskiness of resources use was well within boundaries of UN Women **risk appetite**. The Fund was systematically de-risked over its evolution through: 1) the introduction of capacity assessments, 2) integration with UN Women finance and results tracking systems, 3) reduction in the size of individual grants. These factors balanced a counter shift from financing larger NGOs (lower risk) to less-tested women's CSO (with higher risk). Risk was also mitigated through the inclusion of the 'support' and 'strengthen' capacity building elements of FGE grantmaking.

**Integrating value-for-money into management of outputs.** Overall, the evaluation found positive evidence for indicators of value-for-money, in terms of the management processes established for ensuring the achievement of outputs.

- In terms of **technical efficiency** in maximising the quantity and quality of deliverables, the grant-making processes for all rounds drew on a pool of thematic and regional gender experts that assessed the technical merits and risks for each stage of the proposal process. The evaluation has found no evidence to counter the case that the competitive and quality-assured review of grant applications most likely contributed to the final FGE portfolio comprising grants that represented the greatest potential for impact.
- Regarding **allocative efficiency**, in terms of the right mix of inputs to produce intended results, FGE demonstrated a large degree of flexibility in the allocation of budgets to direct programme costs, whilst placing limits on the eligibility of capital costs for financing from the Fund. FGE grantees in Bolivia and India highlighted this budget flexibility as a major advantage to working with FGE over other UN funding. The appropriateness of the submitted budgets was part of the assessment by appointed reviewers. Allocative efficiency was also sought through rules preventing organisations from participating in multiple proposals – which, in theory, should have contributed to them aligning with the proposal and partners considered to be most effective (and thus most likely to be funded). It should be noted that allocative efficiency was less successfully pursued regarding the capacity development pillar of activities, but that this issue is explored later in the report.
- **Learning, adaptation and improvement** to enhance the value derived over time was in evidence throughout the case study reviews and self-assessments by grantees. FGE is viewed by grantees as having 'accompanied' or 'stewarded' the implementation of grants, being open to adaptation where necessary, and sharing lessons where available. In some cases, this learning network extended to UN Women country offices, whilst in others it did not. The case for building

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<sup>36</sup> A connection between the HeForShe campaign and the FGE was established, with FGE providing the project site for the first field visit of new Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Watson, in 2015 (WPP in Uruguay), development of HeForShe videos based in male engagement stories from FGE grantees in LAC, and channelling some contributions from the campaign. However, no HeForShe income was allocated to FGE – and the value proposition of investing through FGE was not included in HeForShe calls to action.



more systematic learning links between FGE grantees and local UN Women offices is frequently repeated by stakeholders from both parties.

- Effectiveness in **achieving objectives** was balanced over time. In Phase 1, large implementation grants carried a higher risk of in terms of performance to the smaller catalytic grants – with some examples of highly successful implementation grants substituting for weaker performance in other large grants (in the same way a financial investment portfolio might work). By phases 2 and 3, the size of grants was significantly reduced, as was the accompanying performance risk. In these cases, project reports indicate that objectives were successfully delivered – or exceeded – in most cases. Smaller grants also enabled FGE to focus on financing only women’s CSOs. However, the ability of these smaller grants to accelerate wider change was greatly diminished in comparison with the potential of large implementation grants, reducing the overall likelihood of ‘breakthrough’ impacts.
- **Timeliness** of delivery was closely managed by the FGE team working at multiple levels – with support to grantees from both regional Monitoring and Reporting specialists, and from the secretariat in HQ. As of November 2017, the execution rate (expenditure/budget) for the Fund stood at 90%.
- Impacts in meeting the needs and **making a difference** in people’s lives have been tracked through – during the first ProDoc – a standalone results framework and – during the second ProDoc – the UN Women Results Tracking System. In addition, the aggregate outputs of grants (in terms of numbers of people reached through activities) have been reported each year. To a more limited extent, outcomes (the pathways to impact) have been tracked and reported both quantitatively (e.g. numbers of women with increased income) and qualitatively (e.g. individual stories of change). However, the diversity of the portfolio of FGE grants has limited its ability to assess the bigger question of ‘so what’ – to provide an indication of overall shifts in the realisation of women’s human rights because of grant-making. Ensuring this aspect of value for money thus relies largely on ex-ante quality assurance through the review of proposals by experts, rather than ex-post evaluation of impacts.

#### Overall value for money (conversion of inputs to outputs).

**Economic efficiency – return on investment.** The evidence assessed by the evaluation has demonstrated that all ‘resource inputs’ used by the Fund have been managed with a strong regard to value-for-money; and that the management and capacity-building overhead was in the middle of the expected range over the lifetime of the Fund. Similarly, the value-for-money of outputs was mostly well managed, with some scope to enhance the monitoring of impacts and the inter-grantees (and inter-donor) learning communities. Given these factors, combined with grantee-reported coverage of at least 174% of the targeted number of beneficiaries in project activities, and FGE can be reliably assessed to have achieved good economic efficiency over its lifetime.

**Equity, fairness and distributive justice of investments and outcomes.** FGE has demonstrated a firm and resilient commitment to independent grant-making based on the criteria of responding to demand from civil society. Aside from three sub-regions, it has also achieved a broad and geographically balanced portfolio of grants, and generated substantive evidence of addressing sensitive issues facing some of the most marginalised groups of women. Overall, therefore, while there are opportunities to enhance distributive equity even further, FGE has performed very strongly in this aspect of value-for-money.

**Sustainability of outcomes and impacts.** While sustained financing of the Fund has not been achieved, the evidence of sustainability in outcomes and impact is more positive. Overall, the Fund has demonstrated what it set out to achieve – that women’s organisations could manage and leverage large grants to make substantive progress on entrenched issues, and this evidence – along with the knowledge products by FGE – will remain. In terms of the sustainability of programme activities, data from grantees suggests that this is mixed, with a reasonable estimate being that about half of FGE activities continue to be funded from other sources after the grants ended.

Aside from some specific examples, evidence of a step-change in the capacity (and thus sustainability) of grantees is weak – with a need for more comprehensive capacity development work required to achieve this; but in contrast to this the Fund has generated strong evidence of enhancing awareness of

key issues that can then be taken up by mainstream development programmes. Overall, therefore, this aspect of value-for-money has mixed performance.

**Scientific value in learning what works and what does not work.** FGE has published a substantial set of knowledge management materials on lessons and examples from its grants, and knowledge management has been a key pillar of its work despite the dedicated knowledge management staff position being cancelled. At the same time, FGE itself was an experiment into large grant making to advance gender equality through civil society, and so represents an important aspect of learning. Echoes of this can be seen in the increasingly large investments being made by donors in a growing field of women's funds.

Overall, therefore, the very existence of FGE has made a unique contribution to knowledge in the field of gender equality programming, and this denotes scientific value. The only remaining area that the evaluation has identified for furthering value-for-money in this regard would have been to pivot such learning into more systematic multi-stakeholder communities of practice, including greater explorations of what has not worked as expected. This, however, would have required an increase in funding to achieve, and so the gap can be considered to be a pragmatic design compromise, rather than simply an oversight.

**Uniqueness in addressing an underserved or important need.** The original FGE ProDoc (2009-2011) acknowledged that it was formed at a period when other funds were being created to try and achieve some similar things, such as the Dutch MDG3 Fund. At the same time, FGE was unique in that its design was not controlled by the initial donor, but was led by the UN system in dialogue with women's civil society, and was based on addressing many concerns about the absence of a feminist approach in financing for gender equality. At the global level, FGE filled an important niche, and continues to demonstrate some unique characteristics despite the subsequent rise of both women's funds and UN Women as a standalone UN entity.

FGE is no longer unique in being a mechanism to support women's civil society to advance political and economic empowerment goals. However, at a strategic level FGE retains two unique aspects, which it has partially evolved to embrace. The first is the mission to reach the furthest behind first – with FGE having demonstrated that it can reach further than both women's funds (because of the UN umbrella) and UN Women (in terms of discovering fringe organisations and issues).

The second unique aspect is the mission to address structural inequalities between organisations – especially the marginalisation of women's CSOs – from a transformative perspective. FGE is less well placed to address this second mission, with declining levels of funds running counter to the work of addressing the financing gap. However, while it would require changes to the FGE business model to meet such as need, the opportunity for FGE to do so is an underserved and critical one.

**Environmental, cultural and historical significance.** For evaluation interviewees from women's civil society, FGE marked an important piece of historical significance: a Fund designed by and for women's organisations, and hosted by the United Nations. It remains an important symbol of cultural significance, demonstrated by the specific reference to FGE in public statements issued by the women's movement in relation to gender equality funding commitments by the European Union and others. These declarations have not been made because FGE is seen to be a perfectly effective instrument, but because it is emblematic of the acknowledgement by the international community that women's civil society is a legitimate, equal and valuable partner in achieving gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development.

### 33. FGE still has potential to grow if it innovates in enhancing 'access to funding', improving 'reach' to target groups, and 'connecting' stakeholders into learning communities.

The evaluation examined trends and opportunities for innovation in direct financing of CSOs. Based on work on innovation by Melissa Shilling (Harvard Business Review July-August 2017), high level dimensions of innovation relating to funding of civil society were identified. These are presented in Table 7.

Comparative analysis of these dimensions gives insight into how FGE stands relative to other funds, which dimensions are a focus of historical innovation, and which dimensions offer opportunities for future innovation.

**Table 7 Dimensions of innovation in grant-making identified by the evaluation**

Dimension of innovation	Description
<b>Access</b>	The inclusiveness of a fund for a wide or specific audience, whilst maintaining sufficient levels of risk, quality and accountability.
<b>Connecting</b>	Facilitated social interaction within and between investors, grantees, the public and wider movements.
<b>Cost</b>	Reductions in transaction costs and total lifetime costs of funding mechanisms to maximise investments in impact.
<b>Coverage</b>	The alignment of thematic, geographic, or social coverage of grants with investor interests; and the ability of the fund to meet levels of demand.
<b>Impact</b>	The direct, indirect and systemic contributions of grantee work to meeting outcomes of interest.
<b>Reach</b>	The ability of a fund or programme to successfully direct support to a specific, underserved or unique social group.
<b>Visibility</b>	Levels of evidence, original knowledge, and visibility gained from investing in or working with the fund.

Based on evidence from the desk review and evaluation interviews, the evaluation team has ranked the relative importance, scope, and ease of innovation for each of the dimensions (higher number = better). These rankings are then used to identify dimensions where the greatest improvement can most realistically be made – representing the most promising opportunities of future innovation.

Table 8 illustrates that ‘access to funding’ is the most promising dimension for further innovation for a Fund that wants to grow. The evaluation notes that ‘access’ is already a key consideration in FGE design in terms of the independent, online, multilingual grant-making process. Differentiating through enhanced ‘reach’ to target groups, and ‘connecting’ communities of learning and practice are also promising dimensions for innovation. These triangulate with the questions asked by key stakeholders during the evaluation inception.

