ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE STUDY

ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

PART ONE OF A STUDY OF PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE COMMISSIONED BY THE UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Produced by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

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Recommended citation: Wood, G. (2023) "***Organizational Resilience: What does it mean and why is it important to civil society organizations working to end violence against women?*** Part one of a study of practice-based knowledge commissioned by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women."

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About the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is the only global grant-making mechanism dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. Managed by UN Women on behalf of the United Nations system since its establishment in 1996 by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/166, the UN Trust Fund has awarded US$225 million to 670 initiatives in 140 countries and territories. Grant recipients are primarily civil society organizations (CSOs), especially Women's Rights Organizations (WROs). Since 2018, the UN Trust Fund has been funding only CSO projects. In 2023, the majority (62.3 per cent) of these CSOs were WROs.

About practice-based knowledge

The UN Trust Fund's approach to practice-based knowledge (PBK) is inspired by the African Women's Development Fund and Raising Voices, among others, who have called for more investment in the Global South to build the evidence base on ending violence against women and girls (EVAW/G) through local ownership of research and programming, with a focus on practice-based learning. Raising Voices defines "practice-based learning" as "*the cumulative knowledge acquired from designing and implementing ideas and methodologies over a sustained timeframe, including insights gained from observation, direct experiences, and program monitoring.*"[1] The UN Trust Fund is committed to enabling PBK to inform global programming, polices and decision-making. According to the UN Trust Fund's Strategic Plan (SP) for 2021-25[2], PBK is essential for effective policy development, programme implementation, and advocacy work. It ensures that interventions are grounded in the real experiences and realities of those directly supporting survivors and women at risk.

1 Raising Voices: https://raisingvoices.org/about-us/approach/

2 UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 (UN Women, 2021) https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Images/2021/Strategic%20Plan%202021/2021strategic%20planfinal%20002compressed.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Gemma Wood, commissioned by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and **co-created with representatives from thirty-seven civil society organizations who provided the practice-based insights at the heart of this paper.** These CSOs/individuals include (in alphabetical order):

Abdul Bangura, Executive Director, United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers (UFDUM); **Awondo Judith**, Women in Action against Gender Based Violence (WACameroon); **Chinyere Obinna**, Project/legal officer, Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI), Nigeria; **Console Mission**, Nepal; **Faizat Badmus-Busari**, Regional Programme Manager, Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network, Somalia; **Florence Varghese**, Project Manager, Organisation for Community Development, India; **Florence Simbota**, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer, Art and Global Health Center Africa, Malawi; **Gulrukhsor Abdullaeva**, Director, Public Organization Women's Center "Gulrukhsor", Tajikistan; **Jasna Pantic**, Administrative Assistant, Association of Roma Novi Becej, Serbia; **Jayne Waithitu**, Executive Director, Peace Warriors Organisation (PWO), Kenya; **Jenet Ncube**, Lesedi la Batho, South Africa; **Dr. Kasem Kolnary**, Director of Cambodian Health and Education for Community, Cambodia; **Marijke Sonneveld**, Stichting Projekta, Suriname; **Millicent Onyenuche**, Executive Director, Circuit Pointe, Nigeria; **Patricia Ponce Pascuale**, Director and Women´s Rights Advisor, Haurralde Fundaziao, Guatemala; **Samantha Jimenez Maiz and Solmaz Etemadzade**, Haurralde Fundaziao, Guatemala**; Sanchita Maharjan**, Program Manager, Center for Dalit Women (CDWN), Nepal; **Umara khan Khushal,** Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Mobile Team Leader, International Organization for Migration **(IOM),** Afghanistan, **Uche Brown Egbe**, Empowering Women for Excellence initiative (EWEI), Nigeria, Senior Progamme Officer Communications, **Veprore Shehu**, Executive Director, Medica Kosova, Kosovo.

We would also like to thank all those who wished to remain anonymous. This project would not have been possible without their support and participation.

Finally, we would like to thank our internal and external peer reviewers: Dale Buscher from the Women Refugee Commission and Yeliz Osman from the UN Women EVAW Section, as well as Anna Alaszewski, Elimane Bousso, Fiona Dalmier, Hisham Obaid and Marie Palitzyne. Mildred Garcia Rodriguez, Amélie Gontharet and Shruti Majumdar from the UN Trust Fund coordinated and managed the production of the document with support from the whole team.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
CDWN	Center for Dalit Women
CFP	Call for proposals
CSO	Civil society organization
CWSI	Centre for Women Studies and Intervention
EVAW/G	Ending violence against women and girls
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PBK	Practice-based knowledge
PSEA	Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse
PWO	Peace Warriors Organisation
SI	Spotlight Initiative
SIHA	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
SP	Strategic Plan
UFDUM	United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers
UN Trust Fund	UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
VAW	Violence against women
VAW/G	Violence against women and girls
WRO	Women's rights organization

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a practice-based knowledge (PBK) study commissioned by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund), investigating the concept of organizational resilience within civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs). This study sheds light on what organizational resilience means in practice, how it can be defined and conceptualized, and why it is important to the field of ending violence against women and girls and feminist and women's movements, concluding with recommendations for donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers on how to support the organizational resilience of CSOs and WROs working on ending violence against women and girls.

Background

While resilience is a term commonly used in psychology, its prominence has increased in discussions regarding the capacity of organizations and institutions to endure shocks and crises, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.[3] Emerging criticisms around such narratives have warned against the potential dehumanizing effect of the term, as it places expectations on those most impacted by crises to cope (with scarce resources) in contexts often compounded by multiple, intersecting crises and the perpetuation of power imbalances that fuel crises in the first place.[4] Even so, opportunities have been identified when adopting a feminist approach to the topic, for example by emphasizing the importance of collective and caring approaches in organizational resilience (such as through investments in self-care and mental health support for activists).[5] Within this brief literature review, an evidence gap has been identified regarding the resilience of civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) focused specifically on ending violence against women and girls. This knowledge gap can benefit from the practice-based knowledge (PBK) of CSOs and WROs funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and those within its network.

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3 Example literature: Paeffgen, Thea. 2023. "Organisational Resilience during COVID-19 Times: A Bibliometric Literature Review" Sustainability 15, no. 1: 367. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010367 ; Young, Dennis R. "Nonprofits as a Resilient Sector: Implications for Public Policy" Nonprofit Policy Forum, vol. 14, no. 3, 2023, pp. 237-253. https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2022-0038

4 Resources in alternative discourses on "resilience":
"The Dehumanizing Discourse of Resilience" (Malaka Shwaikh, 28 May 2021) Article in Progress Policy Review https://academic.oup.com/isagsq/article/3/2/ksad030/7198303
"Problematizing resilience: the development practice and the case of Palestine" (Keelan & Browne, 2019), Development in Practice https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339208904_Problematising_Resilience_Development_Practice_and_the_Case_of_Palestine
"Degendering organizational resilience –the Oak and Willow against the wind" (Hope Witmer, August 2019), Gender in Management, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335581438_Degendering_organizational_resilience_-_the_Oak_and_Willow_against_the_wind
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Fenomenal Funds (2023) Reimagining Power to Build Resilience, Fenomenal Funds: Washington, DC. https://staging.fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf

5 Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu, "Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul" (2015), African Institute for Integrated Responses to VAWG & HIV/AIDS (AIR), http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-WEB.pdf

UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women support for organizational resilience

For over 15 years, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) has prioritized support for grantees' organizational resilience (albeit using different terms), initially focusing on traditional organizational strengthening and capacity development. This evolved to prioritize smaller civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs), recognizing their significance in women's movements. Practice-based knowledge (PBK) collected with grantees during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for organizational support for survival in crises,[6] leading to the UN Trust Fund providing additional resources and measures.[7] The UN Trust Fund's Strategic Plan 2021–25[8] highlights organizational resilience as a key focus, defining it as an organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to crises. Various strategies have been implemented to support organizational resilience, from mobilizing resources and providing longer-term and more flexible funding, to accompaniment, capacity development, operational support and advocacy. While the UN Trust Fund has demonstrated commitment, there have been differences in terminology and framing used over the years, making it more difficult to measure effectiveness. This study therefore aims to co-create a framework with CSOs and WROs to define, conceptualize and determine the best strategies for supporting organizational resilience. This will ensure more optimal and targeted support for organizational resilience by the UN Trust Fund, and will provide important insights for the wider community working to end violence against women and girls (EVAW/G). The objective is to have a sustained impact on VAW/G in the context of feminist and women's movements.

Methodology and co-creators

Engaging 37 individuals from 34 organizations, including 24 that are currently receiving UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) grants, the participants that co-created this practice-based knowledge (PBK) represent diverse settings across 25 countries, primarily women's rights organizations (WROs) in Africa. The study employed online focus group discussions, dialogue on SHINE (the UN Trust Fund's virtual knowledge exchange hub) and written inputs to gather practical knowledge and co-create insights on organizational resilience.

Key findings

- **A framework emerged inductively from the practice-based knowledge (PBK) shared by civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) that defined organizational resilience as:** "The ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal, external and within the context of systemic discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups) while remaining dedicated to organizational mission and vision and the long-term goal of ending violence against women and girls and sustaining feminist and women's movements."
- **Participants in the study invariably described the characteristics of organizational resilience under five key themes:** (1) people and communities; (2) mission and values; (3) networks and partnerships; (4) strategies and systems; and (5) finances and resources. These themes are interconnected and do

6 Majumdar, S., Wood, G. (2020): "UNTF EVAW Briefing Note on the Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women through the lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations", New York: UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, May 2020 https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2020/External%20brief/Impact%20of%20COVID-19_V08_single%20page-compressed.pdf

7 UN Trust Fund "Covid-19 Immediate Response: Five Point Action Plan (2020) https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Executive%20Board/2020/Annual%20Session/Informals/trust%20fund%2024%20June/UNTF_Five%20Point%20Plan_3.pdf

8 UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 (UN Women, 2021) https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Images/2021/Strategic%20Plan%202021/2021strategic%20planfinal%20002compressed.pdf

Figure 1. A visual depiction of the thematic characteristics of organizational resilience

not follow a linear sequence. Not all participants reported all five facets, with some emphasizing only one or two (see Figure A).

- **Unpacking this further, organizational resilience was consistently portrayed by participants as both a mindset and an ability**. Participants drew comparisons with the perseverance of feminist activists throughout history and activists representing the needs of individuals facing various forms of discrimination.
- **Participants were unequivocal in highlighting the fundamental importance of organizational resilience as a prerequisite for effective and sustainable interventions to end violence against women and girls (EVAW/G).** Without the ability and conditions to be resilient, participants warned that WROs and CSOs would simply cease to exist, and the endeavor to end VAW/G would lack momentum. In essence, resilience does not exist in isolation but is intrinsically linked to broader movement objectives.
- **The ability of CSOs and WROs to be resilient depends on the enabling environment and conditions, often shaped by the actions of donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers.**
- **The UN Trust Fund's assistance has been effective in supporting organizational resilience in four main ways:** (1) promoting staff self-care (e.g. through a dedicated budget); (2) enhancing resilience during crises (e.g. through additional funding and flexibility in the use of project budgets); (3) maintaining project continuity (e.g. multi-year, three-year project grants,

at minimum); and (4) trusting civil society ownership (e.g. through empowering grant-making and management practices). A more in-depth look at the strengths and weaknesses of the UN Trust Fund will be explored in a second paper (Part Two of this study).

- **The PBK and insights shared in this paper have the potential to shape and influence the design of EVAW/G approaches, programming, policies and resource allocations (for the whole EVAW/G community).** This can be achieved through a clearer and more relevant conceptual framework for organizational resilience, directing action in support of CSOs and WROs.
- **The practice-based insights act as a call to action, highlighting that CSOs and WROs working on EVAW/G are severely underfunded but are still expected to be resilient and fill gaps in essential service delivery in the absence of State provision, amidst resistance and pushback against women's human rights.** CSOs and WROs cannot fulfill their essential role without investment in resilient organizational development.

Recommendations for donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers (in general)

- **Provide accessible, fully flexible (inclusive of core) funding for women's rights organizations (WROs) and civil society organizations (CSOs)**. For example, offer emergency funding during crises and emergencies. Ensure funding is accessible (including for smaller organizations) with simple application processes.
- **Make long-term, multi-year commitments to CSOs and WROs to enable them to deliver sustainable approaches**. For example, avoid short-term, one-off, project-based or solely donor-driven support that does not embed a sustainable approach.
- **Facilitate partnerships, collaboration and networks that enable the leadership and central role of WROs and CSOs working on ending violence against women and girls (EVAW/G) to shift power dynamics**. For example, ensure CSOs and WROs can lead in all relevant multi-stakeholder forums on EVAW/G.
- **Embrace trust-based, flexible partnership modalities and ensure capacity development initiatives are demand driven**. For example, allow CSOs and WROs autonomy to adapt programmes and operations to evolving needs and various contexts.
- **Invest in policy making, research and action that address the root causes of violence against women and girls (VAW/G).** For example, invest in research led by CSOs and WROs, and in policies and strategies that tackle the root causes of VAW/G and the backlash against women's human rights.

