

# Is Global Funding Reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women? Experiences from the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA)

## Executive Summary



#ThePledgeWeWant

The [Forest Tenure Pledge](#) made at UNFCCC CoP26 in 2021 was a historic turn in governments' and philanthropic donors' commitment to delivering funding directly to Indigenous Peoples and local communities for their efforts and roles in preventing deforestation and engaging in climate and conservation efforts. What is still unclear in the global funding scenario in 2025 is how and to what extent Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women have benefited directly from the Pledge. The current lack of gender-disaggregated data in international donor trends makes tracking global funding reaching women's organizations difficult.

**Women's organizations have [made the call](#) that if the climate finance goals intend to repair the historical gap in direct funding to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, donors must respond to the gender funding gap and concretely address the rights of women and girls whose direct access to funding has been severely limited.** Women are key actors in climate change and conservation action, traditional knowledge keepers and transmitters, food security and sovereignty caregivers, and have developed incredible resilience in environmental crises; however, they continue to be [underrepresented and underfunded](#). Ensuring direct funding for women's organizations and groups can transform the gender-based inequalities that have historically denied women their rights and locked them out of critical decision-making at the territorial, national, and international levels.<sup>1</sup>

In anticipation of a new Pledge at the UNFCCC CoP30 in Brazil, governments and donors must urgently recognize women as crucial rightsholders in climate and conservation action. **This will ensure that this Pledge concretely includes a gender-responsive perspective to prevent women's rights from being left behind in financial commitments.**

To build evidence and help to fill the data gap on the state of global funding reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women, the [Rights and Resources Initiative \(RRI\)](#),<sup>2</sup> in collaboration with the [Women in Global South Alliance \(WiGSA\)](#), has embarked on an analysis of the level and characteristics of funding WiGSA network members have been able to access. A [preliminary analysis](#) launched at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) CoP16 in 2024 showed that investments in gender equality are on the decline, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant women remain severely underfunded. The preliminary report also indicated that stereotypes and biases against women's organizations persist in the global funding architecture, in which women face higher scrutiny and lower expectations in achieving outcomes when compared to men-led organizations.

This report presents the results of the second phase of this collaborative research: "Tracking Global Funding Reaching Women: Pilot Implementation," which aims to identify and analyze the structural obstacles Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women face in accessing funding. The study builds on the results of the preliminary report launched in 2024, which identified existing data on grants and funding mechanisms reaching

grassroots and rightsholder women’s organizations and scoped opportunities to expand on available data through a bottom-up data collection process involving representative networks within WiGSA.<sup>3</sup>

The present report uses the [Funding with Purpose](#) approach developed under the [Path to Scale](#) (P2S) initiative, which assesses if “climate, conservation and rights funding is channeled in ways that are relevant and appropriate to IPs and LCs, and ensures funding engagements are led by their organizations.” Under this framework, we analyzed whether WiGSA recipient organizations consider if their current funding: i) responds to their needs and aspirations; ii) is flexible; iii) is transparent; iv) is gender-inclusive; and v) promotes mutual accountability.

RRI developed the research in collaboration with WiGSA because the network provides a comparative advantage in visualizing and assessing if and how global funding is reaching different types of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s organizations, groups, networks, and associations working at the intersection of climate and conservation action and women’s tenure and resource rights. Moreover, [WiGSA](#) was catalyzed by RRI in 2022 as a response to the historic [\\$1.7 billion Pledge](#) and launched at the UNFCCC CoP27 in Egypt, and as a women’s movement advocating for access to direct funding.