**Table 8 Most promising dimensions of innovation to support future growth**

Dimensions of change	Importance to investors (1-7)	Room for improvement (1-7)	Ease of improvement (1-7)	TOTAL columns 2-4	PRIORITY for innovation
<b>Access</b>	5	6	5	16	1
<b>Connecting</b>	2	7	4	13	=2
<b>Reach</b>	7	4	2	13	=2
<b>Visibility</b>	4	1	7	12	3
<b>Cost</b>	3	2	6	11	4
<b>Impact</b>	6	3	1	10	5
<b>Coverage</b>	1	5	3	9	6

Analysis of the innovation matrix indicates that focusing on innovation in enhanced access to finance, reach to target groups, and connecting networks is the most promising pathway to differentiating a Fund to attract future investment. It also indicates that focusing on innovation in terms wider coverage, higher headline outcomes, or reducing costs is unlikely to have the same level of effect on Fund attractiveness. For example, donors expect Fund management overheads to not be excessive – but achieving a reduction in this cost is not as compelling a reason to invest compared to ensuring more women’s CSOs have access to finance.

The evaluation compared these priorities to the historical performance of FGE for each dimension of innovation. It found that the focus of innovation in FGE has given priority to enhancing access to finance,

illustrated through the Fund being multi-lingual – operating in more languages (5) than other funds – online, independent, with simplified results chain requirements, and with active support to enhance shortlisted proposals. This prioritisation matches with the scope for future innovation indicated above.

The proposal and funding allocation process is perceived by interviewees from Civil Society as transparent. FGE grantees in Bolivia explain that the application process was clear, competitive, and transparent. A fair and transparent application process encourages women’s civil society organisations to apply for FGE funding even if they don’t have an established working relationship with UN Women. This transparency has allowed FGE to engage with women’s civil society organisations that may not have otherwise been reached through UN Women country programming.

“FGE has engaged women’s civil society organisations that UN Women would not otherwise have reached in Bolivia. FGE funding allows UN Women to expand beyond the civil society partnerships already established by the country office”.

(UN Women staff member, Bolivia)

By contrast, the other dimensions of innovation that FGE has prioritised – visibility through well-designed knowledge products, and enhancing impact in terms of numbers of beneficiaries – do not match with the most promising dimensions indicated by the innovation matrix. Both these dimensions are highly competitive spaces, where it is challenging for FGE to differentiate itself.

FGE has made advancements in terms of enhancing reach to target groups, especially with the focus on no one left behind and women’s CSOs in Round 3. However, as the evaluation has previously indicated, most of this progress relates to rural women – with much lower representation of some of the other most-marginalised groups.

The third most promising area for innovation, connecting, is where FGE has placed the lowest focus on innovation. While the Fund does connect multiple CSOs to each other, to government, and (variably) to UN Women country offices at the level of individual grants, it has rarely convened regional meetings, and there is no real sense of a global FGE community of practice. Table 9 presents some opportunities identified by evaluation interviewees and document review, to address this challenge and others.

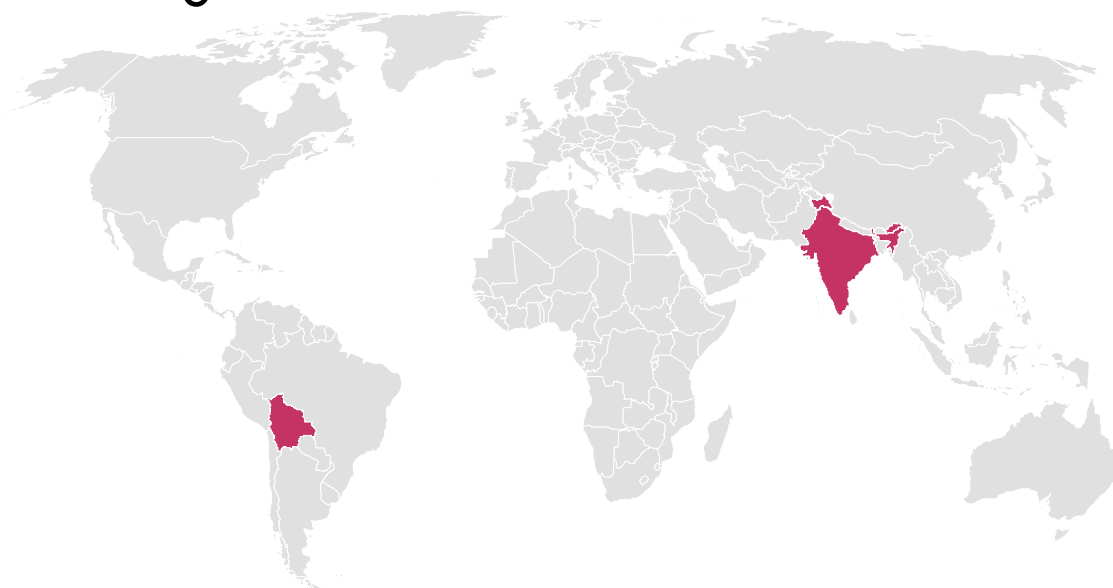
**Table 9 Opportunities for FGE to innovate and improve current performance**

Dimension	Priority	Rank	Opportunities for innovation and improvement
<b>Access</b>	1	1	Establish more flexible application of audit and reporting requirements using a risk-based approach to expand access to FGE finance for smaller women’s CSOs, or those working in non-permissive environments
<b>Reach</b>	=2	4	Enhanced targeting based on reaching the furthest behind first
<b>Connecting</b>	=2	7	Building global multi-stakeholder FGE community of practice and knowledge exchange (for both grantees and donors)
<b>Visibility</b>	3	2	Establish or engage with an existing online platform to support more direct reporting of stories and results by grantees
<b>Cost</b>	4	5	Developing strategic partnerships to add key capacities to the Fund, such as resource mobilisation and platform development
<b>Impact</b>	5	3	Build on the pilot of continuity financing to invest longer and more deeply in the most successful grants, for example by exploring an ‘up-or-out’ <sup>37</sup> funding pipeline for grantees
<b>Coverage</b>	6	6	Expanding fundraising with the explicit target of meeting a higher percentage of the funding cap to women’s civil society

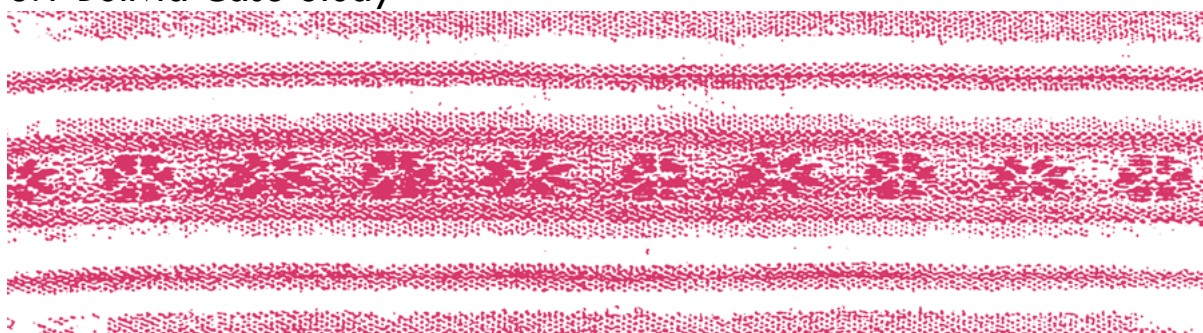
<sup>37</sup> Up-or-out is indicative of a staged hierarchy of progression, in which certain performance metrics need to be met to progress to the next stage of funding; and not meeting these metrics for progression results in the end of the grant (currently all grants are fixed to a single stage).



## 6. Findings Part 3: Evaluation Case Studies



### 6.1 Bolivia Case Study



Bolivia (population 10.9 million in 2016) received two grants from FGE, covering both political empowerment (cycle 1 – implementation) and economic empowerment (cycle 3). In total, these represent \$2.74 million in investment.

The case study mission met in La Paz with grantee representatives from all of the projects for a collaborative outcomes workshop; in addition to interviews with UN Women staff members. Furthermore, a site visit was undertaken to a project site, where group discussions with women construction workers and key informant interviews with project staff were undertaken. The case study was undertaken by Katherine Garven and Fernando Garabito, and met with 35 people.

#### Main findings

FGE funding in Bolivia has successfully reached the most marginalized rights holders through both projects. The Coordinadora de la Mujer (Women's Coordinator - CM) project brought together women from across social classes, urban/rural backgrounds, different ethnic backgrounds (i.e. Afro-Bolivians), indigenous communities, and feminists from different positions. Funding to CM included women's

movements rather than simply NGOs; and the Red Habitat project reached women construction workers who work within the informal sector with short-term contracts provided by unregulated contractors.

CM used FGE funding to bring together women's organisations from across the country to identify a common women's rights agenda. Together they developed and presented legislative proposals at all governmental levels in order to ensure that newly drafted legislation respects women's rights and is gender sensitive.



*Picture 1: Members of the ASOMUC union after a focus group discussion with the evaluation team.*

They used networks to bring together women from different economic backgrounds, rural/urban backgrounds, ethnicities, etc. This intersectionality not only brought women together to achieve results but strengthened the feminist movement in Bolivia. The grant was successful at generating spaces for women and women's movements to discuss their understanding of the patriarchal system; to share experiences; and to visualize an alternative reality (i.e. The School of De-Patriarchialization, sessions to create "The Agenda", etc.). CM, through FGE funding, helped to create these crucial spaces.

The project brought together not only NGOs but also organizations within the women's movement. This was the first time the social movement organizations were included in decision-making. It also worked with feminist allies at the government level. This brought some gender-sensitization to the government.

Coordinadora de la Mujer took the time to clearly define their priorities; they used a rights-based advocacy approach; and they clearly articulated their goals and objectives. They used mass media to communicate with and sensitize the public around women's rights so that there was widespread support for the proposals. CM and its partner organizations made mutual agreements with non-gender specific organizations to mutually support each other to achieve their themed goals and objectives (i.e. intersectionality at work). In retrospect, it would have been wise if the project had included men throughout the process to try to convince them that de-patriarchialization also benefits them.


*"At the beginning, men used to think that women meeting together was insignificant, that they were just meeting up to paint their nails. But now, they are taking our organizing much more seriously".*

A member of a CM partner organization and organizer of the School of De-Patriarchialization.

The Fund was instrumental in not only providing the funding necessary to achieve the project's objectives but also in helping to develop the technical and leadership capacities of women's organisations in Bolivia. The FGE team provided useful monitoring support to help CM coordinate and manage such a large initiative. The country context and the timing of the project were also crucial in contributing to the success of the project.

**Red Habitat (Habitat Network)** is currently using FGE funding (2016 – 2019) to implement the project "Women in the Construction Sector". The project promotes the rights of women construction workers in the cities of La Paz and El Alto and is working to advance their rights through the strengthening of the Association of Women in Construction (ASOMUC), an independent women's construction union. FGE funding made it possible for the project to expand from La Paz to El Alto.