Recommendations for the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

Refine the current definition of organizational resilience to encompass specific traits and characteristics identified by participants. Test, validate and refine this further with a larger group of practitioners.

Articulate a more specific conceptual framework outlining how the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) will facilitate organizational resilience. Use this to inform specific grant-making, operational, knowledge management and advocacy actions.

Use this brief as a Call to Action to mobilize donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers, in collaboration with the EVAW/G community, around the critical need to invest in the organizational resilience of women's rights organizations (WROs) and civil society organizations (CSOs). Leveraging its unique position as an inter-agency UN mechanism, the UN Trust Fund should use its platform and UN Women's partners, especially at regional and country level, to jointly draw attention to this issue, collaborating with partners to ensure that messages are heard, amplified and discussed at key decision-making forums.

Effectively disseminate practice-based knowledge (PBK) findings on organizational resilience and engage in further collaboration with practitioners and researchers to generate additional practice-based insights on this topic.

1. Introduction

1.1. About organizational resilience

BOX 1

The UN Trust Fund's Strategic Focus on Organizational Resilience

The UN Trust Fund's Strategic Plan (SP) 2021-25 includes a specific output on organizational resilience, namely that "More CSOs/WROs are enabled through UN Trust Fund organizational support, accompaniment and capacity development to be resilient and adaptable organizations." The SP's theory of action states that resilience is important because CSOs, especially WROs, are a key channel for reaching women and girls, especially those most at risk of being left behind. They deliver essential, specialist services and prevention programmes that reach communities in need, often when there is a lack of (or lack of access to) government services.

According to the SP, evidence shows that CSOs and WROs are critical in preventing and ending violence against women and girls (VAW/G), especially for community-level responses and prevention efforts, and for tackling attitudinal and social norms that uphold gender inequality. Furthermore, they often represent survivors and support women and girls as agents of change who have voice and agency over their own lives – critical to achieving gender equality.

"Resilience" can be defined as an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. [9] More commonly used in psychology and human behavior studies as a term to describe individual resilience,[10] it seems to be in more frequent use among governmental, private and non-governmental sectors to refer to organizational and/or institutional capacity to withstand or recover quickly from crises, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.[11]

UN Women and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) do not have a published definition for the concept of organizational resilience. However, the UN Trust Fund has a *working* definition,[12] and organizational resilience is a key focus of their Strategic Plan (SP) 2021–25 (see Box 1).

9 Source: Merriam Webster Dictionary (accessed on 18 November 2023) https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience

10 The American Psychological Association describes resilience as the "process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands." Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced. https://dictionary.apa.org/resilience

11 Example literature: Paeffgen, Thea. 2023. "Organisational Resilience during COVID-19 Times: A Bibliometric Literature Review" Sustainability 15, no. 1: 367. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15010367 ; Young, Dennis R. "Nonprofits as a Resilient Sector: Implications for Public Policy" Nonprofit Policy Forum, vol. 14, no. 3, 2023, pp. 237-253. https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2022-0038

12 The working definition is shared with all active UN Trust Fund grantees in the annual Grantee Survey, but it is not a published definition.

The UN Trust Fund defines organizational resilience as the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to crises, incremental change, and sudden disruptions in their internal and external environment, e.g., your organization has mechanisms in place to manage and mitigate both programmatic and operational risks that are working.

Group of certified girls in Boki, Nigeria. Credit: Friday Habila/Center for Women Studies and Intervention (Nigeria)

Resilience is also one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Core Programming Principles,[13] and the "*UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies*" defines resilience as follows:

"Resilience is the ability of individuals, households, communities, cities, institutions, systems and societies to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond and recover positively, efficiently and effectively when faced with a wide range of risks, while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and well-being for all".[14]

13 United Nations Programming Principles https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-1-Programming-Principles.pdf, page 7.

14 "UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies" (UN, 2020), p. 11 https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/UN-Resilience-Guidance-Final-Sept.pdf#:~:text=Resilience-building%20requires%20a%20systems,iii

The term "resilience" has also been used by other significant grantmakers and development organizations.

For example, the Ford Foundation is one of the leading voices on the topic and defines the term as "the ability of organizations and networks to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to unforeseen circumstances, and to seize opportunities, while staying true to mission."

The Ford Foundation's BUILD initiative aims to strengthen the resilience of CSOs and networks in the USA and around the world so that they can grow their impact further and "move the needle on inequality".[15]

Since resilience became more of a buzz word during the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative discourses and criticisms of the term have been emerging. While these criticisms are more relevant to individual, rather than organizational level resilience (referring to the more common narratives in psychological literature around human resilience), some activists and academics have written articles about the risk of the resilience discourse being "dehumanizing" especially when applied in a context of conflict and/or historic colonialism.[16]

Resilience has been labelled as problematic because it places the onus on the individual to be resilient on issues beyond their control, often ignoring layers of (structural) violence and power imbalance. Being resilient often relies on access to resources, which usually resides in the hands of those in power. Some activists and academics have therefore presented the case for a feminist perspective of organizational resilience,[17] rooted in feminist values of cooperation and inclusivity, as well as collective transformation. This case is based on the perspective that notions of organizational resilience to date stem from normative masculine organizational practices, which can restrict access to benefits for women and marginalized groups. Analyzing organizational resilience through a "traditional" lens of hierarchical, top-down organizational structures and access to resources in an unequal society may perpetuate models that do not lead to positive change for women and marginalized groups.

This alternative discourse on resilience proposed by some activists and academics involves a collective and caring approach that recognizes and deals with the root causes of violence.[18] Applying a feminist lens to organizational issues has been described as a critical way to put vision, mission and principles at the heart of organizational development, for a truly transformative agenda. In fact, some feminist funds and grantmakers, including the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and Fenomenal Funds, have been talking about resilience and focusing efforts on this for many years (even before the COVID-19 pandemic).[19]

For the AWDF, it is vital to recognize that organizational leadership cannot be conceived in a social and political

15 Ford Foundation "BUILD initiative" https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/building-institutions-and-networks/

16 The Dehumanizing Discourse of Resilience (Malaka Shwaikh, 28 May 2021) Article in Progress Policy Review. https://academic.oup.com/isagsq/article/3/2/ksad030/7198303
"Problematizing resilience: the development practice and the case of Palestine" (Keelan & Browne, 2019), Development in Practice https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339208904_Problematising_Resilience_Development_Practice_and_the_Case_of_Palestine

17 "Degendering organizational resilience –the Oak and Willow against the wind" (Hope Witmer, August 2019), Gender in Management, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335581438_Degendering_organizational_resilience_-_the_Oak_and_Willow_against_the_wind

18 "Beyond Expectations of Resilience: Towards a Language of Care" (Malaka Shwaik, 2023), Global Studies Quarterly, https://academic.oup.com/isagsq/article/3/2/ksad030/7198303

19 Fenomenal Funds (2023) Reimagining Power to Build Resilience, Fenomenal Funds: Washington, DC. https://staging.fenomenalfunds.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Reimagining_Power_to_Build_Resilience-EN.pdf

vacuum or within systems that are not designed to help them thrive or promote transformation.[20] They advocate for "Building an Organisation with a Soul" to tap into feminist potential, for individuals and organizations to stretch, learn and continue to grow.

"We often think of organisations as created to deliver outputs. However, organisations are not just functional – they are physical, emotional and spiritual. They have souls, and it is each organisation's soul song that keeps its rhythm going, energising and inspiring growth".[21]

Several UN Trust Fund grantees (current and former) are members of the feminist networks who have inspired the abovementioned work around the notions of resilience over the years.[22] The UN Trust Fund recognized this as an opportunity to contribute to the dialogue on organizational resilience by bringing grantees together to explore the subject.

This brief examination of external literature identified a gap on the topic of the organizational resilience of CSOs and WROs working specifically on ending violence against women and girls (EVAW/G), since the literature discusses resilience relating to the work of feminist movements and/or organizations in general, and not EVAW/G specifically. This study can therefore complement the considerable analysis already made on this topic by other feminist funds, academics and activists, through the lens of the practice-based knowledge of CSOs and WROs working to end VAW/G supported by the UN Trust Fund and others in their network.

1.2. About the study

This study is a component of the UN Trust Fund's ongoing efforts to prioritize and highlight practice-based knowledge (PBK) emerging from the work of CSOs. The study's primary objectives were: 1) to unpack the concept of organizational resilience based on practical experience; 2) to analyze the key characteristics defining an organization's ability to be resilient, by context and region, which should be documented and shared with the EVAW/G community to guide decision making; and 3) to understand how the UN Trust Fund's work has enabled organizational resilience of CSOs and WROs, particularly small grassroot organizations, and especially in the light of the pandemic and other intersecting crises. The research and analysis were conducted through an inclusive and participatory process involving UN Trust Fund grantees, specifically CSOs and WROs.

The research has been divided into two parts: this paper (Part One) shares the findings of objectives one and two above, and an accompanying paper (Part Two) will explore these findings in more depth, including objective three, as applicable to the UN Trust Fund's support. The audience for Part One is primarily donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers, since the findings present key messages from CSOs and WROs on why and how investment in organizational resilience is critical for sustaining progress on EVAW/G and support for women's and feminist movements. It will help shape Part Two by providing a conceptual framework and indicative definition of organizational resilience – from the voice of practitioners themselves – against which further knowledge can be extracted from UN Trust Fund supported projects.

20 Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu, "Strategies for Building an Organization with a Soul" (2015), African Institute for Integrated Responses to VAWG & HIV/AIDS (AIR), http://airforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Strategies-for-Building-an-Organisation-with-Soul-WEB.pdf

21 Ibid.

22 For example: "Building Organisational Resilience. Profile of Wangechi Wachira, Executive Director of Centre for Rights Education and Awareness" (25 August 2017), https://awdf.org/building-organisational-resilience-profile-of-wangechi-wachira-executive-director-of-centre-for-rights-education-and-awareness/

1.3. Key questions

This study first aimed to engage CSOs and WROs in a dialogue to understand what organizational resilience meant to them, through key questions asked in focus group and online discussions. Part Two will explore the UN Trust Fund's contribution and lessons learned on organizational resilience in the context of the PBK framework devised through Part One.

By ensuring that the definition and conceptual framing of organizational resilience is co-created, the research offers the opportunity to test, validate and enhance the UN Trust Fund's theory through practice, ultimately providing insights for more impactful strategies to support CSOs and WROs in their efforts to end violence against women and contribute to women's and feminist movements – for the UN Trust Fund and the broader EVAW/G community.

To engage CSOs and WROs in a dialogue on the subject of organizational resilience the following questions were devised, in consultation with the UN Trust Fund, to enable a conversation on the topic through a story-line approach. These questions would lead to an understanding of what organizational resilience is, why it is important and how it can be supported. The questions were translated into French and Spanish and tested in those languages, to ensure applicability to non-English speakers as well. Sub-questions were also used to dig deeper into participants' responses to facilitate a conversational approach to the dialogue.

1. **What are the characteristics of a resilient civil society organization?** Sub-question: how do CSOs define, conceptualize or characterize a resilient civil society or women's rights organization working on interventions to end violence against women and/or supporting women's and feminist movements?
2. **Why are resilient civil society and women's rights organizations important in the context of ending violence against women and girls and supporting women's and feminist movements?** Sub-question: are there examples of how being a resilient organization has contributed to ending violence against women and girls?
3. **What can donors, policymakers, grantmakers or other stakeholders and agents of change do more (or less) of to support resilient civil society and women's rights organizations?** Sub-question: are there any examples of good practices or lessons on how donors can support civil society organizations in being resilient?
4. **What contribution, if any, has the UN Trust Fund made (or not) to supporting your organization in being resilient?** Sub-question: what has the UN Trust Fund done well in supporting CSOs funded by them and what could be improved (according to the sample group)?

1.4. Methodology

The overall research approach adopted was participatory, iterative and inductive, given the complex and evolving nature of the topic. This approach prioritized learning and adaptation throughout the research process, focusing on gathering insights and observations without preconceived theories or hypotheses. In other words, the definitions and concepts mentioned above were not introduced during the data collection phase with participants. Active participation, dialogue and exchange were encouraged through the selected data collection methods, including both verbal and written interaction with participants in multiple languages, enriching the understanding of the subject.

The aim was to co-create knowledge with CSO and WRO participants, engaging them in providing, analyzing, validating and peer reviewing insights generated. This collaborative process aimed to allow participants to actively contribute their unique perspectives, experiences and knowledge, fostering a sense of shared ownership and enabling collective shaping and refinement of the knowledge being produced. Ultimately, this approach was geared towards utility, aiming to generate practical and timely knowledge that could be usefully applied after the study.

Those invited to take part in the study consisted of two main target groups: (1) active UN Trust Fund grantees currently implementing three-year projects,[23]

23 CSOs and WROs awarded grants by the UN Trust Fund in 2021 (Cycle 24) and 2022 (Cycle 25) for three-year projects (2021-2024, or 2022-2025). Cycle 26 grantees (awarded grants in 2023) were purposively excluded, as these organizations had not yet started their projects. However, some were awarded grants at the tail end of the study and hence were invited to the SHINE discussion.

totaling 74 organizations; and **(2) members of SHINE**,[24] the UN Trust Fund's online knowledge exchange hub, comprising over 2,000 individuals, including current and former grantees and other (non-UN Trust Fund) representatives of CSOs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Active grantees were expected to have the most interest due to their existing partnership with the UN Trust Fund, but to ensure diverse voices and discussions in over 50 languages, the SHINE online network was included.