## Key Findings

- The two top priority agendas and strategies within the WiGSA network of organizations are women’s land and resource tenure rights and climate and environmental justice; however, **Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women face significant barriers in securing direct funding that intersects with women’s human and tenure rights and environmental and climate justice.**
- **Women’s organizations must rely heavily on volunteer labor to develop their activities, adding to the existing inequalities of “unpaid work” that women perform.** Moreover, significant differences exist in the level of volunteer work between Afro-descendant women or mixed organizations and Indigenous women or mixed organizations, with the former depending on much larger volunteer labor.
- **Due to limited funding, WiGSA network organizations show serious difficulties creating positions or retaining personnel dedicated to resource mobilization.** The lack of dedicated personnel for fundraising poses additional pressure on project leaders, who need to take on this task in addition to their broader set of functions.
- The median annual budget of WiGSA network organizations in 2023 was approximately US\$273,000, and it increased only slightly in 2024 to US\$338,000.
- There are differences between the budget dedicated to women’s work within mixed organizations (integrating women and men) and women’s organizations. The proportion of the budget dedicated to women’s groups’ strategies within mixed organizations was only 19 percent in 2023 and 28 percent in 2024, reflecting existing disparities regarding the prioritization of women’s rights agendas within mixed organizations.
- **Afro-descendant women or Afro-descendant women within mixed organizations have annual budgets that, on average, are less than half of those of other Indigenous women or mixed organizations and local community women or mixed organizations.** In 2023, the median budget for Indigenous and local community women’s or mixed organizations was US\$273,466, compared to US\$154,000 for Afro-descendant women’s and mixed organizations.
- Data on the “aspirational budget” of WiGSA member organizations (the proposed budget that the organization needs to function properly and sustainably based on its agenda, scope of work, and projections) versus their actual budget reveals an average gap of at least 50 percent between an organization’s actual annual budget and its aspirational budget.
- **The major source of funding for WiGSA member organizations comes from international NGOs.** It is noticeable that feminist funding and UN agencies play a relatively minor role, and human rights funds and national governments have an even more limited role as funding sources for the organizations within the WiGSA network.

- **An alarming deficit of flexible and core funding within the WiGSA network was reported.** Fifty-three percent of member organizations reported having no core funding or that it represents less than 10 percent of their total budget, with some organizations reporting that they have never received core or flexible funding.
- **Organizations and groups in the WiGSA network work mostly with short-term grants.** In fact, 85 percent of member organizations receive grants of two years or less, and 25 percent have funding agreements under six months.
- **Forty percent of WiGSA member organizations reported that securing funding for institutional strengthening is the most difficult fundraising task.** This is followed by funding for knowledge production and research (30 percent) and advocacy work (25 percent). When combining these fundraising challenges, a concerning pattern emerges in which key areas of women’s organizations’ development receive the least funding.
- **Thirty-eight percent of WiGSA organizations reported that they had no savings or reserves,** 67 percent of organizations can only operate for 0 to 6 months without external funding, and only 10 percent of organizations could operate for over one year, suggesting that most organizations operate under conditions of severe financial precariousness.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Redesign funding mechanisms: Toward flexible, institutional, and long-term funding

The predominance of rigid, short-term project grants is the primary inhibitor of sustainability and responsiveness for organizations like those that are part of the WiGSA network. To counter this, WiGSA members recommend:

- Establishing dedicated funding lines for women’s organizations, defining percentages for gender strategies in their funding topics and grantmaking structures, and ensuring that mixed organizations receiving the funds are committed to dedicating at least part of the funding received to support their women’s groups’ activities.
- Prioritizing medium and long-term funding: Make three-to-five-year funding the norm rather than the exception. This provides the necessary stability for strategic planning, talent retention, and building trusting relationships with communities.

### Transform the relationship: From control to trust and strategic partnership

- The current power dynamic, where the donor controls and the partner complies, must be replaced by a true partnership based on trust, mutual learning, and the co-creation of solutions.
- Implement “Reverse Calls for Proposals” models: Instead of donors predefining priorities, this model invites organizations like WiGSA network members to present their own strategic agendas and needs, shifting power dynamics and ensuring that funding responds genuinely to local priorities.
- Simplify application and reporting processes: Reduce the bureaucratic burden by shortening forms, accepting proposals and reports in simpler formats and local languages, and exploring alternative methods such as oral reports or conversational field visits.