The civil society spaces where Red Habitat participates (such as the Consejo Ciudadano de las Mujeres) are strengthened by the support that FGE provides to the organization. For instance, because of FGE funding, Red Habitat is able to work on defending the rights of women construction workers. Because this is an important theme for Red Habitat, the Consejo has adopted women's labour rights as a major



theme for its 2017 – 18 Strategic Plan and will bring the issue of child care in the workplace to the municipal government. These important partnerships between organizations make the work of each entity more sustainable.

With FGE funding, Red Habitat has been able to provide more training sessions to ASOMUC leaders and has expanded the training sessions to include more women. ASOMUC leaders have received training on how to advocate for their needs and priorities in front of the media. FGE funding has allowed for a continuity of the previous work done.

“There used to be terrible competition between women on the construction sites. We wanted to bring each other down and we treated each other even worse than men treated us. But once we started taking courses together and joined the ASOMUC women construction workers’ union, we started to support each other and to treat each other like sisters. Now we take care of each other on the construction sites”.

A woman construction worker and member of ASOMUC.

Not only has the FGE project been successful in providing technical training that has permitted women to assume higher paying construction jobs, but it has solidified a space (ASOMUC) where women construction workers can come together, share their experiences, build solidarity, and support each other in overcoming the challenges they face in the construction industry.

**Both projects** have helped to strengthen a sense of solidarity between women and to help women see the points of view of other women. Feminist networks have been strengthened and there is greater understanding of patriarchy and de-patriarchalization among women’s organizations. Alliances have been formed between women’s civil society and government politicians. Women involved on the projects report being more empowered to speak out about their rights.

The case study emphasised that women’s civil society provides more consistency and sustainability (government policies are often consequences of popular rhetoric; and government staff is regularly rotating with little consistency). Women’s civil society holds the government to account and have decentralisation that connects the government to the people. Stakeholders highlighted that UN agencies need mechanisms to hear the priorities of the people (governments don’t necessarily reflect the diversity of views from civil society).

**Enabling factors.** Bolivia has been going through a favourable economic climate which has made citizens and politicians feel more at ease and more willing to adopt progressive policies. There are more women politicians within government than before (the country has been moving towards political parity) and they are important allies in advancing women’s rights. For instance, the new female mayor of El Alto is a huge supporter of the Red Habitat project. In addition, a few high-profile cases of violence against women helped to sensitive politicians and the public around the need to defend women’s rights. International conventions served as a reference point to unite people and drive a feminist conversation.

**Hindering factors.** The extremely entrenched patriarchal system and male chauvinistic attitudes within society and lacking education and sensitivity towards women’s rights. In the case of Red Habitat, women are seen as unlucky on construction sites. Men often see gender equality as a zero-sum game (the advances that women make will be equal losses for men). There was opposition to the new government that caused political divisions and that proved as an opposing force to advancing women’s rights. In fact, the “Unity Pact”, an evolving national alliance of Bolivian grassroots organizations in support of indigenous and agrarian rights, land reform and a Constituent Assembly, broke which created strong political polarization as groups broke away from the official groups. There have been few men politicians who are interested in joining the women’s movement, and those who did were often ridiculed by their fellow male colleagues. The government has been going through a phase where it is sceptical of NGOs.

Both organizations were already well established (over 20 years of operation for each) and had strong financial and administrative management capacities. Both organizations also had established partnerships with other civil society organizations (who had a good deal of established capacity) and

benefited from being part of a large network of feminist organizations (that operated at the local, municipal, indigenous, and national levels); and were respected and had good working relationships with members of government.

Women's civil society in Bolivia needs support in strengthening processes that work towards the de-patriarchialization of Bolivian society. This includes support spaces for learning, bringing women together, and defining their priorities and agenda. Both FGE projects were focused on processes and on bringing women together to form advocacy groups. However, the FGE funding model is too short of a time-span to see this through.

FGE supports women's civil society organizations that would otherwise not necessarily be reached through UNW programming (UN Women's Bolivia office has an established set of NGO partners that it regularly works with while FGE funds organizations that are outside of this network). The FGE projects expect the UN Women office to provide support and to communicate with them but the UN Women office is unsure of the extent to which they are allowed to get involved in FGE projects (they don't want to overstep into FGE territory or overlap with FGE).

FGE processes are more flexible than those of UN Women (i.e. FGE has no limit for a budget line while UNW does). The projects experience frustration when UN Women conducts financial reviews because the expectations and standards are not the same.

Projects (especially Red Habitat) would like to have received more support from UN Women due to their physical proximity. The UN Women office has political connections that could help the Red Habitat project expand and make political headway but the relationship with UN Women is essentially non-existent.

The UN Women office is mandated to support the Bolivian government and therefore it allies with civil society organizations to provide government support. While civil society can ally with government to advance women's rights, it also plays a vital role in challenging the government and advocating for change. This opposing position that civil society must play causes UN Women's country offices to face somewhat of a conflict of interest. This is why it is important for women's civil society to receive funding through a mechanism that is independent from UN Women.

FGE is seen as being strategic in the way it conceives the aid, the amount of resources allocated to projects, and its independent and global approach which avoids potential tensions with governmental institutions in the country, leading to more impactful changes at the structural level. FGE gave the projects a lot of leeway in terms of how to manage the funding. With FGE, women's civil society in Bolivia felt like they were the leaders of the project. They were given the necessary space by FGE to do their own thing and to take the lead in terms of achieving results.

The projects found the FGE RBM reporting system to be quite limiting (i.e. it was difficult to respect the maximum word count when entering information into the on-line Grant-Management System). It was challenging for the projects to synthesize their results and present them according to a different template than they were used to. They would have preferred to simply submit the performance reports that they had generated on their own.

**“Currently, international support for civil society is focused on building administrative capacity when it should focus on creating organizational transformation.”**

A CM political ally.

Civil society projects benefit from being associated with the UN brand (this is an advantage of funding going through the UN). It helps raise visibility and provides additional legitimacy to their work. Actors in Bolivia agree that the best way for international funding to be allocated to women's civil society is through an independent fund that multiple UN agencies that work on women's rights contribute towards (including UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, UN Women, etc.) This would promote intersectionality among UN agencies and a harmonized agenda and would also reduce the burden on UN Women to generate all of the funds. UN Women could serve as a coordinator of this inter-agency fund.

## Main lessons

**The ways in which women's rights are framed and discussed can affect the extent to which men are willing to come on board as gender equality advocates.**

When gender equality is framed around the need to deconstruct a discriminatory system of patriarchy, men may more easily distance themselves from feeling personally attacked or responsible for this inequality and may therefore be more willing to come on board as advocates against an unfair system. CM had more success in engaging men around women's rights when the problem was framed around the system of patriarchy rather than gender inequality.

**Processes that bring large numbers of women together from diverse backgrounds are essential for strengthening the feminist movement and for achieving large-scale impact.**

The CM project created spaces for diverse women-led organizations and grassroots movements to come together to share experiences, identify priorities, and develop concrete strategies and action-plans. The feminist movement in Bolivia was strengthened as a result.

**Risk can be mitigated by working with networks rather than one sole organization.**

Risk management can be diverted when funding is given to networks – or network-making CSOs – rather than to isolated NGOs operating on their own. Both organisations evaluated in the Bolivia case study proved to be very successful at networking. When there is greater participation in a project, the risk of it being side-lined or failing to reach results is reduced.

**International grant-making can best support large-scale impact and sustainability when funding is multi-year and is focused on supporting processes rather than projects.**

Both projects evaluated in La Paz, Bolivia, showed that funding is more effective and impactful when it is purposefully placed within processes already in operation in a country rather than in isolated projects that may not make part of a larger social movement, i.e. the constitutional and post-constitutional process in Bolivia proved to be a fruitful one that allowed for civil society to organize and create spaces for active participation to advance women's rights.

## 6.2 India Case Study



India (population 1.32 billion in 2016) received 5 grants and was also included in a regional grant. These covered political empowerment (cycle 1 – implementation, and cycle 2); and economic empowerment (all cycles). In total, these represent \$3.9 million in investment.

The case study mission met in Delhi with grantee representatives from all of the projects for a World Café style workshop; in addition to interviews with UN Women staff members. A site visit was undertaken to Bhopal and Dewas, where group discussions with Dalit women and key informant interviews with project staff were undertaken. The case study was undertaken by Maria Borisova and Tim Hartley, and met with 36 people.

## Main findings

India struggles with gender inequality issues beyond just equal economic growth and access to educational resource opportunities. Gender inequality exists in the form of socially constructed, predefined gender roles firmly anchored in India's sociocultural fabric that has deep cultural and historical roots. Sociocultural influences have spill over effects across all domains, including the organizational workforce, and social and political contexts. This unquestionable influence is still accepted as the norm within the societal and familial periphery.

Due to a complex cast system of the Indian society rooted in inequality, lots of initiatives targeted at the most marginalized communities in the lowest castes face lots of resentment and hostility. Women's Civil Society organizations face chronic underfunding as changing the social norms and transforming the mentality of the society is a long process that does not yield tangible results. Moreover, challenging patriarchal norms is frequently considered too radical.

Much of the work coming out of FGE grantees in India is inspirational and pioneering, with countless stories of change coming from beneficiaries. CSO leaders noticed that the FGE process was a "different kind of funding and experience" compared to normal, and grantees felt supported. At the same time, each region, each State, each issue, and each community is extremely different in India, and raised a question about "what does success look like" and what can realistically be hoped for, from each project. In retrospect, it might have been better, to acknowledge the long-term nature of the challenge (tackling patriarchal systems and mentalities) and to be very tactical about where to invest FGE resources, who to award it to and how to measure success so as to have created a coherent overall narrative for other funders to engage with.

"It's important to get a proof of concept and understand what critical mass would look like on the ground."

Grantee

**Jan Sahas Social Development Society** – awarded \$220 000 – ran a 3.5 years dignity campaign aimed at liberation of Dalit manual scavenger women. Out of the total programme target of 10000 women to be liberated from manual scavenging, 8178 women are now free from 15 target districts in three States (including 6657 women rehabilitated in alternative employment). 45 dignity centres have been established and more than 7000 liberated women manual scavengers are organized into community based organizations leading advocacy efforts.

37% women reached by the project are now participating in local governance processes, and more than 60 resolutions have been passed at the local level to address manual scavenging. FGE helped amplify the work of Jan Sahas, who are continuing their work. The main focus now is to open more organisations that will help liberated women to retrain and be in a dignified employment.

**IT for Change, KMVS and Anandi** were awarded \$280 000 for the Making Women's Voices and Votes Count ICT initiative. This aimed at leveraging the digital opportunity – through the strategic use of community radio, community video, ICT-enabled information centres, IVRS-based trans-local networking and GIS-enabled participatory mapping – for building a vibrant women's political constituency at the grass-roots, across three sites in India.

Advocacy and campaigns at a local and institutional level enabled a shift in local public discourse towards gender equality; there were increased realisation of claims and entitlements by women in Gujarat and Karnataka; and more active networking between elected women representatives and women's groups in gender responsive governance.