The study utilized three main data collection methods: (1) **focus group discussions** (FDGs) with active UN Trust Fund grantees, in English, French and Spanish; (2) an **online, interactive discussion** on the SHINE hub open to all registered users in more than 50 languages; and (3) **written inputs from participants** by email. Two FGDs were conducted in September 2023, while the SHINE online discussion spanned eight weeks from August to October 2023, with the research questions posed at bi-weekly intervals. Moderators, including an external consultant and UN Trust Fund staff, encouraged dialogue and asked probing sub-questions. A summary of responses was posted as a comment in the discussion for validation on SHINE, and participants shared quotes, links and images during the discussions. Steps were taken to protect privacy and ensure confidentiality during the data collection process.[25]

The data analysis approach included first transcribing the insights gathered through the FGDs and SHINE discussion into written text, and then systematically sorting, categorizing and labeling specific parts of the text into similar emerging themes, which arose inductively from the practice-based insights. Using a thematic analysis approach, alongside an iterative and inductive approach, allowed the themes to be refined and developed based on grounded, practice-based insights (rather than pre-conceived hypothesizes). The written reports of the FGDs and SHINE discussion – based on the analysis – were then shared with the participants for validation and additional inputs (in three languages), to test and hone the findings. The final report was also shared with all participants for reliability testing, validation and refinement. UN Trust Fund staff were also included in two sense-making workshops in order to test the findings and recommendations with them, and to share the conclusions and recommendations.

1.5. Limitations to the study

The study has certain limitations that may impact the applicability of the findings. Firstly, the findings are skewed towards insights from grantees, specifically those awarded grants in 2021 and 2022. To address this bias, future phases of research will involve testing the findings with other CSOs in the UN Trust Fund network and beyond. **Secondly, UN Trust Fund staff played a role in organizing the FGDs, taking notes and moderating the SHINE discussion.** While their presence may have influenced participants' openness, the consultant tried to mitigate this by ensuring that the UN Trust Fund staff involved were not directly managing the specific projects or grantees in question. Additionally, the consultant provided their email for confidential feedback to maintain impartiality. **Thirdly, the researcher's prior employment with the UN Trust Fund from January 2015 to December 2022 may introduce potential bias.** However, the researcher disclosed this experience at the beginning of the study and committed to minimizing any associated bias.

It is also important to acknowledge that the researcher could not conduct a comprehensive analysis of the variations in insights provided by participants from different contexts (such as humanitarian versus development), regions, types of organizations (such as WROs versus international non-governmental organizations, INGOs), or other criteria. This restriction arose from the limited size and random nature of the sample group, making it challenging to purposefully disaggregate the data. A more comprehensive analysis of these differences will be conducted in the next phase of the project, which will involve a larger sample and an examination of project reports and evaluations.

24 SHINE is the UN Trust Fund's online hub for global knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls https://www.shinehub.org/home

25 *Privacy, confidentiality and security:* Online discussions were conducted in secure, confidential spaces, exclusively for registered individuals who consented to participate. In Zoom FGDs, participants were notified of recording and note-taking for research purposes only, with a clear agreement not to share information beyond these spaces without explicit written consent. All records were securely stored on UN Women's protected servers. Additionally, participant names and identifiers were omitted in the draft and final reports to maintain confidentiality, except in cases where written permission was given to acknowledge their contributions.

2. The UN Trust Fund's support for organizational resilience

The UN Trust Fund has been on an evolving, 15-year long journey of supporting facets of organizational resilience, albeit under different terms and definitions. This began in 2009 with the introduction of capacity development workshops for all CSOs awarded UN Trust Fund grants, with a focus on "traditional" aspects of organizational strengthening, such as training CSOs on how to effectively plan, monitor and evaluate EVAW/G projects, as well as financial and operational management.

The journey evolved in 2013 to recognize and target the unique skills and resourcing needs of smaller CSOs and WROs, inspired by research from feminist networks that demonstrated the link between these organizations and the effectiveness of women's movements.[26] Thus the UN Trust Fund introduced the Small Grants Window of funding, which aimed to enhance the organizational capacities of smaller CSOs and WROs through dedicated resources, accompaniment and capacity development. This strategy sought to empower smaller organizations as key catalysts for change within feminist and women's movements to end VAW/G. Support for smaller CSOs and WROs continues today through prioritization in calls for proposals, special budget provisions, advocacy and amplification of their voice through UN Trust Fund networks.

The term "organizational resilience" has been used interchangeably by the UN Trust Fund since then, alongside "capacity" or "organizational" or "institutional" strengthening and/or development, often connected to the importance of flexible funding for CSOs and WROs and investments in organizational health (such as flexible funding and self-care as inputs/characteristics of organizational resilience). For example, in 2017, the UN Trust Fund piloted two new budget allocations for small grants: one for self-care costs and another for core funding.[27] A survey on the use of the self-care budget by grantees found that the funds had been used effectively for investment in organizational resilience.[28]

Recognizing that organizational issues within EVAW/G programming were not just relevant to smaller grantees, the UN Trust Fund elevated the issue across the EVAW/G ecosystem by including the topic for debate at the 2019 Global Grantee Convention.[29] Involving hundreds of current grantees and partners across the EVAW/G network, this convention highlighted the significance of robust operational systems for sustainable viability

26 For example, the seminal AWID report "Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots" argued that "the 'leaves'– the individual women and girls – are receiving growing attention, without recognizing or supporting 'the roots' – the sustained, collective action by feminists and women's rights activists and organizations that has been at the core of women's rights advancements throughout history"

27 Core funding is defined in the UN Trust Fund EVAW Strategic Plan as "Core funding (also referred to as unrestricted funding) is flexible funding that can be used for general operations. Core funds should contribute to the realization of the organization's mission and vision and help support social change processes the organization is committed to. Available from Cycle 21 onwards".

28 Internal, unpublished survey.

29 Article on the "First UN Trust Fund Grantee Convention: Bosnia and Herzegovina 2019" (24 October 2019), UN Trust Fund EVAW website, https://untf.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2019/10/first-un-trust-fund-grantee-convention-bosnia-and-herzegovina-2019

of CSOs, particularly emphasizing the need for effective operational functions.

The significance of this need became ever more pertinent during the COVID-19 pandemic, when PBK co-created with grantees in early 2020 highlighted the crucial need for organizational resilience in addressing the reported rise in VAW/G.[30] Grantees emphasized the necessity for urgent, flexible funding to enhance resilience, covering aspects such as upgrading information and communication technology and improving health and safety measures.

The UN Trust Fund responded rapidly through a five-point action plan, providing additional resources and flexibility for grantees to adapt to the crisis.[31] Furthermore, in a collaboration with the Spotlight Initiative, the UN Trust Fund provided US$9 million in additional funding for institutional (organizational) strengthening of existing grantees in Sub-Saharan Africa to respond to the double pandemic.[32] The Call for Proposals (CFP) 2020 was also dedicated to the issue, in which additional special budget provisions were introduced for organizational strengthening, addressing challenges posed by the pandemic to the survival of CSOs and WROs working in that context.[33]

The transition to the concept of organizational resilience gained momentum in the development of the UN Trust Fund's Strategic Plan 2021–25. Influenced by insights from PBK, the plan emphasized the strategic focus on enabling CSOs and WROs to become resilient and adaptable entities through resourcing, organizational support and capacity development. The plan recognizes the importance of CSOs, particularly WROs, as key channels for reaching women and girls, delivering essential services and challenging gender inequality.

Operationalizing the focus on organizational resilience continued in the 2022 and 2023 CFPs, by explicitly centering on organizational preparedness and resilience, especially when working within contexts of protracted crises.[34] Guidance to applicants emphasized the need to plan for the organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, resist, adapt, respond to and recover from risks and changes. The UN Trust Fund also introduced more flexible and core support for CSOs and WROs, paying increased attention to self and collective care and contingency funding, as well as increased core funding.

In parallel to the learning on organization resilience, the UN Trust Fund has been investigating the significance of women's and feminist movements in ending VAW/G through the co-creation of PBK with grantees. In the UN Trust Fund's "movement building" series, building organizational power has been identified by grantees as a vital part of building the core capacity of EVAW/G organizations to operate sustainably and effectively over time.[35] This includes strengthening the ability of organizations to work in an adaptive, resilient manner within evolving and often challenging social, political and environmental contexts, so they can respond to emerging needs regarding VAW/G. In broad terms, it also includes bolstering organizational capacities in fundamental areas such as leadership, management, policies, infrastructure, staff subject area knowledge and skills, fundraising and administration.

To conclude, the UN Trust Fund has been investing in facets of grantees' organizational resilience for 15 years, including the enhancement and prioritization of: (1) resources and funding for CSOs and WROs; (2) flexibility

30 Majumdar, S., Wood, G. (2020): "UNTF EVAW Briefing Note on the Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women through the lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations", New York: UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, May 2020 https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2020/External%20brief/Impact%20of%20COVID-19_V08_single%20page-compressed.pdf

31 UN Trust Fund "Covid-19 Immediate Response: Five Point Action Plan (2020) https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Executive%20Board/2020/Annual%20Session/Informals/trust%20fund%2024%20June/UNTF_Five%20Point%20Plan_3.pdf

32 PRESS RELEASE: Spotlight Initiative, European Union and UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women announce additional USD9 million for women's organizations during COVID-19 pandemic, https://untf.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/04/announcement-of-additional-usd9-million-for-women-organizations-during-covid19-pandemic

33 UN Trust Fund grants awarded in CFP 2020: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/grant-giving/untf-grants/grantees-24th-cycle-2021

34 UN Trust Fund grants awarded in CFP 2021 https://untf.unwomen.org/en/grant-giving/untf-grants/grantees-25th-cycle-2022 and CFP 2022 https://untf.unwomen.org/en/grant-giving/untf-grants/grantees-26th-cycle-2023

35 UN Trust Fund's "Movement Building" series: https://untf.unwomen.org/en/learning-hub/knowledge-products/movement-building

within budget provisions; (3) advocacy for the role CSOs and WROs (especially small WROs) play in ending violence against women and girls; (4) co-creation and elevation of PBK; (5) attention to self-care of activists and practitioners; (6) improvements to CFPs to make funding accessible and flexible; (6) resource mobilization to raise more and longer-term resources for CSOs and WROs; and (7) capacity development for programmatic and organizational effectiveness, amongst other steps.

The UN Trust Fund journey on organizational resilience has evolved through a series of strategic shifts and practical insights based on PBK from grantees and learning from broader EVAW/G networks (see Figure 2). This short summary recognizes the UN Trust Fund's efforts to support organizational resilience and also identifies differences in terminology and framing over the years, reaffirming the research gap this study can fill to provide a more precise framework based on the PBK of CSOs and WROs.