### The inclusion of intersectional and transformative gender approaches

The current approach to gender integration into funding architecture has proven insufficient and is often superficial. A shift toward intentional and transformative investments that address the underlying root causes and structural barriers to gender inequality is needed.

- Be intentional and specific in supporting gender work: Donors should avoid generalized proposals and instead design programs with concrete mechanisms to ensure that women are real beneficiaries, with a deep analysis of how inequalities affect Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in specific contexts.
- A connection between funding for human rights, women’s rights, and climate and conservation is needed: Gender-based, racial/ethnic-based discrimination, and socioeconomic exclusion interconnect and affect the positioning of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in climate and conservation

funding architecture. Achieving global climate change and conservation goals must go hand in hand with eliminating discriminatory patterns against women.

### **The urgency of funding racial justice for Afro-descendant women**

- Afro-descendant women’s organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean have highlighted the alarming lack of specific funding for initiatives that address racial justice, discrimination, and the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, especially women. This absence severely limits the impact and sustainability of their work, perpetuating historical and structural inequalities. An urgent change is essential to make racial justice visible and position it as a central priority in donors’ regional agendas.

### **Reinvent impact measurements: From quantitative reporting to systemic change evaluation**

- Donors should adjust standardized reporting templates and work with their partners to co-design systems that capture the substantive changes that organizations themselves value.
- Co-design monitoring and evaluation systems by incorporating qualitative indicators that measure transformations in trust, political participation, dominant narratives, and power relations at the family and community level.
- Fund learning, not just reporting: Grants should include specific resources for organizations to conduct their own reflection, learning, and strategic adaptation processes. “Reports” to donors must transform from compliance exercises into spaces for strategic dialogue about challenges and learnings.

### **Invest in strengthening the local ecosystem**

- The strengthening of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s organizations cannot depend solely on their internal capacity to adapt to a rigid system. Donors must invest in the support ecosystem that allows these organizations to thrive.
- Create specific funds for capacity-building: These funds should be managed by the organizations and networks themselves and fund their identified priorities, such as purchasing accounting software, training in strategic communications, hiring legal support for formalizing legal status, and paying fair salaries for administrative and fundraising staff.



## **Endnotes**

- 1 Indigenous women and Afro-descendant women have long struggled for the recognition of their individual and collective rights, including their rights to fully and effectively participate in decision-making. See [IFIP 2021](#); [Raising Indigenous Women’s Voices for Equal Rights and Self-Determination; Challenges, Barriers, and Strategies for Leadership Among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women](#); and [UN Women](#).
- 2 RRI is a global coalition of more than 200 rightsholder organizations dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities, as well as the women within these groups. The RRI Gender Justice Program promotes and enables the development of bottom-up, evidence-based analyses and the creation of tools to support women’s national and international advocacy and meaningful participation in strategic policy decision-making at both national and global levels.
- 3 The list of WiGSA member organizations that participated in the research are: Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP); Coalition des Femmes Leaders pour l’Environnement (CFLEDD); Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas de Bolivia (CNAMIB); Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas (CONAQ); Coordinadora de Mujeres Líderes Territoriales de Mesoamerica (CMLT); Dynamique des Groupes des Peuples Autochtones (DGPA); Federation of Community Forestry Users, Nepal (FECOFUN); Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI); Fundación Azúcar; La Asociación de Mujeres Afrodescendientes del Norte del Cauca (ASOM); La Asociación de Mujeres Artesana Embera (AMARIE); le Réseau des femmes Africaines pour la gestion Communautaire des Forêts (REFACOF); National Indigenous Women’s Federation (NIWF); Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazonicas (ONAMIAP); Pastoral Womens Council (PWC); PEREMPUAN AMAN; Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora (Red MADD); Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev); União das Mulheres Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira (UMIAB); Women on Mining and Extractives (WoME); and Women Rights and Resource Network (WRRN).