**Feminist Dalit Organization (FEDO)** received US \$ 400,000 towards *Strengthening Policies and Budgets for Dalit Women's Economic Rights in South Asia Countries* (Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka). Caste-based discrimination affects over 260 million people globally, especially in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Among the "Dalits" (formerly "untouchables"), women face a triple burden of discrimination based on their class, caste and gender. The programme seeks to empower them through strengthening regional and national policy and budgetary frameworks to advance their economic rights.

The programme intends to build Dalit women's capacities to participate in developing policies and programmes geared towards the empowerment of the Dalit community, and to focus public attention on the urgent need to take measures to protect their rights. It is forging non-traditional partnerships with men and boys to accelerate women's economic empowerment.

**PRADAN in partnership with JAGORI** were granted US \$2,549,974 to facilitate women in four endemic poverty states of India to access, actualize and sustain provisions on women's political empowerment. Building on the limited economic gains of large-scale governmental employment and credit programmes for poor and marginalized women, PRADAN and JAGORI inserted a missing empowerment element to these efforts, working in endemic pockets of poverty among Dalit and tribal communities in 30 districts to raise the awareness of 300,000 women of their rights, increase their participation in local governance structures and support young leaders to resist and challenge discrimination and violations.



Picture 2: Evaluation participants, near Bhopal, India

Over 38,000 women have increased access to livelihood opportunities through livelihood technologies and entitlements training. Some 861 Self Help Groups, with over 67,800 members, have received support and are now regularly convening and participating in village level meetings. 900 women from 49 villages have met with their District Officers, filed for membership in village level governance (Gram Sabha) and claimed their rights through a range of formal representation mechanisms with the support of 97 trained women paralegals.

**Gender at Work** in partnership with DSS project of the Mitra Service Society received US \$492,400 in 2009 to build a strategic network between Dalit women's organizations and organizations that work for Dalit women's rights in two states to bring Dalit women's voices and perspectives into social accountability mechanisms and right to food advocacy. As a result, 14,000 Dalit women obtained decent employment and 80 Dalit women were trained and employed as work supervisors. Having individual job cards and bank accounts – for the first time in their lives – gave them control over their earnings.

**Rajasthan Network for People Living with HIV and AIDS**, together with Impact Partners in Social Development received \$255,218 to work in 32 districts of Rajasthan State. The project reached 7,000 women living with HIV and AIDS, and a further 800 duty bearers. The project increased capacity to advocate for women's human rights, enhanced access to government services for women living with HIV and AIDS, and undertook peer research that was used to draft new policy. As a result of these outputs, the maximum age of eligibility for support to children in completing their education rose from 14 years to 18 years; and women in the project reported an income rise for Rs2,000-Rs4,000 per month in combination with less demanding labour options.

**For all projects**, the Country Office of UNW was very supportive and one of the staff members of the UNW was allocated to coordinate the work of FGE. The relationship between the grantees and FGE work particularly well in India. The grantees reported that the relationship they established with FGE staff were good and they were getting lots of technical support from FGE. Once the proposals were submitted and grants awarded, FGE guided the grantees in preparing the detailed proposal and plan of action. The support was provided throughout the length of the grant, including help with RBM framework.

Moreover, the relationship between the organisations co-leading the projects were also very co-operative and constructive. One of the strengths of FGE pointed out by the grantees was the efforts with investing in capacity building. However, due to the limited timing of the project the tangible results cannot be achieved as they normally would require more time. To capacity-build a sector so chronically starved of resources is an enormous task; and the current capacity develop initiatives (grants process including organised workshops, ad hoc relationships formed, conscientious grant coordinators, RBM training) is only scratching the surface of the capacity gap.

“We [women’s CSOs] don’t really understand what capacity building is and so we don’t prioritise it, or budget for it – meaning it doesn’t get done, which means we still don’t know what it is – and so the loop continues. We think we’re good at it, but we’re not really.”

Former CEO of a prominent women’s led CSO in India (not FGE-funded)

In the context of chronic underfunding, the case found that it is highly likely that most money that becomes available is automatically absorbed in organisational survival and/or geographical growth to sustain or scale immediate impact, rather than it being invested strategically for long term benefit of the organisation and the public it serves. Given this, it is likely that an effective capacity building programme would need to be designed based on evidence of what is known to have worked elsewhere around the world. In the private sector, accelerators and incubators exist specifically to help burgeoning ideas (and teams) strengthen, and get to the next level. These are a potential model to learn from.

“...these start-up greenhouses are designed to place the most promising sprouts in the right environment for healthy, fast, guided growth.”

<https://www.techrevolution.asia/entrepreneurs-guide-incubators-accelerators/>

The case study highlighted that there are many variables at play, in terms of the pre-conditions for “gender work and CSOs”, including but not limited to: (1) national, regional, local level variables (in terms of need, scale, heritage, appetite, infrastructure, political backdrop); (2) the effectiveness, track record, scale and/or maturity of the CSO in question; (3) the extent to which a particular approach (or idea) is well-tested, known about, successful already. It also emphasised the risk of trying to consolidate and homogenise what constitutes “women’s groups” (which exist on different levels), or indeed what “problems” they face.

Nevertheless, some of the most significant achievements of FGE were in bringing key decision makers, organisations and government together to bring the change about. FGE was particularly good at raising awareness of pressing issues of marginalised communities and drawing attention of the UN agencies, the government and international community.

## Main lessons

### **A women-centred approach and ensuring that women are owners of technologies and mediums (and not just end users) creates a ‘power transformation’ to women.**

A significant insight was learning through FGE how to make women centred approach and ensure that women are owners of the technologies/mediums and not just end users. It was also learnt that only through this kind of initiatives there is ‘power transformation’ to women. It was learnt that initiatives which envisage short term gains like providing information/enhancing access will not be sustainable, so it is very important to institutionalise the process especially when working with local self-governance structures.

### **More tangible results could be achieved with grant extensions relevant to the context of each organisation.**

All the grantees agreed that FGE grantees would be strengthened and more tangible results could be achieved if the duration of the grants could have been extended. However, it depends on the projects and for some of them a 2 year boost could be enough, especially if it had been already going for some time, whilst for the projects that are in their infant stage, 2 years wouldn’t be enough to produce significant result, especially in capacity building.





**Even within the women's groups there are more and less privileged; sustained structural change requires reaching out to all the women.**

It was learnt that initiatives which envisage short term gains like providing information or enhancing access will not be sustainable: it is important to institutionalise the process especially when working with local self-governance structures. Structural transformation is very difficult to capture; to achieve transformation it is critical to reach out to all the women. To do that - leadership training, education, building social movements, building awareness required; even within the women's groups there are more and less privileged.

**Development of FGE's own long term and strategic capacity is necessary in order for it to fully and holistically capacitate other women's organisations.**

The relationship between the grantees, UN Women, and FGE work particularly well in India. Support was provided throughout the length of the grant, including help with RBM framework. Although all the grantees highlighted the importance of RBM, some of them admitted that additional training would be beneficial as some staff members struggled with it. There is also a need for FGE to strengthen its own capacity for accessing new donors. Investment in fundraising tools and building capacity of fundraising; developing innovative communications; using social media for women's organisations.

## 7. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The following 10 conclusions were developed by the independent evaluation team from evaluation findings using realist synthesis to aggregate the evidence from each evaluation hypothesis; combined with an assessment of the overall performance of FGE using the rubric outlined in the evaluation matrix.

Taken together, these seek to address the evaluation purpose: *“assess the Fund’s achievements, working methods, management and overall performance as per its two ProDocs (2009-2014) and (2014-2017) ... to allow UN Women Senior Management to make informed decisions about the Fund’s future beyond the current ProDoc’s expiration in 2017.”*





## 7.1 Development results for gender equality and empowerment of women

*Responding to effectiveness, sustainability, and potential for impact*

### 1. The Fund for Gender Equality implemented everything it set out in Programme Documents covering 2009-2017.

*Based on findings 1-3*

Throughout its lifetime, the Fund implemented all the activities, and contributed to all the outputs it set out in ProDocs 2009-2013, and 2014-2017. In doing so, it achieved some remarkable results – including testing a new model of grant making for gender equality and directly touching the lives of 535,823 women from 80 countries – despite not having all staff positions filled, and facing a global economic downturn. Evidence from FGE grants has frequently been used to advocate for UN Women’s wider mandate, including mobilising political and financial support to both the core budget and other funding instruments.

Despite some gaps in the systematic aggregation of independently-verified outcome-level results data, the evaluation has collated sufficient triangulated evidence to conclude that the Fund has made significant contributions to increasing awareness and visibility of women’s human rights, building stronger CSO networks for gender equality, and establishing local partnerships for women’s political and economic empowerment. 97 per cent of programmes targeted and reached marginalized populations of women and girls; 70 per cent reach women and girls who face two or more levels of discrimination; it is estimated that 642 laws and policies were adopted, and 8 reformed, with a contribution from FGE projects; 145 women supported by FGE were elected to office; and 21,109 women accessed sustainable sources of income for the first time.

As a consequence of the mission, actions and results supported by the Fund, the members of several international women’s networks have lent their unsolicited public support to FGE in recent times; advocating its use by development partners as an important and necessary mechanism for advancing gender equality. Furthermore, the substantive benefits that have been enabled by the Fund contribute meaningfully to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals beyond SDG5 (gender equality).

### 2. The comparative advantage of FGE is addressing social norms to advance gender equality and reach marginalised groups.

*Based on evaluation findings 4-5*

The evaluation found that the most frequent contribution of FGE to gender equality outcomes is in enabling women’s participation in political and economic spaces at the local level. In doing so, a key strength of the Fund, and a differentiating factor from other UN Women programming, is successfully addressing social norms that define gender relations. This contributes to output 2 of the UN Women Organisational Effectiveness and Efficiency Framework (OEEF).

*“UN Women: supports movements for gender equality; advocates for gender equality commitments from decision-makers at all levels; expands constituencies for gender equality; convenes partners against discriminatory social norms ...”*

*(UN Women SP 2014-2017 OEEF Output 2 – Increased engagement of partners in support of UN Women’s mandate)*

FGE grant-making to civil society organisations that are embedded in the context of action provides the community-level presence, knowledge, and stake to engage with and influence the evolution of social norms. Evidence of this has been prevalent throughout the evaluation case studies, previous survey data, and the stories of change contained within grantee reports.

While FGE has contributed to several other objectives – including building civil society capacity, convening multiple stakeholders, and supporting policy implementation by institutions – it is not exclusive in delivering these results. By comparison, it remains uniquely placed to work with organisations and issues in the margins to address gender social norms at community level to advance equality and women’s empowerment. This comparative strength complements broader UN Women strength in advancing *de jure* norms, strengthening institutions, and convening the women’s movement. It also complements the social

norm work of UNFPA and UNICEF; the political and economic empowerment work of UNDP, Rome-based Agencies, and ILO (that don't have gender social norm work); and the gender social norms interventions of UNESCO and IOM (that do not have substantial community level reach).

### 3. The original design of FGE gave insufficient consideration to sustaining the fund; and subsequent decisions have not in addressed these weaknesses, or raised sufficient funds to meet demand.