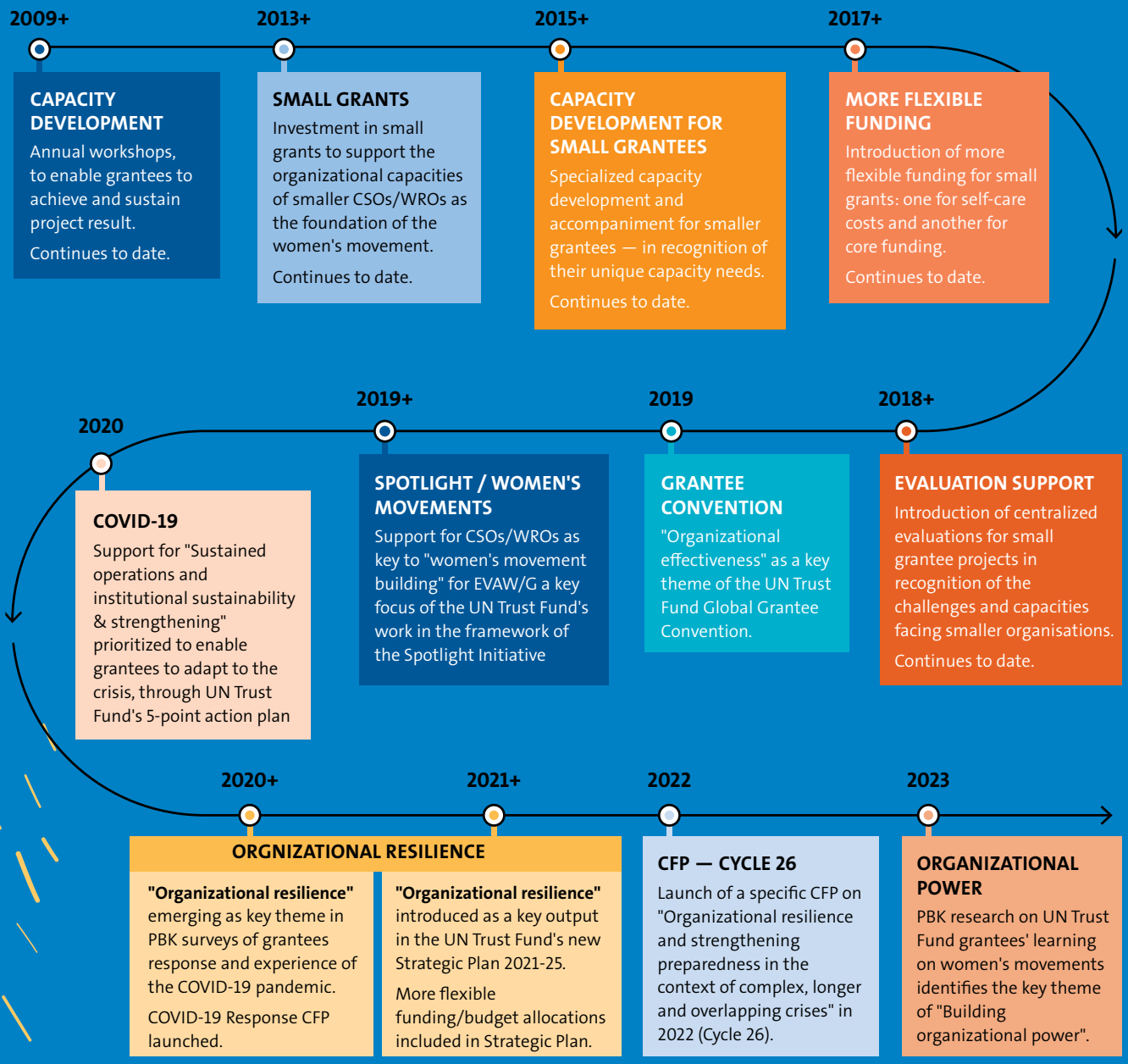


Figure 2: The UN **Trust Fund journey on organizational resilience**

3. About the participants

The participants in the study who co-created the practice-based knowledge reflect the diversity and breadth of the UN Trust Fund's network. The FGDs and SHINE discussion involved 37 individuals from 34 organizations,[36] **of which 24 were UN Trust Fund grantee organizations** (current and former) and seven represented other, non-UN Trust Fund CSOs or NGOs. The SHINE discussion online attracted 53 comments, the highest number for a SHINE discussion to date, involving 24 individuals.

37 PEOPLE

34 ORGANIZATIONS

24 UN TRUST FUND GRANTEES

25 COUNTRIES

Geographic representation

Participants were based in 25 countries across all five UN Trust Fund regions of focus: Africa (12), Asia and the Pacific (4), Europe and Central Asia (4), Latin America and the Caribbean (4), and North Africa and Arab States (1).

Africa was the most represented. The 25 countries were: Afghanistan, Albania, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Guatemala, India, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Mexico, Nepal, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Serbia, Somalia, South Africa, Suriname, Tajikistan and Togo. Nigeria was the most represented country, with three participants across the FGDs and SHINE discussion, followed by Kenya, Nepal, Rwanda and South Africa (each with two participants).

Types of organization

Of the 24 UN Trust Fund grantees, 19 were women's rights organizations, three identified as human rights organizations, one as a development CSO and one as an LBGTIQ+ organization. Of the non-grantees, nine identified as CSOs or NGOs and one as an international NGO (SHINE does not identify WROs or smaller organizations, although some described themselves as such in comments online). Of the grantees, 15 were smaller CSOs receiving small grants (US$150,000 and under) from the UN Trust Fund, while nine were larger organizations receiving larger grants (from US$150,001 to US$1 million).

19 WROS

10 CSOS /NGOs*

3 HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

1 LGBTQI+ ORGANIZATIONS

1 INTERNATIONAL NGO
Not possible to define by type/focus

36 These grantees received grants from the UN Trust Fund in grant cycles from Cycle 21 (2019) to the most recent Cycle 26 (2023), including those provided funds under the Spotlight initiative, with a higher representation from Cycles 24 and 25 due to the researcher's targeted approach. The participation rate from Cycles 24 and 25 was reasonable at 32% compared to the initial sample size of 74 grantees targeted.

Organizational settings/geographic context

The organizations represented were based in diverse settings, encompassing both humanitarian and developmental scenarios. Country settings ranged from upper-middle income levels to the least developed contexts, experiencing a variety of intersecting crises and challenges (see more detail in the findings below), including conflict and post-conflict settings. Significantly, given the sample group, those grantees in Cycle 24 were awarded grants in the UN Trust Fund's COVID-19 Response Window, hence the tendency for the study to lean slightly towards insights focused on addressing EVAW/G in the context of the pandemic.

Project focus

The participants' projects varied, covering different types of interventions and forms of violence, ranging from intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual harassment in the workplace, to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict settings. Interventions were focused evenly across the three main outcome areas of the UN Trust Fund: (1) improved access for women and girls to essential, specialist, safe and adequate multisectoral services; (2) increased effectiveness of legislation, policies, national action plans and accountability; and (3) improved prevention of VAW/G through changes in behaviours, practices and attitudes.

Beneficiary/ constituency groups

A high proportion of the organizations taking part in the study aim to tackle the multiple intersecting forms of discrimination that women and girls face, making them more at risk from violence.

This included a significant focus on the overlapping identities of Indigenous women and girls, women and girls from ethnic minority groups, internally displaced women and girls, and those living with disability. Other constituent groups benefitting or involved in the sample of UN Trust Fund projects included survivors of violence, women and girls living with HIV and/or AIDS, self-identified sex workers, women and girls from low-income groups, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex (LGBTQI+) people.

In summary, it is important to highlight that this report represents insights predominately from representatives of women's rights organizations (over 50% of the organizations represented) and organizations in Africa (50% of the countries represented). The other participants come from diverse contexts and countries, ranging from Afghanistan to Tajikistan, Ecuador and Serbia. This distribution aligns well with the current overall proportions in the UN Trust Fund's portfolio, as does the range in project intervention type and constituency groups of focus, given that the UN Trust Fund has placed explicit focus on addressing the needs of marginalized women facing intersecting forms of discrimination and violence in calls for proposals.

4. Key findings

This section presents the study's findings in response to each research question. The discussions have been synthesized and summarized by incorporating direct insights, quotes and written contributions from the CSOs involved. In recognition of the extensive experience, expertise and knowledge of the discussants, the researcher **fully attributes the following text to them and views these insights as co-created through collaboration**.

To be true to the dialogue with the participants, the findings are presented in the format and flow of the discussion following the research questions, with quotes provided verbatim. Analysis (by the researcher) of the connections between the answers – to dig deeper into the contribution these findings offer the EVAW/G community – can be found in the conclusions section. **Some findings below may raise more questions and answers, which will be discussed later in the report and/or in the second accompanying paper, Part Two.**

4.1. What is the context for resilience?

To kick off the discussion, participants talked about the various challenges, crises and adversities being experienced by civil society organizations working in the field of EVAW/G. During the discussions, many examples were provided, which can be summarized as follows:

- **External factors** originating from outside organizations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health-related challenges (including Ebola), conflict, climate change impacts, natural disasters, shifts in government policies or legislation, economic crises, and resistance and backlash against gender equality from society, institutions and/or communities.
- **Internal factors** originating from within organizations (exacerbated by external factors), including staff stress and burnout, financial instability or a lack of funds, shortages in human resources and staff capacity, difficulties in attracting and retaining staff, office and staff security, and the depreciation of infrastructure and equipment.

It was emphasized by some participants that women and girls are disproportionately affected by various crises due to intersecting forms of discrimination, and the CSOs supporting them therefore have to tackle these compounded challenges. This risk was reported as intensified by the context of entrenched discrimination, gender inequality and harmful social norms in many contexts, and diminishing resources available for civil society organizations working towards gender equality and EVAW/G overall. In the words of one discussant, from an organization representing the human rights of people living with disability:

"In our organization we consider having resilience since we constantly train ourselves to face the adversities of the project itself as well as the political situation in our country. Resilience is a fundamental axis, we believe it must be constantly under construction, especially from various perspectives such as anti-ableism."[37] *(Quote from participant)*

37 Ableism is discrimination in favour of non-disabled people. Source: https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/disablism/

Figure 3. Challenges experienced by CSOs & WROs

Within the framework of this resilience-focused discussion, participants consistently alluded to the intersection of internal and external factors intertwined with power dynamics and the foundational systems of oppression and discrimination. These dynamics, particularly directed against women, girls and marginalized groups, were reported as creating a multiplier effect, amplifying the magnitude of crises, challenges and adversities that necessitate resilience.

Numerous participants drew parallels by comparing and merging the challenges and adversities encountered by organizations in a broader context with the opposition to women's human rights in general.

In essence, the participants engaged in the field of EVAW/G emphasized the inseparable connection of these challenges (see Figure 3).

"Everyone talked before about how important it is that activists don't burn out. I burn out at least twice a year. It's very challenging to keep up and now we have new challenges: right wing, anti-LGBT, anti-women movements, ... we didn't have it before. We see that when we don't have sustainability, when we struggle for support, we struggle for donors, there are challenges everywhere. I think WROs, LGBT organizations, are amongst the most resilient ones, facing all these challenges systematically." (Quote from participant)

The intricate relationship between adversities and challenges confronting CSOs and WROs, especially those involved in EVAW/G and feminist and women's movements, became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants in the discussion focused extensively on the organizational response to this crisis. But for many, this crisis was only one of the enduring and myriad challenges faced by CSOs and WROs dedicated to EVAW/G.

"The word resilience came more into greater use after COVID-19. We're always adapting and overcoming challenges in our history. But now it's more structured about the need for organizations to be resilient." (Quote from participant)

Participants elaborated on the pivotal role played by CSOs and WROs in addressing gaps left by the State in providing essential services for survivors of VAW/G during the pandemic and for communities at large, which faced limitations in accessing services during lockdowns and restrictions. The pandemic introduced a number of challenges, including a surge in VAW/G, disruptions in crucial services and economic difficulties, underscoring the heightened significance of CSOs and WROs. Some participants viewed this situation as an opportunity to raise the profile of essential service provision:

"Before COVID-19 it was very difficult to get money on ending VAW/G, no one [i.e., donors] was interested in service provision, only in prevention. When COVID-19 happened, it became really well known in the media, being forced to stay with someone at home and being beaten, COVID-19 kind of saved us in a way as people realized the need to invest in service provision." (Quote from participant)

The participants in this study represented organizations that have always endured and persisted in their endeavors to deliver interventions to end VAW/G. However, they consistently report ongoing challenges stemming from inadequate State provision, insufficient funding and, in many cases, active resistance to their initiatives.

"Grassroots initiatives can face opposition from established institutions, powerful interests or cultural norms that resist change. Resilience enables these organizations to persist in the face of resistance and navigate complex political landscapes. And for us to mitigate this, we now have community-based actors who come from these communities." (Quote from participant)

4.2. What is a resilient civil society organization?

In the context of the myriad crises, challenges and adversities noted above, the discussion participants were asked to articulate their own understanding and experiences of organizational resilience in terms of definitions, concepts and characteristics. Specifically:

QUESTION 1: What are the characteristics of a resilient civil society organization? For instance, how do you define, conceptualize or characterize a resilient civil society or women's rights organization working on interventions to end violence against women and/or supporting women's and feminist movements?

Some of the participants had clear and well-articulated definitions of organizational resilience, with at least 15 people in the SHINE discussion (representing all five geographic regions in the sample) writing specific definitions in the online conversation and many others across the FGD and SHINE discussions outlining elements of resilience. When talking about a resilient CSO, many participants shared a vision of what happens when a CSO is resilient, in other words, what organizational resilience looks like in practice.

The following key words arose inductively from the discussions: the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal and external) while remaining dedicated to organizational mission and vision and working towards long-term, sustainable goals – in this context, ending violence against women and girls and supporting feminist and women's movements.

"[Resilience] is about adaptability, malleability, that organizations can move to be resilient and face the waves, like the waves of feminism, we need to face the waves of crises, whether the war in Ukraine, migration, the earthquake in Haiti, so many things that hit us every day, so it would be logical that we are moving from one side the next, but also to find the capacity to face these needs without losing the essence of the organization." (Quote from participant)

Participants frequently expressed a common sentiment regarding resilient CSOs and WROs which can be encapsulated as having a mindset of "surviving and thriving" and "never giving up" in the face of adversities. Resilient CSOs demonstrate unwavering perseverance and determination in pursuing their organizational objectives and maintaining their values and principles even in the face of adversity, crises and challenges. In the words of one discussant:

"A resilient civil society organization, especially one working in the realm of women's rights or feminist movements to address issues like violence against women, is an organization that demonstrates the ability to effectively adapt, endure and thrive in the face of challenges, disruptions and changing circumstances. Resilience in this context goes beyond mere survival; it involves the capacity to evolve, learn and maintain its core mission and values despite external pressures, setbacks and uncertainties." (Quote from participant)

The participants consistently described resilient organizations as those that have the capacity to respond to crises in a timely and effective manner, emphasizing both short-term crisis management and long-term strategies for sustainable change. They report viewing setbacks as opportunities for improvement, fostering a culture of innovation and learning. Importantly, for the participants, resilience extends beyond mere survival: it involves the capacity to respond, evolve, learn and maintain core values despite external pressures.