*Based on evaluation findings 20-23*

FGE launched with a \$65 million USD contribution in 2009; by the time of the ProDoc 2014-2017 this had reduced to a steady biennial income of \$6 million USD. While the early results of the \$7.5 million Round 3 grants indicate the value of this finance to the women's CSO that received it, the financing gap for gender equality CSOs is nearer to \$60 million USD per year (equivalent to 1/3 of the non-core resources mobilised by UN Women in 2016<sup>38</sup>). Addressing this gap was the original ambition of the Fund.

Set up under intense time pressure, and with a large initial contribution to manage, the initial programme design paid attention to realising the vision of a strategic fund grounded in feminist principles and the lessons of the past. It was not considered to be the creation of a permanent entity, and did not give significant consideration to resource mobilisation (neither did the subsequent ProDocs). Furthermore, although the Fund has mobilised around 0.7% of the global pool of gender equality funding it is targeting, the potential funds available are marginal by comparison with other sectors, such as climate or health.

Fundraising efforts have been unable to disentangle FGE from other UN Women programming in the minds of key audiences. Confusion exists within donor community about why financing FGE does not constitute a core contribution to UN Women; and why UN Women is not co-financing FGE as a mechanism to reach women's civil society. Confusion also exists within FGE and UN Women about where responsibility for resource mobilisation ultimately sits. Without clearly disentangling the articulated purpose of FGE and UN Women, and communicating the complementarity and synergies between them, fundraising will continue to be a major point of contention for the Fund.

The evolving decisions to progressively focus on reducing management and capacity development costs of the Fund – rather than seriously invest in resource mobilisation – is, in retrospect, likely to have been wrong. This resulted in a situation where uncertainty around a possible 'reset', 'relaunch', or responsible exit led to loss in human resources capabilities (knowledge management, monitoring and reporting, and capacity development) that were some of the main reasons donors invested in the Fund – putting further grants into question, and creating a negative spiral.

### 4. Most FGE project activities are sustained by former grantees; although coverage of convening, connecting and capacity building during grants was variable.

*Based on evaluation findings 6, 24, 25*


Grantees have reported several important design features of the Fund that have contributed to sustaining at least half of activities beyond the completion of FGE grants. As a result, 96% of FGE projects continued in some form once grants were completed, with 19% of projects were scaled-up and expanded using new sources of finance. Most FGE grantees put in place tactics to sustain the project activities beyond the FGE grant by combining their own funds with other sources.

At the same time, and with some exceptions, the prevalence and intensity of the key contributions of FGE to sustainability were confined to projects and had limited effects on wider organisational transformation. For example, technical support received from the FGE has strengthened grantee ability to achieve results, but was consistently found to require a broader set of organisational capabilities in order to be transformative. This includes demands for capacities that FGE was itself weak in such as resource mobilisation and strategic growth.

The evaluation case studies revealed the value that FGE grantees place on opportunities to connect and convene with other actors – in terms of both amplifying and sustaining their work. The evaluation found

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<sup>38</sup> <http://annualreport.unwomen.org/en/2017/financial-statements>



that FGE provided concrete support to convening and connecting women's CSOs and gender equality advocates – including at a time before this role was consistently undertaken by UN Women country offices. A lot of potential for cross-country and regional exchange between FGE grantees and UN Women offices remains to be realised.

Once again, however, connecting activities were more limited in scope than demanded by grantees for sustainability – grantees being convened only once-per-grant at regional level, and the relationship between FGE grantees and UN Women country offices being inconsistent across the portfolio. Nevertheless, and despite these challenges, FGE benchmarks as comparable to – or, in the cases of RBM and grant-making, better than – similar funds and programmes (such as the Dutch MDG3 Fund) for sustainability.

## 5. Addressing inequality between the organisations that are needed to leave no one behind is the collaborative advantage of FGE within the UN system.

*Based on evaluation findings 26-29*

As the operating landscape and funding environment evolved, the primary focus of FGE has adapted: shifting towards a tight focus on addressing the structural inequality experienced by local NGOs and women-led CSOs. It is exemplified by the progressive tightening of the criteria for eligible organisations – eventually restricting FGE to women-led CSOs (correlating with an increase in the proportion of ineligible grant applications). This complements the capabilities of other parts of UN Women and the UN system, which support state institutions and partner with INGOs and established civil society.

Recognition of this focus on inequality between organisations – between large scale 'general NGOs' and women's CSOs in particular – is critical to understanding the unique value proposition of the Fund. Many funds and programmes are focused on addressing inequality between groups of people, including gender inequality (such as the increasing number of women's funds). However, FGE has established a position from which it has the potential to address the structural inequality faced by women's civil society, as evidenced extensively in the research work of AWID. Reaching these underfunded organisations is critical to reaching the marginalised constituencies and issues they serve; and under the umbrella of the UN (and with access to UN Women country offices) FGE has more dependable access to more places than other funds and programmes.

The main challenge for FGE to justifiably make this strategic case is the small scale of financing compared to the huge demand for gender equality funding that women's CSOs have expressed: a more than \$2 billion USD financing gap over the lifetime of FGE. While more-and-better fundraising would help, this is unlikely to reach the scale required without embracing the *New Ways of Working*<sup>39</sup> and transforming FGE into a joint programme or UN system-wide fund.

The best alternative strategy identified by the evaluation for scaling the impact of FGE would be to transform the Fund into a multisided platform: to shift from an approach of 'picking-winners', to one of connecting institutional funders and women's CSOs in a way that empowers both. The existing portfolio of quality-assured but unfunded proposals from previous rounds could be a significant asset for such an initiative; as are UN Women's experience and systems for administration and accounting.

## 6. The most powerful 'business case' for FGE is to accelerate reaching the furthest behind first.

*Based on evaluation findings 22, 28, 29*

There have been numerous changes in the financing for gender equality universe since FGE was started in 2009, not least of which is the creation and rise of UN Women. Alongside this is a growth in women's funds – channelling increasing levels of finance from private individuals and traditional institutional donors to their networks of grassroots women's organisations. Despite these changes, FGE continues to occupy a unique niche.

Alongside its global grant-making reach that has sought to achieve distributive equity, the most critical contribution that FGE has made to advancing UN Women goals for political and economic empowerment is to establish the legitimacy of issues and organisations that reach people who are forgotten. The support

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/sg-report-on-unds-qcpr-june-2017.pdf>

to women doing manual scavenging in India – visited by the evaluation case study – is illustrative of the political, as well as financial and technical, support that an FGE grant can bestow.

In Table 10, based on the DFID business case framework, the evaluation evidence indicates that the case for ‘doing something’ remains strong. Despite the rise of multiple funding avenues for civil society, the trends in funding data suggest that the counter-case (to do nothing) will continue to “starve the roots”<sup>40</sup> of women’s civil society at a time that it is under increasing political pressure worldwide. This is particularly the case for the under-recognised and politically sensitive issues that need to be addressed to reach the furthest behind first.

**Table 10 Business-case for a fund for gender equality based on the DFID framework**

Business Case	Description	FGE	Future considerations
Strategic	Sets out the context and the need, including for intervention. Sets out the Impact and Outcome expected	The strategic case has shifted from breakthrough financing to contributing to leave no one behind. Few organisations were addressing this space, but more funds are now targeting gender or gender-related civil society	The civil space for women’s organisations is closing and the financing gap is as large as ever. Marginalisation of the hardest to reach groups requires the capabilities of women’s organisations. The UN has unique access in these circumstances.
Appraisal	Explores how FGE will address the need set out in the Strategic Case, appraises options, and identifies which best delivers value for money	FGE has been committed to demand-led financing combined with capacity building in RBM	Most current capacity building is technical and focused on delivery of outcomes, with gaps in organisational capacity/focus on sustainability
Commercial	Ensures that the option is commercially viable and delivers value for money through procurement	FGE has developed unique assets for UN Women: the grant management system, evidence portfolio and M&R network	Resource mobilisation for grants to civil society needs to avoid competing with core funding to UN entities, including (but not limited to) UN Women
Financial	Establishes that the option is affordable and that the principles of sound financial management for public funds are followed	FGE averages a 24% capacity building and management cost, within the expected range for small grants	Funds and programmes can offset some risk by outsourcing selected management functions. Most funds outsource financial management (only 1 post in FGE), but resource mobilisation is also an option
Management	Sets in place the arrangements necessary for the successful delivery of the intervention including procedures for monitoring and evaluation	FGE has established robust proposal, grant management, reporting and communications.	Management arrangements require dedicated resource mobilisation and partnership specialists

<sup>40</sup> AWID (2013) Watering the leaves: starving the roots.



## 7.2 Organisational effectiveness and efficiency

*Responding to efficiency and relevance*

### 7. FGE compares positively with other funds and small grants programmes in terms of the UN Women 'institutional enablers', with the exception of fundraising.

*Based on evaluation findings 7-19*

The evaluation found relatively limited the design and operating models of most funds and small grants programmes – with the main variations being in terms of grant ranges, duration, eligibility and reporting requirements, and the source of income (public contributions, private philanthropy, or investment returns). Comparative analysis with 15 gender, civil society, and environmental funds and small grants programmes reveals that FGE performance benchmarks well in most of the institutional enablers identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

#### **Excellence in programming and results-based management.**

The evaluation found that monitoring and reporting of FGE projects has been systematic, reliable, and detailed. This has benefited from a network of dedicated regional monitoring and reporting specialists embedded in regional offices. Furthermore, grantee capacity in results based management has been systematically strengthened and supported throughout the grant-making process. RBM training was valued and useful to grantees, but in future would require a process of continuous learning to ensure it is fully mainstreamed as a capability in CSOs.

FGE has progressively integrated its monitoring with the UN Women Results Management System (RMS) as this facility emerged. This has ensured that all results achieved during the ProDoc 2014-2017 have contributed to the development results frameworks of the UN Women regional architecture, and subsequently the UN Women Strategic Plan. At the same time, however, the Fund has struggled to aggregate this outcome data at the global level to articulate its unique value addition in a way that resonates with evolving donor interests. Products such as the study on women's economic empowerment in fragile states and the meta-analysis have been appreciated by donors such as Japan and DFID for information and research purposes, but this has not yet translated into an uptick in resource mobilisation.

Part of the challenge faced by FGE has been a lack of clarity and shared understanding on the roles and responsibilities of local UN Women offices regarding grantee projects. This issue was identified in the portfolio of independent project evaluations covering about 20% of the grants; but efforts to address it started to be implemented and deliver value late in the lifetime of the Fund.

At the root of this situation has been an inconsistent understanding between FGE and some UN Women offices of what 'demand-led' programming means in concrete terms. While the actions of FGE has been guided by a consistent theory-of-change that is fully pretexted on establishing civil society leadership, tensions have sometimes emerged in cases where country offices perceive that FGE is not supporting the implementation of country Strategic Notes that were developed in consultation with women's civil society representatives. Establishing a shared understanding of what 'demand-led' civil society financing means – as has been achieved in some countries – is critical to the future performance of the Fund.