Discussion in the framework of the seminar-workshop" Women and Cities: Territorial (In)Justices".
Credit: Laura Zanotti and Celeste Onaindia/Centro de Intercambio y Servicios para el Cono Sur Argentina (Argentina)

"Resilience is undoubtedly a key factor in the success and sustainability of civil society organizations. A resilient organization can weather challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue to effectively serve its mission and stakeholders. In my view, a resilient civil society organization is one that has the ability to not only navigate external shocks and uncertainties but also to learn and grow from them. It's an organization that fosters a culture of innovation and learning, where setbacks are seen as opportunities for improvement." (Quote from participant)

The link between resilience and the ability of CSOs and WROs to work strategically for EVAW/G and women's and feminist movements was frequently articulated by participants. The ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal and external) while remaining dedicated to the mission and vision of EVAW/G, was reported as a long journey requiring perseverance, mirroring the intergenerational work of women's and feminist movements overall (See Figure 4 for a visual depiction of this journey and the emerging definition of organizational resilience within this). In the words of one discussant:

"It [resilience] is so important for organizations working to improve the general feminist movement because it's such a long journey ... Plus, it has so many layers to it.... Organizations have to be resilient because nothing will change overnight, because we are not part of the first group of women to fight this fight, and there will be another generation afterwards." (Quote from participant)

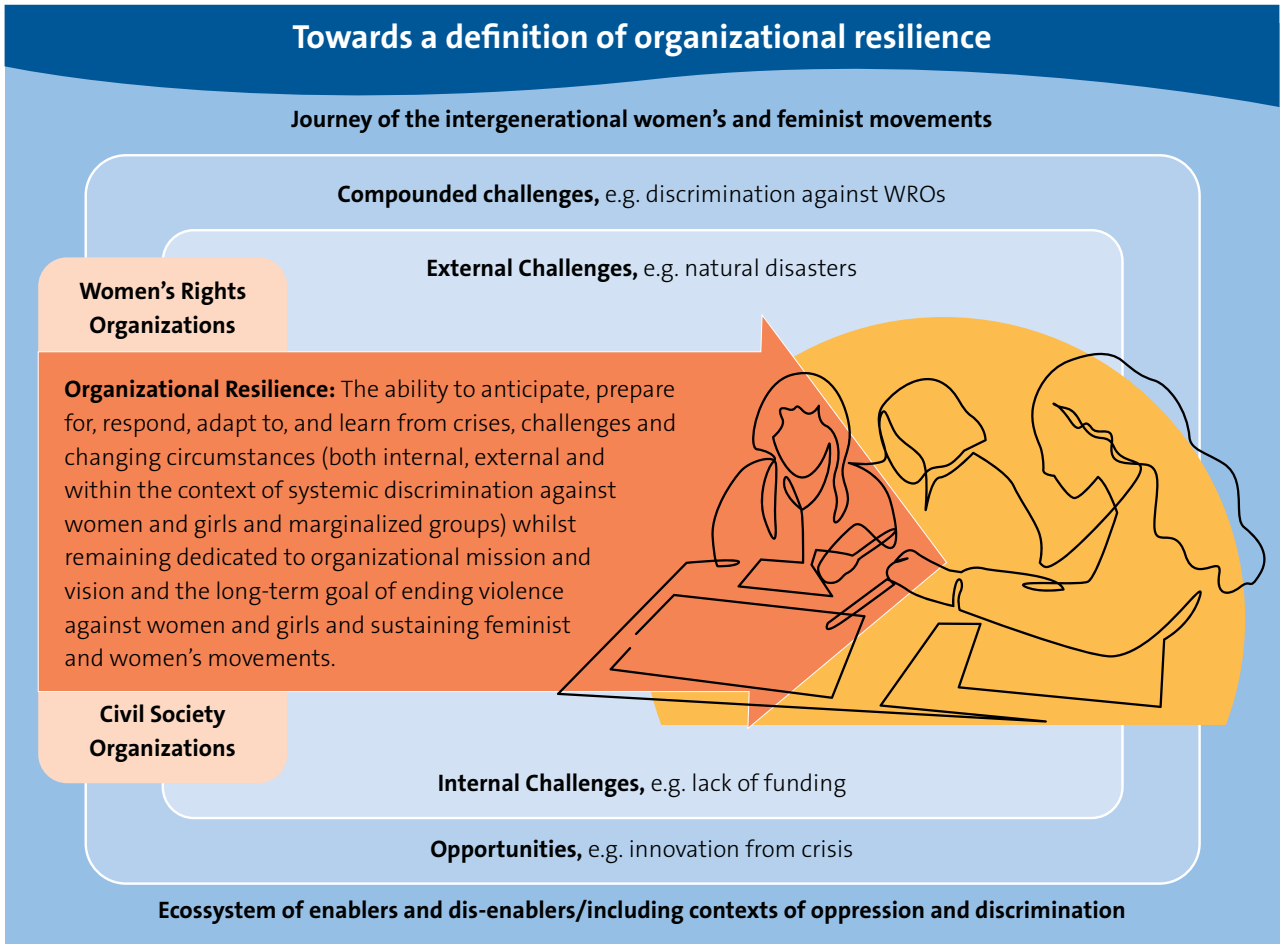


Figure 4. A visual depiction of the journey of organizational resilience

4.3. What are the characteristics of a resilient civil society organization?

Moving on to the characteristics of resilience, participants invariably described the qualities, features or attributes that determine whether an organization can "be resilient", under several key themes. **Five key interrelated themes emerged inductively from the FGDs and online interactions: (1) people and communities; (2) mission and values; (3) networks and partnerships; (4) strategies and systems; and (5) finance and resources** (refer to Figure 5 below and Box 2 for an explanation of each theme). These themes are interconnected and do not follow a linear sequence. Not all participants reported all five facets, with some emphasizing only one or two.

The characteristics that determine resilience often relate to the capacity or ability of the CSOs and WROs to access and use resources, skills or expertise to plan, adapt and adjust to crises and change, which cannot happen in a vacuum, relying on the ecosystem around the organizations. This issue will be explored further in the next section on what donors, policymakers and grantmakers can do to support resilience, as these characteristics were reported by participants as being dependent – in many cases – on the enabling environment and conditions (such as the availability of donor/government funding).

What is a resilient civil society organization?
What do practitioners consider to be the characteristics?

Practitioners were requested to articulate their own understanding and personal experiences in terms of concepts and characteristics of organizational resilience.

The analysis revealed **five key interrelated themes** that emerged from the FGDs and online interactions: (1) people and communities; (2) mission and values; (3) networks and partnerships; (4) strategies and systems; and (5) financial resources

It is important to note that these themes are interconnected and do not follow a linear sequence. All are required.

Figure 5. A visual depiction of the thematic characteristics of organizational resilience

BOX 2: WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A RESILIENT CSO/WRO WORKING ON EVAW/G?

A summary of the findings

(1) People and Community: CSOs that are resilient are characterized by committed feminist leaders and dedicated staff, often drawn from the communities they serve. They prioritize the well-being, mental health, self and collective care of their staff, fostering a supportive work environment. Through dedicated staff and grassroots activism, CSOs establish deep connections with and earn the trust of the communities, women and girls they assist. Trust between the people served and WROs and CSOs is a critical element of sustaining efforts to end VAW/G and advance women's and feminist movements over the long term.

(2) Mission and Values: CSO that are resilient remain unwavering in their mission and commitment to serving communities, even in the face of adversity. They uphold their vision, mission and values, even when facing significant opposition and systemic oppression and discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups. Key values that characterize CSOs that are resilient include transparency and accountability, particularly towards the women, girls and communities they serve. Resilient CSOs demonstrate inner strength, perseverance and long-term commitment to the goals of EVAW/G and women's and feminist movements.

(3) Networks and Partnerships: CSOs that are resilient are characterized by effective networks and partnerships. They actively build and nurture networks of partners, allies and supporters, while also engaging with stakeholders who may be resistant or critical of their cause. Solidarity and collaboration are essential for maximizing shared resources and amplifying advocacy messages, particularly when facing strong opposition to women's human rights in some contexts. This is especially crucial for CSOs representing women with intersecting needs, who may encounter substantial backlash from multiple fronts.

(4) Strategies and Systems: CSOs that are resilient employ long-term strategies to achieve sustained impact and establish sound governance structures to guide and manage the organization towards tangible results. They implement robust systems for operational, risk and financial management, as well as adaptative approaches to navigate crises whilst maintaining a long-term vision of change. Continuous learning and feedback mechanisms are crucial for building resilience, with the recognition that learning from failures is just as valuable as learning from success.

(5) Finance and Resources: CSOs that are resilient are characterized by the ability to access and mobilize stable, long-term, flexible funding, including unearmarked or core funding, and maintain emergency reserves for crisis situations. They display creativity in overcoming financial constraints when resources are limited. Having optimal infrastructure, human resources, financial resources and operational capabilities are essential, with a particular emphasis on skilled staff and capable leadership with adaptative capacities. Resilience is further strengthened through proper recognition and compensation of staff (competitive salaries, health insurance and other benefits), including for community activists.

The following examples and quotes provide a deeper insight into the emerging themes, emphasizing the interconnected nature of these findings, with an illustrative description in Figure 6 (see end of the section).

PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY

Many participants began by focusing on the theme of people and community, which encompasses CSO staff, activists, community members and the women and girls they serve. As organizations are essentially composed of individuals who work for CSOs, often as members or representatives of the communities they assist, the participants emphasized that resilience can only be achieved if proper support is provided to these individuals.

For CSO personnel to be resilient and to effectively advocate for the most marginalized groups, the participants said it was crucial that the physical and mental well-being of staff, as well as collective welfare, are nurtured, which includes creating a healthy working environment. Individual resilience among staff members reflects and, in turn, contributes to organizational and community resilience, and vice versa.

Through healthy, empowered staff who are representative of the community served, the organization is more likely to be able to establish trust with the community, which is another critical characteristic of resilience. Participants emphasized that trust is essential to ensuring access to communities and the successful implementation of interventions to end VAW/G in the long-term.

"Being a resilient organization means having the possibility to advance what you're fighting for in very difficult environments, with very small resources, with lots of challenges and lots of factors making your work difficult. In resilient organizations you take care of yourself as an activist and of your staff." (Quote from participant)

MISSION AND VALUES

The participants noted that resilient CSOs are composed of feminist leaders and passionate individuals who uphold strong personal belief and value systems and possess the personal resilience necessary to steadfastly address VAW/G amid a variety of challenges. In the words of one participant: *"In our view, feminist leadership of the organization is one of the most important attributes to help organizations be more adaptable."* It is through this unwavering commitment at both the individual and collective levels that CSOs can maintain their dedication to their organizational vision, mission and values, ensuring resilience when faced with difficult circumstances. This includes a commitment to accountability and transparency with communities and stakeholders to foster trust.

With skilled staff and feminist leaders at the helm, the participants reported that CSOs are better equipped to tackle the complex and sensitive issues surrounding VAW/G alongside the multitude of challenges faced. They confront resistance from governments and institutions while advocating for women's human rights. They strategically navigate obstacles and challenges, whether at the community or national level. Several participants shared compelling stories about the long-term impact achieved by their organizations because of their ability to be resilient, highlighting the enduring influence on local and national women's and feminist movements. Without CSOs and WROs – including the skilled feminist activists that work for them – that are resilient to challenges, there would be a huge vacuum in efforts to stand up for women's human rights. In the words of one participant:

"Resilience in CSOs is having the capacity, the ability and the tools to continue to advance in the face of adversity. We work in a conflict region, and since the war broke out, we had to find a way to stay back. But if we had left, there would be a massive vacuum. A lot of crimes, sexual violence and human rights abuses would have gone unreported. It's about having the ability to balance between making sure your staff are safe, having policies, capacity and tools in place to withstand adversity, as well as continue to engage in the work you do." (Quote from participant)

NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The participants stressed the critical importance of networks and partnerships in building resilience, since addressing harmful social norms and human rights violations against women necessitates a broader societal and ecosystem transformation. Resilient CSOs understand that long-term change can only be accomplished by fostering effective collaboration at various levels, from the local to the national, involving a diverse array of multi-stakeholder partners and stakeholders.

Participants reported that these robust support networks are not only essential for achieving EVAW/G objectives but also for navigating setbacks and losses by drawing strength from solidarity. Discussants provided examples to illustrate how networks and partnerships can enhance

the collective resilience, fortitude and influence of CSOs, particularly WROs. Through solidarity with others, they are better equipped to handle disappointments, including the worst-case scenario of the tragic loss of human rights activists.

"A resilient organization ... has the ability to fight the disappointment within a group, to fight against losing its members and activists. Sometimes we are doing less than we wanted. That means it provides protection to its members and builds their personal strength to cope with what goes on outside. It is not just about fighting the outside players, but to fight from inside, to have a team that is supportive, and it can provide support, communication and exchange at a time when no one is feeling powerful enough to deal again, again and again with the pushback." (Quote from participant)

This partnership approach was cited as particularly important for the resilience of small grassroot organizations. Some participants highlighted the unique challenges that newer organizations face in building resilience compared to more established, mature organizations. Newer grassroot WROs were reported as needing more support on resilience, to ensure the next generation of women's and feminist CSOs were able to emerge, especially from local movements. INGOs were recognized for their significant role in providing capacity development, access to networks and other technical support to smaller CSOs. In the words of one participant:

"To us a partnership approach to working is very important. Small grassroot civil society organizations don't have the organizational capacity to keep up to date with all the international best practice, but know their community very well. Having access to resources that can suggest, prompt and mentor international best practice that has the potential to boost local interventions is very positive, and something that donors could take a lead on." (Quote from participant)

STRATEGIES AND SYSTEMS

Engaging in the work of EVAW/G and participating in women's and feminist movements is a long-term commitment. As a result, the participants emphasized the importance of CSOs having well-thought-out, enduring strategies and robust operational systems in place to effectively manage their organizations for the long term while having concrete plans for navigating crises when these hit, enabling resilience. This includes the need to strategize and establish plans that account for long-term financial viability and sustainability. Participants reported examples of devising strategies and planning tools that enable the team to adapt programmatic and operational activities to unforeseen events and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At their core, CSOs require robust and adequate human resources, operational, financial and risk management systems, and policies and procedures to sustain their existence and make them resilient to challenges and crises.

Several participants mentioned the challenge of balancing the need for long-term strategies with the demand for robust day-to-day operational, risk management and programmatic capacities. This is viewed as an ongoing, learning-oriented process, which calls for organizational openness to learning from both failures and successes. Some participants also highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of learning as a characteristic of resilience. Many examples from the pandemic were shared, illustrating how CSOs were able to adapt operationally and programmatically, such as transitioning from in-person to virtual activities during COVID-19 lockdowns, to improve their resilience to the crisis.

Local Caravan campaign to end sexual harassment of women at work. Credit: Joy Jovi Jabo Mercy Owuor/Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (South Sudan).

"[Resilience is] to adapt to the difficulties that arise, through difficult times, for example during COVID-19 when we were confined ... their [resilient organizations'] capacity to adapt to the changes that came up, the confinement to work from home, and yet still offer services to the users without any problems, taking into account the reduction in mobility we had at the time, at the end of the day it's [about] broaden[ing] our capabilities without losing sight of our identity as organizations." (Quote from participant)

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

All the participants emphasized that financial and resource stability is fundamental to resilience. CSOs that possess sufficient financial, human and operational resources, as well as the necessary infrastructure (such as vehicles, office space and equipment), to effectively carry out their mission, are reported as being more resilient. Moreover, for resilience, these organizations exhibit the capacity to manage these resources adeptly.

Several discussants underscored that the ultimate goal for most CSOs is to achieve financial independence through sustainable resource flows, which would reduce their reliance on external donors enabling resilience. Discussants identified financial security as a critical factor in ensuring that organizations have the essential human resources to deliver services and interventions resiliently. CSOs can only be resilient in the long-term if they have the means to attract and retain the right, skilled and capable leaders, managers and staff, which necessitates adequate funds to provide competitive compensation, including salaries, health insurance and benefits.

"The word resilience came more into greater use after COVID-19. We're always adapting and overcoming challenges in our history. But now it's more structured about the need for organizations to be resilient. I drove someone to the hospital who was giving birth to [a] baby conceived from rape. I didn't think, I just did it. But then later I realized that is resilience – reacting to difficulties. Human resources are so important. You have to look after yourself, distance from trauma even though you have empathy, and look after your staff. To build and leave a legacy. To teach others. To allow others to learn and continue the work." (Quote from participant)

Figure 6. The characteristics of organizational resilience in the context of EVAW/G

4.4. Why is organizational resilience important to EVAW/G?

The second question in the study explored organizational resilience in the context of EVAW/G and support for feminist and women's movements. Specifically:

QUESTION 2: Why are resilient civil society and women's rights organizations important in the context of ending violence against women and girls and supporting women's and feminist movements? For instance, do you have any examples of how being a resilient organization has contributed to ending violence against women and girls?

The participants were asked to provide examples of how organizational resilience contributes to EVAW/G and feminist and women's movements. On multiple occasions, discussants expressed the belief that the answer to this question was self-evident: without the ability and conditions to be resilient, CSOs, especially WROs, and women's and feminist movements simply would not exist, and the effort to end VAW/G would lack momentum.

As one focus group participant put it, "*The answer is implicit in the question itself!*" Nevertheless, the discussion was lively and detailed, underscoring the vital role of CSOs in the fight against VAW/G and in supporting broader women's and feminist movements (while acknowledging that the role of CSOs in movements can vary depending on their organizational type and operational context).

On analysis, five key interconnected themes emerged organically from the focus group discussions and online exchanges. The facets of resilience listed above enable CSOs and WROs to: (1) champion women's human rights locally; (2) navigate crises to sustain women's

and feminist movements; (3) empower and safeguard feminist and women leaders and activists; (4) hold duty-bearers to account and fill gaps in service delivery; and (5) implement sustainable, long-term interventions necessary for transformative change to end VAW/G (see Figure 7 below and Box 3 for more detail).

These themes appear to be intertwined, a holistic cycle of enabling factors reflecting the role of CSOs and WROs as both supporters of movements and intrinsically part of the women's and feminist movements themselves. In other words, you cannot have one without the other.

By enabling the facets of resilience listed above, CSOs reported being more able to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal and external) while remaining dedicated to their mission and vision to end VAW/G and support feminist and women's movements. The participants argued that only through resilience can these organizations and their staff adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring the continuity of efforts to end VAW/G and sustain the women's and feminist movements. In the words of one discussant:

"We [CSOs] are the soldiers, we are the voices that bring to light the injustice that is just ink on white paper, a policy in beautification for a vote. When we raise our voices in unity the world listens, for we make them hear. That for me is powerfully needed." (Quote from participant)

BOX 3: WHY ARE RESILIENT CIVIL SOCIETY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IMPORTANT IN THE CONTEXT OF ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS AND SUPPORTING WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS?

A summary of the findings

(1) Championing women's human rights locally: The journey towards women's human rights often starts at the grassroots and community levels, where individuals become aware of women's and girls' entitlement to live free from violence and discrimination. Grassroot and community-based CSOs and WROs therefore need to be resilient to uphold this foundational level of support.

(2) Navigating crises to sustain women's and feminist movements: The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of local CSOs and WROs in adapting and recalibrating their strategies to address the surge in VAW/G. CSOs and WROs are vital for sustaining women's and feminist movements and providing essential services that uphold women's human rights, particularly during crises. If CSOs and WROs cannot be resilient, feminist and women's movements may regress or stall in crises.

(3) Empowering and safeguarding feminist and women leaders and activists: CSOs and WROs have a pivotal role in training, empowering and safeguarding the current and future generations of feminist and women's human rights activists and leaders. Resilience ensures this role can be fulfilled and that the intergenerational, long-term legacy of CSOs and WROs can be passed on to future generations.

(4) Holding duty-bearers to account and filling gaps in service delivery: CSOs and WROs play a crucial role in holding duty-bearers accountable to human rights frameworks and legislation and in filling gaps in essential service delivery for survivors when State provision is lacking. The effectiveness of these organizations in this mission depends on resilience, ensuring they don't face trade-offs and can meet urgent needs while advocating for systematic change.

(5) Implementing sustainable, long-term interventions: Achieving transformative change to end VAW/G is a long-term goal, especially in contexts where gender equality remains a distant objective. To maintain the momentum in women's and feminist movements and advance efforts to combat VAW/G, organizations need to be resilient to adversities to sustainably implement long-term interventions.

The subsequent examples and quotations provide a deeper insight into the emerging themes above, highlighting the interconnected nature of these findings.

CHAMPIONING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS LOCALLY

One of the recurring themes emphasized by the participants was the importance of CSOs operating at the local and community levels in support of women's and feminist movements, and the need for resilience to maintain this connection to local women, girls and communities. Several discussants shared this sentiment, with one participant using the following quote to illustrate their perspective:

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood they live in; the school or college they attend; the factory, farm, or office where they work. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."
Eleanor Roosevelt speech to the United Nations in Paris on 27 March 1958

In referencing this quote, the discussant aimed to emphasize that the very bedrock of universal human rights lies in the daily experiences and interactions of individuals within their local communities. It underscores the critical importance of addressing women's human rights at the grassroots level, in the context of people's everyday lives, as a pivotal step toward ensuring human rights on a global scale.

Multiple participants expressed the view that CSOs play an indispensable role in women's and feminist movements due to their strong community ties and direct engagement with beneficiaries at the local level. To maintain this connection even during change and uncertainty, CSOs need to resiliently possess local knowledge and expertise, facilitating effective collaboration and building trust within communities. Discussants shared the idea that resilience within the community and within the organization are intertwined, as community-based CSOs and WROs, along with the individuals they serve, confront challenges and drive change together.

"We [community-based CSOs and WROs] link to the community, and we work with vulnerable groups. And we know their needs. We are committed to using our survivor-centered approach. So that's why we need to know the needs of survivors." (Quote from participant)

In times of crisis, those CSOs and WROs that can resiliently maintain direct and long-term connections with communities and women and girls who are survivors or at risk of violence, are more likely to make an impact on VAW/G through an understanding of the changing needs on the ground. This includes providing an essential platform and a voice for these survivors, who may otherwise not be heard during crises.

Chumkiri Women's Group meeting. Credit: Cambodian Health and Education for Community (Cambodia)

"Those NGOs that don't work directly with survivors are not really able to support ending violence against women. It's us [local] organizations who are resilient, and who support women's movements, and who try to learn how to overcome challenges and to provide services to those that need us to become the voices of those voiceless." (Quote from participant)

NAVIGATING CRISES TO SUSTAIN WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Through their proximity to communities and in the absence of adequate government-provided services in some contexts, CSOs report playing a crucial role in resiliently delivering urgent and essential prevention and response support to women and girls, especially in crisis situations. The key facets of resilience are therefore essential to ensuring that community level support can be maintained. The participants reported providing vital prevention interventions, advocating for women's human rights and elevating community needs to the provincial and State level to hold governments to account for EVAW/G laws, policies and national plans, including access to justice in cases of violence. In the words of one discussant:

"CSOs don't just sustain the support for human rights at this level, they allow the experiences, situations and solutions at grassroots level to be fed up the chain and to inform higher level reforms, policy and interaction." (Quote from participant)

Through investment in resilience, CSOs can adapt service delivery and other interventions to meet the requirements of survivors and those at risk in real time, across the humanitarian and development nexus, as was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussants shared that through investment in the core characteristics of resilience, such as human resources, infrastructure and emergency reserves, CSOs can navigate crises and avoid having to cut services or make difficult trade-offs between intervention types. Discussants stressed that without the ability to be resilient, the impact of crises would be significantly more devastating on CSOs and, consequently, on the EVAW/G cause and feminist and women's movements overall, leading to setbacks in progress towards gender equality. If CSOs can be resilient, there is an opportunity to counteract the imbalances caused by crises, which can disrupt existing power dynamics, both positively and negatively.

EMPOWERING AND SAFEGUARDING FEMINIST AND WOMEN LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS

Discussants highlighted that resilient CSOs and WROs make a significant contribution to the broader women's and feminist movement by investing in feminist and women's leadership and activism. Often led and represented by women, these organizations serve as a crucial platform for addressing pressing issues, sustaining momentum and providing essential support to women and girls. Without aspects of resilience, CSOs and WROs may not be able to invest in the next generation of women's leaders and feminist activists to continue this vital work. In the words of one discussant:

"Instituting grass-root actors has produced results as an effective fulcrum of institutional resilience. The composition of trained grassroots actors includes formation of women's groups and girls' movements. These groups have become agents of change, having gone through mentoring and capacity-building programmes....On the strength of our institutional resilience strategy, women and girls have become active agents of grassroot movements for change, expanding and contributing to women's and feminist movements. The result of this movement towards resilience is currently happening in three states ... where we work." *(Quote from participant)*

Organizations report that leaders of CSOs and WROs have effectively transitioned into roles as politicians and prominent feminist leaders (and vice versa). Investment in facets of resilience can therefore ensure effective knowledge transfer to the next generation of activists, safeguarding the sustainability of women's and feminist movements. Without this resilience and longevity, some discussants expressed concerns that the intergenerational legacy of women's and feminist movements could be eroded, notably through the loss of learning and knowledge transfer.

"Resilient organizations give sustainable, generational transfer.... If you don't have a [resilient] feminist NGO – you don't have the power to save energy and transfer it to the next generation of women and girls." (Quote from participant)

Empowering and safeguarding CSO staff and activists is of paramount importance, particularly for maintaining direct and enduring engagement and support for communities and survivors of violence. Most discussants talked about the importance of self-care, mental health support and protection of activists against harm and vicarious trauma to ensure the longevity of women's and feminist movements and progress on EVAW/G. For instance, activists and CSO staff report finding themselves at the forefront of documenting violations of women's human rights, a role that necessitates effective coping mechanisms, capacities and organizational

support for mental health care. If CSOs are to be resilient, these coping mechanisms will be prioritized by the organization and extended to community activists, as a contribution to the movement as a whole. In the words of one discussant:

"Working on important yet demanding issues can lead to burnout among volunteers and organizers and especially when the policies are not favorable. We have been resilient by involving practicing self-care, setting realistic goals and fostering a supportive environment to prevent burnout. We have motivated the community-based actors with capacity building packages." (Quote from participant)

HOLDING DUTY-BEARERS TO ACCOUNT AND FILLING GAPS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

The absence of resilient CSOs and WROs could create a void in essential service delivery and the capacity of communities to hold government and duty-bearers accountable for women's human rights. As discussed by the participants, CSOs, particularly WROs, play a critical role in advocating for women's rights to live free from violence, especially in situations where it is not a government priority, where strategies and laws are not being effectively implemented, where there are no adequate State services or when there is active resistance. Participants described how CSOs and WROs play a crucial role in EVAW/G and supporting women's and feminist movements across the spectrum of service delivery, prevention and implementation of laws, policies and actions *if resilience is enabled*.