#### **Financing strategy.**

The evaluation evidence clearly indicates that FGE did not have an adequate financing strategy. In part this was because serious consideration was given to fundraising late in the life of the Fund, once the challenge of effectively using the initial Spanish contribution has been met. However, FGE had insufficient access to human capital (in terms of dedicated specialists, access to corporate capacities, or senior management representation) for partnership development and fundraising throughout its life. This compares poorly with funds that are successfully sustaining and growing; which have at least one professional fundraising or partnerships position.

Furthermore, for various valid reasons, until 2016 UN Women senior management historically took a largely hands-off approach to managing the Fund. While this had many positive effects, it also led to critical gaps in resource mobilisation. Chief among these was an unresolved difference of understanding as to the role of other parts of UN Women in fundraising for FGE. Compounding this challenge was a

stronger focus within the Fund on responsible management of the existing resources rather than new fundraising – a situation aggravated by the continuous vacancy in the Deputy Fund Manager position throughout the 2014-2017 ProDoc period.

#### **Stewardship of resources, including transparency and risk management.**

FGE has achieved a positive reputation among most women's civil society representatives for its efficient and effective stewardship of resources. Achieving a combined capacity-building and management overhead of 24% places the Fund right in the centre of comparable small grants programmes from the environment sector – most of which fund smaller and simpler projects than FGE. At the same time, current FGE systems and structures were designed to achieve this level of efficiency based on the initial level of funding from Spain, and require a minimum-level of annual resources mobilisation in the range of \$6m-\$10m to remain efficient.

Despite investing in addressing some sensitive political issues, and supporting civil society engagement in the contested political and economic spheres, FGE has been managed so that it represents a low overall source of reputational risk for UN Women. This has been achieved through proactive support of partnerships between civil society and local government, as well as integration with UN Women's financial management systems. As a result, FGE management of fiduciary risk is strong from a donor perspective, but is also heavy from the perspective of smaller women's CSOs – impacting the potential reach of the Fund.

#### **Knowledge management, branding and visibility.**

A major overhaul in the branding and communications approach of FGE since 2014 has resulted in universally appreciated Annual Reports and knowledge products. Along with specific concrete examples of change, these have contributed to the visibility of UN Women more broadly – frequently being used to advocate for the wider mission of the entity. FGE also promoted decentralised knowledge sharing by grantees through their own networks and national institutions; with some key lessons being documented and published centrally by the Fund. This was a logical and feasible strategy given available resources.

The main underutilised opportunity identified by the evaluation is the lack of integration between FGE and the other UN Women sub-brands, especially the EmpowerWomen.org knowledge gateway (for knowledge management) and the HeForShe Equality Line cause marketing brand (for resource mobilisation).

#### **Human resources, staff performance and safety and security.**

The evaluation found extensive evidence of FGE practicing a culture of 'accompaniment': supporting leadership, continuous learning, and performance improvement by civil society organisations. This was one of the most powerful features of the Fund from the perspective of grantees that participated in the evaluation, and was contrasted with the approach of being engaged as an implementing partner.

FGE's external-facing culture was based on a strong internal team dynamic that the evaluation found to be a living example of empowering, creative, and responsive human resources management. Unfortunately, as the level of resources available to the Fund has declined and uncertainty over future plans have increased in recent times, this team has steadily been eroded and a key asset developed to support future grant-making has been put at risk.

#### **Corporate and programme information systems.**

The grant management system that was established for Round 3 grant-making is considered by the evaluation to be a significant asset for UN Women – enhancing the accessibility and efficiency of the submission and selection process. At the other end of the grant-making process, the integration of FGE monitoring with the UN Women Results Management System does have some challenges, but also has the benefit of meaning that key grant data is published according to the agreed IATI international open data standards.



8. FGE has managed inputs and outputs economically, attained an appropriate level of efficiency, and delivered overall value-for-money.

Based on finding 32

Table 11 illustrates that in both the management of (input/output) value and the overall value-for-money assessment, FGE has achieved a ‘good’ performance. Each indicator has been triangulated from multiple sources, and is explained in more detail in the relevant sections of the findings.

While the weakest areas have been found to be the systematic assessment of impacts, and the consistent assurance of sustainability, these two dimensions do not substantively detract from the impressive overall achievement of a comprehensive and robust level of value-for-money over the lifetime of the Fund.

Table 11 Value-for-Money assessment of the Fund for Gender Equality 2009-2017

Performance	Red	Amber/Red	Amber/Green	Green
<b>Management of input value</b> (see section 4.2)				<b>Good</b>
Relevance				
Affordability				
Ethical and lawful				
Economy				
Riskiness				
<b>Management of output value</b> (see section 4.1)				<b>Good</b>
Technical efficiency				
Allocative efficiency				
Learning and adaptation				
Effectiveness				
Timeliness				
Impacts				
<b>Overall Value-for-Money</b> (see section 5.3)				<b>Good</b>
Economic efficiency				
Equitable distribution				
Sustainability				
Scientific value				
Uniqueness				
Cultural significance				

9. FGE grant-making has contributed directly to the development results and organisational effectiveness priorities in UN Women strategic plans covering 2011-2017.

Based on findings 30, 31, 33

At the global level, the evaluation found that FGE grant-making has been clearly aligned with UN Women development goals, normative frameworks, and the priorities of key stakeholders. This has been achieved by establishing broad thematic grant-making categories (under Strategic Plan impact areas 1 and 2), combined with technical review by independent specialists and commenting by UN Women offices.

Within these areas FGE has systematically targeted, and strengthened the voice of, marginalised groups of women. Since these groups are often not on the national agenda of governments, they mostly feature only on the fringes of UN Women country level strategic notes. This gives an impression of loose alignment at country level. However, the evaluation found multiple examples of issues and organisations first identified by FGE being mainstreamed into core UN Women programming because of increased awareness and demand built among national stakeholders. FGE also helped put CSOs on the radar of UN Women country offices as potential future partners.

Alongside these contributions to the UN Women development results framework (and its links to the SDGs, Beijing Platform for Action, and CEDAW), the evaluation also found FGE makes direct contributions to the organisational effectiveness and efficiency framework output 2 (support to civil society) and output 3 (knowledge, innovation and RBM).

“UN Women works with civil society actors as: knowledge partners; implementers of programmes; advocates and collaborators in norm setting; and agents for accountability. UN Women supports civil society through partnerships, convening and networking, supporting knowledge exchange and funding including through grant-making mechanisms. It uses its political leverage to help open space for government/ civil society dialogue.”

(Text under UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Output 2)

“Achieving gender equality, and leaving no one behind, demands transformative shifts and innovative solutions to removing structural barriers. Innovation and technology provide unprecedented opportunities. To leverage this, UN Women: Supports piloting of innovative solutions to gender equality challenges by civil society organizations including through its grant-making mechanisms such as the Fund for Gender Equality and UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.”

(Text under UN Women Strategic Plan 2014-2017 Output 3)

**10. The most promising opportunities for future grant-making are building on FGE strengths to enhance ‘access to funding’, improve ‘reach’ to target groups, and ‘connect’ different stakeholders to address the structural marginalisation of women’s organisations.**

*Based on all evaluation findings, especially finding 33*

The evaluation undertook a systematic analysis of the performance of FGE based on evaluation criteria, questions and hypotheses established through a participatory inception phase. The evaluation matrix established a rubric to assess the level of achievement of each hypothesis. Evaluation evidence was synthesised and triangulated to determine whether FGE has achieved, is approaching, or has not yet reached each of three levels of performance. These three levels are the ‘minimum standard’ expected for each hypothesis, a ‘benchmark standard’ set broadly according to comparable funds and programmes, and an ‘ultimate-goal’ in terms of the ideal performance of the Fund.

Table 12 illustrates that the strongest overall performance of FGE relates to the ‘potential for impact’ criterion, with the Fund achieving 80% of its ambition and 3/5 hypotheses rating as having fully achieved the intended ‘goal standard’. The second strongest area is ‘effectiveness’, with FGE having achieved 67% of its performance ambition, and all hypotheses achieving or approaching the ‘benchmark standard’ based on comparable funds and programmes.

By comparison, the only criterion in which FGE did not achieve the minimum expected standard for all hypotheses was in relation to ‘potential for sustainability’. This low score primarily related to the weakness of the Fund in sustaining its own financing base, although the sustainability of grantees could also benefit from further strengthening. The remaining criteria, ‘relevance’ and ‘organisational efficiency’ rated in the mid-range of the ambition of FGE and comparing similar to equivalent funds and programmes.

Table 12 Performance of FGE based on the evaluation outcome hypotheses and rubric

Evaluation hypothesis	Minimum standard	Evaluated performance		Score	Overall
		Benchmark	Goal		
<b>Effectiveness</b>					
2.1.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	50%	67%
2.2.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	50%	
2.3.1	Achieved	Achieved	Not reached	67%	
2.3.2	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	
2.3.2	Achieved	Achieved	Not reached	67%	
2.4.1	Achieved	Achieved	Not reached	67%	
<b>Organisational efficiency</b>					
3.1.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	17%	45%
3.2.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	17%	
3.2.2	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	
3.2.3	Achieved	Achieved	Approaching	83%	
3.3.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	33%	
3.3.2	Achieved	Not reached	Not reached	0%	
3.3.3	Achieved	Achieved	Not reached	67%	
<b>Potential for sustainability</b>					
4.1.1	Not reached	Not reached	Not reached	0%	22%
4.2.1	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	50%	
4.3.1	Approaching	Not reached	Not reached	17%	
<b>Potential for impact</b>					
5.1.1	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	80%
5.1.2	Achieved	Not reached	Not reached	33%	
5.2.1	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	
5.2.2	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	
5.2.3	Achieved	Achieved	Not reached	67%	
<b>Relevance</b>					
1.1.1	Achieved	Achieved	Approaching	83%	57%
1.1.2	Achieved	Approaching	Approaching	67%	
1.1.3	Achieved	Approaching	Not reached	50%	
1.2.1	Achieved	Not reached	Not reached	33%	
1.2.2	Achieved	Not reached	Not reached	33%	
1.2.3	Achieved	Not reached	Not reached	33%	
1.3.1	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	100%	

Combined with an analysis of the strategic case for FGE and mapping the innovation landscape, the evaluation evidence indicates that enhancing ‘access to funding’, improving ‘reach’ to target groups, and ‘connecting’ stakeholders into communities of learning and practice are the most promising dimensions of innovation if FGE wants to grow. Figure 16 illustrates that while these dimensions sit at the intersection of the Fund’s existing strengths and opportunities, they also require that it overcomes some key weaknesses in order to avoid the main threats to its sustainability.