"Resilient civil society and women's rights organizations play a crucial role in ending violence against women and girls and supporting women's and feminist movements in several ways... These organizations raise awareness about the prevalence and impact of violence against women and girls. They advocate for policy changes, legal reforms and public discourse that challenge and address gender-based violence.... They work to ensure that legal frameworks are comprehensive, responsive and effectively implemented ... [and] They hold governments, institutions and other stakeholders accountable for their commitments." (Quote from participant)

Without the combination of elements that determine resilience (such as staff expertise, mental health support to prevent vicarious trauma, equipment, funding and so on, as noted in question one above), CSOs may be unable to navigate complexities, crises and uncertainties in order to stay with communities in need, monitor and report VAW/G and hold government and duty-bearers accountable for women's human rights. In the words of one discussant:

International Women's Day 2021 and Inauguration of four Women Cooperative Societies. Credit: Uche Brown/Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative (Nigeria)

"Resilient CSOs/WROs are critical and important under current complex and polarizing political and security circumstances. It is critical and important for them in ending VAWG because you know the phrase "see something, say something". In conflict contexts, the majority of those who can afford to, pack up and leave, leaving the vulnerable to stay behind. No one is keeping an eye out and reporting or documenting the violations that occur; everything gets lost in the reality of conflict. Conflict-related sexual violence, VAW/G and gender-based violence (GBV) are not being highlighted in the media or reports during conflict, because if it's not documented (seen) as crimes that are going on, no one will report it. Feminist WROs who have the capacity and resilience to stay back, must be taken care of, supported and acknowledged. You can imagine documenting gang rapes, women are being sold as slaves, the mental health and the damage that occurs in that space, documenting these violations. When we talk about resilience, we should group it with self-care." (Quote from participant)

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE, LONG-TERM INTERVENTIONS

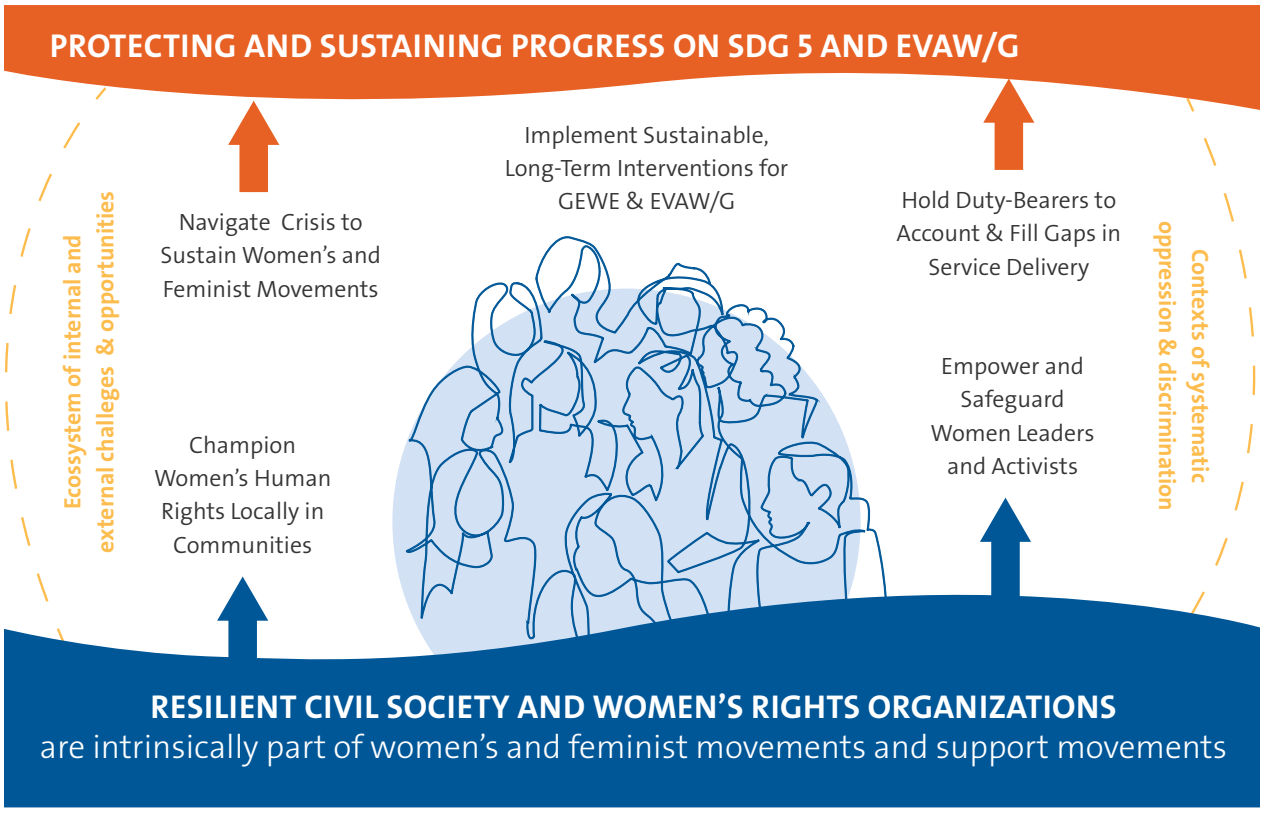
Most discussants emphasized the significance of organizational resilience in the context of ending VAW/G because it requires sustained, long-term interventions. Resilience is considered essential for feminist and women's movements, including those focused on ending VAW/G, as these efforts are enduring, spanning generations. They involve comprehending and breaking the cycle of violence over time, underscoring the necessity for resilience and endurance. Long-term support (both in terms of financial and political/policy commitment) is crucial for these organizations, particularly in societies where VAW/G is deeply ingrained. CSOs that can be resilient play a vital role in analyzing and catalyzing societal transformation from within. CSOs and WROs need to be robust and resilient enough to persevere in the feminist struggle, which has persisted for generations.

"When CSOs are working over the long term, and in doing so have shown resilience to external factors and shocks, their contribution has the potential to become a lot more impactful. They truly know their communities, have firsthand experience in creating change, they have the networks they need within government and communities, they are able to reach the vulnerable communities. So, if you look from the other direction, if there are no resilient civil society organizations with whom to work, the quality of the interventions that can be delivered is much lower." (Quote from participant)

On the point of longevity, some of the discussants, particularly on SHINE, examined the distinctions and connections between "resilience", "adaptability" and "sustainability", noting that all three are inextricably linked and essential to EVAW/G and women's and feminist movements. In general, discussants associated organizational resilience – *the ability of CSOs and WROs to be resilient (including the ability to adapt) to shocks, change and challenges* – with the greater likelihood of achieving sustainable impact on EVAW/G. Through resilience, services for survivors can continue, laws and policies are implemented, and attitudes and behaviours change to prevent VAW/G. For some participants it is a holistic cycle of resilience, adaptability and sustainability over time:

"So does resilience encompass all of these things together, or is it something different? ... [H]ow do you find stamina over time, how do you thrive in the long run? To me, this is where resilience is more than sustainability, adaptability and risk management. There is something more earthy and fundamental in being resilient. It's that you can stay true to your beliefs and values, even when they are under threat, and deliver over the long term. Sustainability, adaptability and management of risk (as well as other factors) all contribute to this." (Quote from participant)

Despite differences in semantics, participants across all the discussions clearly identified the link between investments in resilience and all its facets, and the overall goal of EVAW/G and the longevity of women's and feminist movements (see Figure 7 for a visual depiction of how resilient WROs and CSOs contribute to EVAW/G).



These WROs and CSOs must have the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to, and learn from crisis, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal, external and within the context of systemic discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups) whilst remaining dedicated to organizational mission and vision and the long-term goal of ending violence against women and girls and sustaining feminist and women's movements

Figure 7. A visual depiction of how resilient WROs and CSOs contribute to EVAW/G and sustainable women's and feminist movements

4.5. What can donors do to support organizational resilience?

The third question in the study focused on how donors, grantmakers (such as the UN Trust Fund), policymakers, other stakeholders and agents of change could support organizational resilience. The participants were asked to provide specific recommendations and examples of good practices that enabled the definition and characteristics of resilience described above.

QUESTION 3: What can donors, policymakers, grantmakers or other stakeholders and agents of change do more (or less) of to support resilient civil society and women's rights organizations? Do you have any examples of good practices or lessons on how to support civil society organizations in being resilient?

Five main themes emerged inductively from the discussions: (1) accessible, flexible, long-term funding; (2) long-term commitment for sustainable approaches; (3) partnerships, collaboration and networks; (4) trust, flexibility and capacity development; (5) policy, research and action to address root causes. See Figure 8 and Box 4 below for more detail.

The discussants overwhelmingly focused on quality long-term funding and commitment from donors and grantmakers as foundational for the resilience of CSOs working on EVAW/G and supporting women's and feminist movements. One key finding emphasized that the quality and type of funding can make or break resilience: CSOs and WROs can only anticipate, adapt and respond to crises and challenges, while remaining true to their mission, if flexible, core, long-term funding is available and accessible.

However, it is not just about funding – the discussants also highlighted the critical need for donors, grantmakers and policymakers to enable spaces, platforms and access to decision-making forums.

BOX 4:

What can donors, policymakers, grantmakers and other stakeholders and agents of change do more (or less) of to support resilient civil society and women's rights organizations?

A summary of the findings

1. Accessible, fully flexible, long-term funding: provide fully flexible, long-term funding to cover aspects such as core operational costs, salaries and emergencies. Funding must be accessible (including for smaller organizations) with simple application processes and minimal requirements and complexities.

2. Long-term commitment for sustainable approaches: prioritize long-term organizational support for CSOs and WROs over many years, recognizing that transformative change to end VAW/G can take decades. Avoid short-term, one-off, project-based support that lacks a sustainable approach for longevity.

3. Partnerships, collaboration and networks: enable collaboration between WROs and CSOs to form networks and alliances, amplifying their voices and promoting knowledge-sharing across these organizations. Provide access to decision-making forums on EVAW/G through global networks and platforms.

4. Trust, flexibility and capacity development: embrace flexibility in funding and grant management approaches to allow CSOs and WROs to adapt to evolving needs and contexts. Foster transparent and trusting relationships between these organizations and funders. Invest in demand-driven capacity development.

5. Policy, research and action to address root causes: Invest in research with and by CSOs on women's rights and issues related to EVAW/G to inform evidence-based policy decisions. Advocate for national, regional and global programmes, policies and strategies that tackle the root causes of VAW/G and ensure a space for civil society activities.

The following examples and quotations offer a more in-depth understanding of the themes discussed earlier, highlighting the interconnected nature of these findings.

ACCESSIBLE, FULLY FLEXIBLE, LONG-TERM FUNDING

The participants predominantly emphasized the critical importance of robust, long-term financial support from donors, policymakers and grantmakers. They called for fully flexible funding that would allow competitive salaries for CSO staff. This flexibility is vital to curb staff turnover and maintain uninterrupted services, ensuring the well-being of the communities they serve. In the words of one discussant:

"Based on our experience with several types of funding, we believe that CSOs would be empowered to be[come] more resilient if donors support flexible and responsive operations (enabling adequate response and adaptation to unexpected internal or external needs) and contribute to core funding (enabling long-term and strategic planning, retention of staff, etc.)." (Quote from participant)

Furthermore, it was suggested that donors should be ready to provide emergency funding (top-up/contingency funding) quickly when a crisis occurs, without subjecting organizations to lengthy application processes. The allocation of core funding for organizational expenses was also recommended.

"What we lack is also urgent support funds....If some opportunity or backlash or natural disaster is happening – it's important to be able to respond quickly and have core funds. For example, hygiene packages or food for women running away from violence, or support to rebuild the office in the event of floods." (Quote from participant)

The process of applying for funding, including calls for proposals, must be simplified and made accessible for even the smallest, informal WROs. The discussants stressed the need for a reduction in restrictive conditions on funding and the mitigation of excessive bureaucratic hurdles, including an end to convoluted language, jargon and complexity that can prevent applications.