Figure 16 SWOT matrix for FGE based on evaluation evidence

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track record of demand-led multilingual grant-making, and delivering projects through a proven mechanism with a high level of satisfaction for grantees.</li> <li>• Substantive existing reach to marginalised groups and multiple sustainable development goals.</li> <li>• Culture and practice of ‘accompaniment’ that resonates with women’s CSOs and that has own their public endorsement.</li> <li>• Strong and diverse community of technical reviewers.</li> <li>• Able to provide global overview of demands of women-led CSOs as well as programming trends in WEE and WPP.</li> <li>• Unique comparative advantage in addressing social norms to advance women’s political and economic empowerment.</li> <li>• Good overall value-for-money through careful management of resources and outputs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundraising message and strategy entangled with UN Women; leading to confusion, competition, and lack of synergies.</li> <li>• Insufficient human resources in fundraising and partnerships.</li> <li>• Insufficient or inconsistent links between FGE grants and other UN Women interfaces (country offices, EmpowerWomen.org).</li> <li>• Low ownership of FGE within the UN system and poor alignment with New Ways of Working.</li> <li>• Heavy financial reporting requirements for smaller women’s CSOs.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women’s funds proving that money is available for gender equality, and large pools of financing for development that have yet to be mainstreamed.</li> <li>• Few other established mechanisms as well placed to reach the furthest behind first, anywhere in the world, to a reliable standard.</li> <li>• Large set of existing assets, including grant management system, portfolio of approved proposals, brand equity, and track record of delivery.</li> <li>• Strong strategic case for addressing the structural marginalisation of women’s CSOs by connecting funders to women’s CSOs.</li> <li>• Demand to build on existing capacity development strengthening work to include broader strategic capabilities.</li> <li>• Potential synergies with other UN Women sub-brands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of levels of FGE financing being in a self-reinforcing downward spiral.</li> <li>• Multiplication of alternative bilateral and private financing mechanisms for civil society organisations working on gender.</li> <li>• Uncertainty over the future of the Fund leading to loss of FGE human capital from 2017; resulting in poor institutional memory and diverting management attention.</li> <li>• Any further dilution of grant size to maintain distributive equity likely to undermine a comparative advantage of FGE.</li> </ul>



### 7.3 Lessons for UN Women on the strategic drivers of change

Four lessons have been generalised from the evaluation evidence and are derived deductively using selected drivers of change identified in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021. A fifth lesson synthesises the evidence on why fundraising for FGE did not succeed to the level required.

#### **Lesson 1: Challenges for fundraising efforts in support of civil society grant making**

FGE offered a unique value proposition that evolved to stay globally relevant, and it was well managed – actively demonstrating many of the empowerment values that it promoted. Despite this, and the successful results delivered through its grant-making, it failed to grow or sustain the financing base – a critical weakness in a Fund with the purpose of addressing the structural underfunding of gender equality civil society.

The major reasons for this decline in funding are:

1. FGE was not designed to be sustainable. For the first two rounds, it was focused on building the management capacity to deliver a large initial grant from Spain. It is only once this Spanish finance was depleted that significant time was invested in diversifying resource mobilisation.
2. FGE did not have access to human resources capacities in fundraising and partnerships, two skill sets that have been critical to the sustainability and growth of other funds (a post was included in the original organogram, but was never recruited and was subsequently dropped).
3. FGE capacity development in RBM was valuable, but not sufficiently distinguished from other capacity development initiatives to warrant special attention from donors or demand from civil society.
4. UN Women and FGE were unable to adequately disentangle the value proposition of FGE from core financing of UN Women itself – both to communicate with donors and to prioritise internal resource mobilisation and synergistic management efforts.
5. Declining resources led to a negative funding trap – new and repeat donors have been hesitant to invest without the validation of peers, or a clear signal of strategic renewal; and a structure designed to deliver at scale looks increasingly inefficient when managing smaller grant rounds.

Other contributing factors to the decline in funding, with lessons about important but lesser effects were:

1. The challenge of articulating the broad FGE mission to make it sufficiently compelling or stand-out compared to alternative avenues for funding gender equality goals.
2. Support to two of the most funded areas of gender equality – economic and political empowerment – at a time of increasing donor concern about other manifestations of gender inequality.
3. Not connecting to wider events or other platforms to drive awareness of the Fund (for example the link between UNTF and 16 Days of Action).
4. Low ownership of FGE among funders, due to the restricted role of the Board to validating process, the lack of high level patrons, absence of structural links to the rest of the UN system, and few opportunities for FGE donors to connect and exchange.
5. Targeting fundraising efforts at a very small proportion of available funds for development – specifically gender equality funding.

#### **Lesson 2: Connecting women's civil society organisations is an important complement to more formal convening efforts.**

*Based on alliance-building and movements as a driver of change*

Around 20% of FGE grants included a substantive aspect of convening – mostly centred around those grants implemented by women's networks. This is reported as having represented significant value to women's CSOs, especially at a time before UN Women systematically addressed alliance building and convening the movement for change at country level.

While convening is no longer an FGE comparative advantage, it has also demonstrated numerous examples of connecting. This includes connected CSOs to government through the eligibility criteria for grant rounds, connecting CSOs to each other through occasional gatherings, and connecting grantees to UN Women's network and the wider UN system. Connecting – the informal process and culture of introducing stakeholders to one another – has proven to be an important contribution to the enabling

environment, is affordable, and complements UN Women's convening efforts. The power of its connections is thus an important part of the FGE value proposition.

**Lesson 3: Technology needs to be combined with more prosaic innovations – such as multilingualism, simplified tools and proactive expert support – if it is to successfully enhance access for reduced-capacity audiences.**

*Based on innovation and technology as a driver of change*

The grant management system (GMS) implemented for Round 3 has completed an effort to shift all grant-making activities to a web-based system that started at the conception of FGE. This responded to specific concerns about the restricted accessibility of existing grant making to only those organisations 'in the know' or connected to existing UNIFEM/UN Women networks.

However, in the context of progressively narrowing the eligibility criteria to target smaller women's CSOs, the capacity to access and use any technological system cannot be taken for granted. In the case of the Fund, the GMS has helped to enhance accessibility because it is one part of a wider enabling environment of activities. **These include working in more languages that any other centralised fund or small grants programme**, providing hands-on support to shortlisted proposals and selected grantees, and simplifying RBM tools to match the target audience.

**Lesson 4: Among the wealth of knowledge and virtual networking opportunities that are available, meeting face-to-face remains the most valued mode of exchange.**

*Based on South-South cooperation as a driver of change*

Knowledge management has been an important theme in FGE ProDocs, and is presented as a contribution of the Fund to organisational effectiveness and efficiency in UN Women strategic plans. Multiple knowledge products have been developed and shared by the FGE secretariat; and grantees have been encouraged to generate and share similar products among their own South-South networks.

At the same time, the evaluation clearly illustrates that FGE grantees have wanted to, and benefitted most from, meeting together to network and collaborate in person. Given the expenses associated with this approach, it has happened only occasionally in the Fund on a regional level. However, the evaluation also identified that attending third-party events (such as conferences) is – in general – an underutilised channel for reaching target organisations. Supporting more frequent South-South cooperation in-person between grantees could thus be a case of facilitating networking at existing events, as well as making provision for dedicated meet-ups.

**Lesson 5: Not all knowledge can be institutionalised – CSOs are vulnerable to the loss of key leaders.**

*Based on the knowledge-hub as a driver of change*

One of the key lessons from grantees about an aspect of sustainability that worked less well is the reliance of many women's CSOs on the networks, skills, authority, and knowledge of key personalities. This reliance is one of the symptoms of 'founder syndrome', and is source of significant vulnerability for organisational and project sustainability.

Recognising that not all knowledge can be documented and institutionalised is an important step in responding to this lesson. This opens the door for complementary knowledge-exchange strategies to be considered and supported, such as transition planning, shadowing, apprenticeships, and mentoring. While many of these techniques are commonly used in large organisations, the heightened vulnerability of smaller CSOs to the loss of a key leader makes the use of such approaches an important aspect of a sustainable knowledge management strategy.

## 8. Recommendations to Management

The following 8 high priority recommendations have been developed to address the purpose of the evaluation through actionable management responses. They are based on a systematic qualitative analysis of the evidence and conclusions, respond to all of the evaluation criteria, and are validated by the Broad Reference Group as representatives of the relevant stakeholders.

### 8.1 Recommendations to accelerate results for gender equality and women's empowerment

*Based on evaluation conclusions 2, 4, 5, 6, 10*

#### 1. Prioritise innovation in access to funding and reaching the furthest behind first

Target group:	Director, Programme Division <i>and with Head, Fund for Gender Equality and Director, Strategic Partnerships</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Focus future grant-making and knowledge management on improving access to funding for women's CSOs to reach the furthest behind first</b>

The most powerful FGE business case is to accelerate the SDGs by reaching the furthest behind first in terms of marginalised groups of people who can only be reached by – or reached best by – women's CSOs. This requires building on existing FGE efforts to enhance access and reach fringe organisations, such as multilingual grant-making, independent technical assessments, and online grant management.

There is scope for future grant making to expand reach to marginalised groups beyond rural women, and to give more focus in future M&E to honest learning on what approaches have failed and what have succeeded in terms of outcome-level changes. There is also considerable scope to work with UN Women operations sections to explore options for risk-based dispensation for low-capacity women's CSOs from meeting all of the current grant management and financial reporting requirements during the initial phases of each grant (such as has been modelled by the UNICEF Small Scale Funding Agreement – SSFA).

#### 2. Leverage FGE's comparative and collaborative advantages in addressing social norms to align with New Ways of Working across the UN system

Target group:	Deputy Executive Director, Policy and Programme Bureau, and Director, Strategic Partnerships <i>with UN Women Senior Management Team</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Advocate with UN Development Group members – including but not limited to UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, IFAD, ILO, IOM, UNEP, and UNHABITAT – for a joint fund for gender equality that will address social norms to advance women's political and economic empowerment</b>

The evaluation evidence clearly indicates that the comparative advantage of FGE has been to address social norms to advance gender equality in political and economic empowerment. Strengthening the connections of FGE with the wider UN system offers the complementary collaborative advantage of reaching women's CSOs almost anywhere in the world, and accessing additional pools of gender mainstreaming funding from other sectors.

As it is currently constituted, there is no significant ownership of FGE in the UN system aside from UN Women. This is inconsistent with, and misses the potential of, both UN Women's coordination role and New Ways of Working under the current initiatives of the Secretary General. At the same time, the evidence of FGE contributions to multiple SDGs demonstrates that significant scope exists to encourage projects at the intersections between economic and political empowerment, and the mandates of other members of the UN Development Group.

Taken together, the evaluation evidence suggests that a joint arrangement – with UN Women as the administrative agent – is likely to offer a fund for gender equality the same benefits as it does the UN Trust Fund on Ending Violence Against Women.

### 3. Incubate the strategic and organisational capacities of women’s CSOs and networks

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality with Director, Civil Society
Recommended management action:	<b>Build on the FGE support and strengthen pillars to create an incubator programme for women’s CSOs</b>

The evaluation findings indicate that FGE was right to include a significant focus on capacity development of CSOs through two of its pillars (supporting with technical assistance, and strengthening RBM). Both dimensions of the FGE design were valued by grantees. However, the evaluation evidence also reveals gaps in the coverage and intensity of capacity development, and lessons for enhancing sustainability.

Two issues stand out in terms of improving the performance achieved by FGE:

3. Broaden the coverage of capacity development to include strategic planning (for example, transitioning leadership beyond a founder or expanding areas of operations), resource mobilisation, communications, and other demand-led capabilities.
4. Intensify the transformative potential of capacity development by extending the length of support to high-performing grants – for example through continuity (up-or-out) financing for grants that have demonstrated potential to deliver significant impacts.

These changes would shift the design of FGE closer towards an intensive incubator programme (a structured process of support that grantees graduate through) that aimed to combine transformative finance with transformative organisation development<sup>41</sup>. In addition to broadening and intensifying capacity development, an incubator approach of a could also more consistently connect grantees with UN Women networks, convening mechanisms, and flagship programmes through regular sessions to meet practitioners, experts and UN Women networks.

### 4. Shift future programming from ‘picking winners’ to ‘connecting innovators’

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality with Director, Civil Society
Recommended management action:	<b>Conduct a scoping study into the viability, implications and potential of a multi-sided platform ‘business model’ to better address the structural underfunding of women’s organisations</b>

The most compelling strategic case for FGE is to address the structural marginalisation of women’s CSOs that has been evidenced by OECD GenderNet and AWID research, among others. The design and eligibility requirements of FGE have been progressively refined to target grants to achieve this aim. However, the scale of FGE financing is currently 5% of the level required to have a meaningful impact on this problem.

Examining the problem of inequitable financing of women’s civil society through the RSA<sup>42</sup> innovation lens of ‘*think like a system, act like an entrepreneur*’<sup>43</sup> reveals that nearly all similar funds and programmes are taking the same approach as FGE. In each case, potential investors are offered a mechanism for selecting a number of women’s CSOs that is differentiated primarily in its process, eligibility and approach to grant-making. No fund or programme is tackling the structural nature of the problem.

<sup>41</sup> An example of a social venture incubator is run by University of Cambridge Judge Business School: <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/faculty-research/centres/social-innovation/cambridge-social-ventures/social-venture-incubator/>

<sup>42</sup> Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce; <https://www.thersa.org/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/from-design-thinking-to-system-change>





Addressing the structural gap in gender equality financing requires a shift from a ‘project’ mindset to a ‘platform’ approach – from competing to do civil society financing better than other funds, to connecting and enabling an ecosystem of institutional investors, funding mechanisms for gender equality, and women’s CSOs. Exploring a platform business model could reveal alternative perspectives to innovating connecting different parties, reaching new audiences, and expanding access to more resources for women’s CSOs.

“A platform business model creates an ecosystem that promotes shared value in place of traditionally transactional relationships ... A network strategy is a plan that aligns [organisational] goals to a shared purpose, identifies the functional roles most critical in the platform, and outlines the interactions and rewards required to sustain the resulting relationships. An effective network strategy enables the success of a platform, regardless of the role of technology.”

(Brown, 2016. *3 Questions to Ask Before Adopting a Platform Business Model*. Harvard Business Review.)

Fully scoping the opportunity, and the associated costs, of a platform approach requires a more substantive body of work than this evaluation can provide. Nevertheless, the evaluation evidence does indicate that FGE has already got access to many of the ingredients required by a multi-sided platform (MSP) model. These include an initial supply of pre-assured projects, data to empower both sets of users, a trustworthy grant-management mechanism, a process for identifying high-potential projects, and a monitoring and reporting system.

However, establishing a platform would also require some changes. These would include introducing an element of donor-advised funding that allowed donors to provide restricted eligibility criteria (such as geographic constraints) for at least a portion of their contributions. It would also require curation of proposals, filtered results data and tailored communications through a user-friendly interface (such as Kickstarter or Kiva).

### Box: The multisided platform as a potential pathway to impact for FGE

Globally there is growing interest in the platform business model. There are many initiatives referred to as ‘multi-stakeholder platforms’ in the sustainable development movement. However, these are differentiated from ‘multi-sided platforms’ in the commercial world. Most sustainable development platforms, such as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, have been established to support coordination and networking between actors in a particular-space. Most commercial platforms, such as eBay, are purely based on reducing the transaction cost of an exchange between participants.

Commercial multisided platforms (MSPs) bring together suppliers and users in high-value exchanges. Their chief assets are information and interactions, which together are also the source of the value they create and their comparative advantage. In recent years, information technology has made building and scaling up platforms vastly simpler and cheaper, strengthening network effects, and enhances the ability to use data that increase a platform’s value to all.

Platforms operate as an ecosystem, with the same basic structure comprising four types of players. The owners of platforms control their intellectual property and governance. *Providers* serve as the platforms’ interface with users. *Producers* create their offerings, and *consumers* use those offerings. The best performing platforms go beyond better demand-supply matches; they invest in new value creation. In platform markets, cultivating user capability becomes as strategically important as reducing transaction costs. Successful platforms empower their users. This resonates with the overall culture and approach of FGE.

With a platform, the critical asset is the community and the resources of its members. The focus of strategy shifts from controlling to orchestrating resources, from optimizing internal processes to facilitating external interactions, and from increasing customer value to maximizing ecosystem value. Applied to FGE, the MSP model implies shifting from ‘controlling’ all of the funds that are raised, to connecting institutions that want to invest in gender equality with women CSO’s that are best placed to reach the furthest behind first.

Unlike existing platforms in the gender equality space (such as Catapult, which raises funds from individuals), FGE is uniquely placed to connect global institutional donors with women’s organisations in hard-to-reach contexts (for example, in the way that MasterCard connects large banks with small traders). FGE could still ensure quality and equity by screening proposals as it does now; and producing its own curated list of recommended proposals. The evaluation evidence indicates that this type of model could contribute to impact on the wider structural barriers to achieving gender equality, as well as through the impacts of grantees’ work on women’s lives.

## 8.2 Recommendations to enhance organisational effectiveness and efficiency

Based on evaluation conclusions 3, 7, 8, 9

### 5. Redesign the experience of donorship in FGE to build engagement, long-term support, and knowledge exchange

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and with Head, Fund for Gender Equality and Director, Strategic Partnerships
Recommended management action:	<b>Commission a dedicated specialist position to engage existing and potential institutional donors in a revitalised partnerships strategy</b>

The evaluation findings clearly indicate the value of the strong commitment in FGE to demand-led grant-making. At the same time, it identifies some unintended consequences of this approach on the engagement with, and ownership of, donors to the Fund. Other funds and programmes that are currently demonstrating growth tend to be associated with a stronger role for donors and high-level patrons in governance and steering mechanisms.



Giving donors a more proactive role does not imply sacrificing the independence of FGE grant-making. Hybrid models for governance have been demonstrated by emerging funds, such as AmplifyChange, in which donors are engaged in setting benchmark ranges for the targeting of Fund resources – while the fund managers are free to make decisions within these benchmarks.

There are other ways that Fund donors can become engaged. Some of the smaller donors to FGE have emphasised an interest in working with the Fund not only to broaden their reach, but also to engage in a grant-making community of practice from which they can learn. FGE could do more to nurture this community of exchange on good civil society donorship as a value proposition. Presently, it is inhibited from doing so by the absence of a partnership specialist within the organogram, and the continued vacancy of the Deputy Fund Manager position.

#### 6. Invest in a ground-up revitalisation of FGE fundraising strategy and human resources

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality <i>with Director, Strategic Partnerships</i>
Recommended management action:	<b>Secure continuous access to professional fundraising capabilities dedicated to continuously replenishing the Fund with a target in the range of \$10m-\$60m per year</b>

The evaluation firmly concludes that the original design of FGE and subsequent changes gave insufficient consideration to sustaining the fund in the long term. As a result, the current level of finance available to the Fund covers only a marginal portion of the expressed demand from civil society. FGE requires a fundraising strategy that is complementary-to and not competitive-with other UN Women global resource mobilisation efforts.

Given that the Fund requires a fundraising minimum of \$10 million per year to maintain competitive efficiency, and that the funding gap to meet most of the demand from eligible women's CSOs is \$60 million per year, the target for a fundraising strategy should be between these amounts. Furthermore, the fundraising strategy requires disentangling both the fundraising messages and the fundraising strategies of FGE and UN Women HQ. Doing so could unleash synergies, such as reducing UN Women transaction costs by passing all small donations (below a set threshold) to FGE; or supporting contributions from country-level donors by allowing country-specific targeting for funds contributed from the Global South.

Having access to dedicated fundraising expertise is a critical gap in the capacity of FGE to make this strategy happen. Securing this expertise is therefore a priority in terms of both sustaining and growing the Fund. Evidence from other funds indicates that public-private partnerships for securing talent and strategic flexibility have been used to good effect in terms of specific capabilities. Scoping the viability of such a consortium-supported fund could offer an alternative and less capital intensive approach to securing the fundraising talent that FGE needs.

#### 7. Preserve the operational assets established by FGE

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality
Recommended management action:	<b>Prepare an asset management plan to preserve and benefit from the considerable and successful investments that have been made by FGE</b>

The evaluation analysis found that FGE has managed its inputs and outputs economically, attained an appropriate level of efficiency, and delivered overall value-for-money across multiple indicators. It has done so in part because of a set of operational, programmatic and strategic assets that have been built over the lifetime of the Fund. This series of assets can support of future grant making to women's civil society. However, the uncertain sustainability of FGE places them at risk of being lost.

The evaluation has identified six key grant-making assets that have the potential to benefit future grant-making to women’s civil society if they are suitably managed:

7. **The FGE brand:** it’s legacy of results, visible commitment to women’s civil society, and legitimacy of association
8. **A portfolio of evidence:** the track record of grants, with outcomes data, evaluation reports, and knowledge insights about what works and what does not
9. **A motivated and functional team:** that achieved ‘*esprit de corps*’, maintains institutional memory, and has a network of global relationships with civil society
10. **An online grant management system:** linked to UN Women accounting and audit standards (shared with UNTF)
11. **A book of quality assured next-in-line proposals:** previously reviewed, but as-yet-unfunded, quick start projects to fund
12. **Reduced transaction cost reporting:** an established mechanism for the provision of a single accessible annual report to all FGE donors, rather than individual donor reporting

8. Acknowledge, document and institutionalise the good practices approach, inter-personal dynamics, and contributions of the FGE team

Target group:	Director, Programme Division and Head, Fund for Gender Equality
Recommended management action:	<b>Commission a UN Women learning note on lessons and results from the ‘accompaniment’ approach with grantees and internal FGE team dynamics</b>

The evaluation identified extensive primary and secondary evidence that, within creative space afforded to it, the FGE secretariat developed a functional, motivated, and responsive team. The dynamics of this team mirror many of the principles that FGE established for its grant-making, and it thus ‘led-by example’. This manifested itself in the ‘accompaniment’ approach of the FGE team, and FGE focal persons, towards grantees: an empowering style that contributed to the extremely high satisfaction ratings of 96% of grantees being ‘*highly satisfied*’.

Overshadowed by the challenges of fundraising and sustaining the Fund, this positive team dynamic has not always been recognised more widely by UN Women as an example from which positive lessons can be derived for the rest of the organisation. Taking time to reflect on and document this experience in the form of a UN Women (not just FGE) learning note would contribute to both acknowledging the work of a committed group of staff, and help to institutionalise the approach more widely in UN Women.