"Most times the grant questions are written in big words, and women-led organizations in local communities may not be familiar with the big words or the true intent of the words used in questions by donors and grantmakers. Care should be taken in formulating the questions for better understanding by everyone, irrespective of class, grade and educational level." (Quote from participant)

The participants emphasized the importance of shifting away from short-term thinking and embracing a long-term perspective and commitment. They stressed the enduring effort required to challenge and change negative norms and discriminatory practices. Some participants cautioned against "tokenism" and one-off project-based support driven by donor priorities and short-term political goals that do not reflect the realities of CSOs working at a grassroots level. Terminating projects after only one year was identified as damaging and unethical, particularly if this results in essential services for survivors being cut.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES

The participants showed appreciation for donors, policymakers and grantmakers who support CSOs through long-term, multi-year funding agreements. These agreements empower CSOs to build resilience over time, even in the face of resistance to gender equality, women's rights and human rights. Furthermore, the discussion emphasized the importance of extending projects, when required, in terms of both duration and available resources. This extension ensures the sustained continuity and effective planning of long-term strategies.

"Some services are not free. And we cannot provide support to women without resources ... Long term support is important. Projects that last two to three years are much more effective on the overall growth of the organization. They are generally more effective for planning some other strategies.... Five years is the best possible option I say to donors." (Quote from participant)

PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND NETWORKS

The importance of donors facilitating and supporting networks, partnerships and advocacy efforts was underlined as essential to the resilience and impact of CSOs and WROs. For example, donors, policymakers and grantmakers can facilitate networking and dialogue among partners to promote the exchange of essential knowledge, leading to coalitions and other collaborative actions to amplify EVAW/G efforts and foster solidarity for shared goals. In the words of one discussant:

"[There is] real benefit from combining international best practices [from policymakers] and local knowledge [from CSOs and WROs] ..... In our view, this hybrid way of working, with real investment from both sides, is very powerful in creating change." (Quote from participant)

TRUST, FLEXIBILITY AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The participants emphasized the importance of donors being more deeply and consistently engaged throughout the implementation of projects, moving away from conventional reporting methods. They put forth the idea of adopting trust-based models and exploring innovative, less onerous reporting approaches. Examples included verbal or interview-style reporting, which align with feminist principles and consider linguistic differences. The discussion also called for simplifying reporting processes and cautioned against making judgments based solely on written reports. In the words of the discussants:

"Donors should be more involved all throughout the project: where are they now in the process if we're going off track and not meeting their expectations? As grassroots organizations, we struggle to keep our path, so we can't always do all the things that are requested. Just because we have developed that capacity isn't enough, [if] half the staff has left. If donors are saying our reports are not great, they're missing the point of community mobilization, we shouldn't be judged only by how we write our reports." (Quote from participant)

"It would be beneficial for CSOs if donors looked at reporting (accountability) from a place of trust, instead of distrust. Formats for M&E [Monitoring and Evaluation]/reporting could focus more on qualitative results (also on the level of the organization itself) instead of focusing on quantitative outputs, which do not always capture the meaningful changes that occurred through or during project implementation." (Quote from participant)

On the other hand, some donor processes, notably those of the UN Trust Fund, were perceived as beneficial and an opportunity for learning and capacity development. The discussants encouraged donors and grantmakers to nurture a collaborative and empowering relationship with CSOs based on trust. They also advocated for demand-driven, tailored training and capacity development, including leadership training and scholarships for women activists within WROs and CSOs.

POLICY, RESEARCH AND ACTION TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

Finally, the participants urged donors, policymakers and grantmakers to address larger issues – the root causes exacerbating VAW/G globally – such as migration, climate change and conflict. They stressed the significance of investing in Global South-led research, including knowledge produced by and with CSO practitioners, to inform evidence-based decisions and advocate for action against violations of women's rights. The discussants highlighted the importance of utilizing data and evidence, including the practical knowledge of CSOs, to design more specific and well-structured calls for proposals that can support specialized organizations, particularly WROs dedicated to addressing VAW/G. They suggested that leveraging CSO knowledge to improve donor and grantmaker policies and approaches for tackling VAW/G could enhance the long-term resilience of CSOs, leading to more sustainable outcomes. In the words of one discussant:

"Some calls for proposals look like cabbages. Women's rights, minority rights, socioeconomic issues, LNOB [Leave No One Behind], human rights, cross-cutting themes. As an organization we will write everything to meet the need, but we don't know what would be beneficial in the end. If we can influence donors to be more specific that would be great." (Quote from participant)

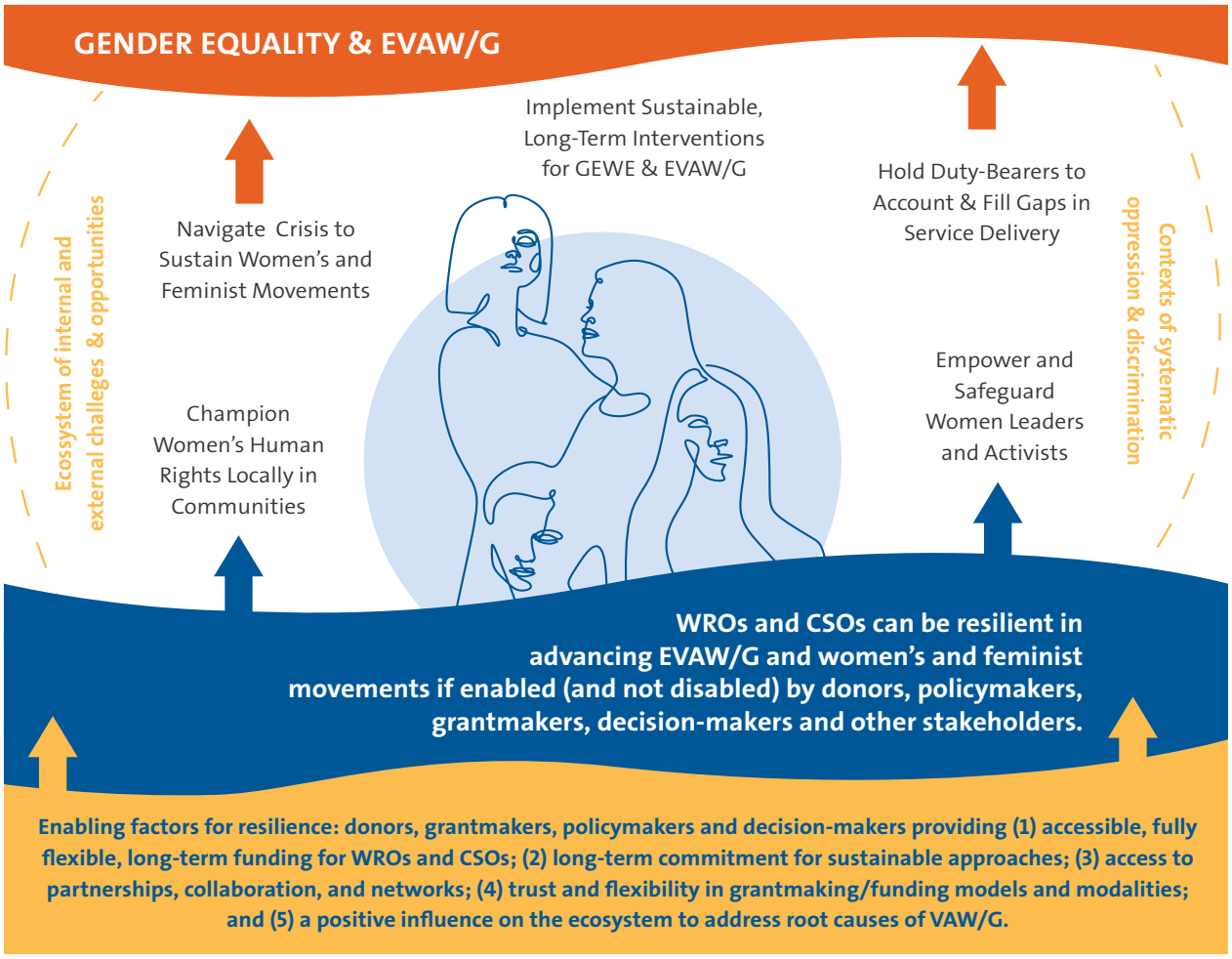


Figure 8. A visual depiction of the critical role of donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers in fostering an enabling environment and ecosystem that strengthen the resilience of WROs and CSOs dedicated to EVAW/G

4.6. What contribution has the UN Trust Fund made to organizational resilience?

The final question in the study focused on the contribution of the UN Trust Fund to organizational resilience.

QUESTION 4: What contribution, if any, has the UN Trust Fund made (or not) to supporting your organization in being resilient? For example, what has the UN Trust Fund done well in supporting your organization? What could be improved? What recommendations can you offer for future support to civil society organizations?

Four key positive areas arose inductively from the discussion on the UN Trust Fund:

Girls from Musayiwa village using "pamtondon" as a participatory arts approach to discuss issues of early child marriage and where to report it. Credit: Chawanangwa Nyirenda/Art Glo (Malawi)

- **Support for staff self-care[38]:** The UN Trust Fund's support has been instrumental in preventing staff stress, burn-out and vicarious trauma. For example, one CSO supported by the UN Trust Fund was able to use the Fund's "self-care" budget to organize an annual staff retreat with recreational activities, which played a crucial role in staff well-being and their emotional health.
- **Enhancing resilience during crises:** When faced with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the additional funding[39] from the UN Trust Fund played a pivotal role. It enabled organizations to adapt their activities, strengthen their capacities through training and resources, and offer essential support to beneficiaries.
- **Maintaining project continuity:** The UN Trust Fund's long-term support (three-year projects, which will be extended to four years from 2024[40]), especially during the pandemic and for those organizations funded twice, has helped maintain project continuity.

38 The UN Trust Fund offers a budget for self-care costs in all grants awarded, to a maximum of US$5,000 (for current grantees), increasing to US$7,500 from 2024.

39 The UN Trust Fund provides a budget allocation of up to 4% to 3% for "contingency" costs in all grants awarded from 2020. Additional funding was made available during the COVID-19 pandemic for some grantees.

40 The UN Trust Fund provides grants for three-year projects, increasing to four years from 2024. In previous grant award cycles some organizations have successfully applied for a second and third grant, if eligible, leading to partnerships between the UN Trust Fund some CSOs for six to nine years.

Grantees highlighted the importance of being able to ensure the consistent delivery of services to survivors.

- **Trusting Civil Society ownership:** The strategy of the UN Trust Fund to place confidence in civil society organizations and allow them to take ownership of their projects has been successful. This trust has empowered organizations to overcome challenges and achieve project goals, even when external factors have threatened project progress.

Feedback on areas the UN Trust Fund could improve or enhance largely echoed the generic recommendations for all donors, policymakers and grantmakers in the field of EVAW. Some recommendations were: providing flexible, long-term, multi-year funding; emergency funds to support organizations in crisis; promoting a relationship of mutual trust and autonomy; simplifying reporting procedures and reducing bureaucracy; and providing opportunities for capacity development.

Discussants widely recommended that the UN Trust Fund should continue, enhance or build on the positive work already undertaken to support CSO resilience. In other words, the UN Trust Fund was encouraged *to do more of the above,* with one *specific call for less bureaucracy*, for example by making application, grants management and reporting processes simpler whenever feasible, especially for smaller grassroot organizations with less staff. In elevating the work of CSOs and WROs dedicated to EVAW/G, one discussant recommended:

"We think it is important that donors, grantmakers and policymakers inform others about why CSOs are so important and should be supported. So for example, if the UN Trust Fund adopts this into official policy and sees the benefit that they become a vocal advocate for this approach that informs other donors and grantmakers." (Quote from participant)

More detail on the UN Trust Fund's specific contribution will be investigated in the second, accompanying paper (Part Two of this study). This section therefore serves as a snapshot of the insights provided by the focus group discussions and online exchanges via SHINE, in harmony with the generic recommendations for donors. These initial findings will be further explored in Part Two, with more detailed analysis of the UN Trust Fund's policies, procedures and operational sphere of influence. See Figure 9 for a visual depiction of the UN Trust Fund's contribution to supporting aspects of organizational resilience.

SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES AND ACCESSIBLE, FLEXIBLE LONG-TERM FUNDING

Participants in the discussion expressed their gratitude for the UN Trust Fund grants, which have facilitated project delivery and long-term sustainability, particularly for projects lasting a minimum of three years (extended to four years in CFP 2023). These grants have empowered CSOs and WROs to effectively carry out projects and meet the needs of survivors. Notably, one discussant mentioned that their organization had received a second grant from the UN Trust Fund, securing a six-year commitment that has brought about significant project and organizational benefits. The extended support, including multi-year and multiple grants, was highlighted as particularly advantageous in helping CSOs manage projects efficiently, especially in times of crisis and when faced with unforeseen delays.

"We have been able to support women survivors of sexual violence because of the UN Trust Fund.... through good quality legal aid which institutions have failed to provide. Legal procedures can go on for years, [hence] the importance of long-term support to represent marginalized women especially." (Quote from participant)

Participants suggested that the UN Trust Fund should explore the possibility of broadening its support to encompass smaller, grassroot organizations and non-registered or informal groups in order to make it more accessible for them. They also identified certain challenges in the UN Trust Fund's current approach, including the necessity for additional core funding[41] to cover organizational expenses and the provision of emergency or top-up funding to cover unforeseen circumstances or serious human rights violations where higher costs exceed the limits of grants. Some participants recommended greater flexibility in project timelines and budgets, including the approval of project extensions, to allow CSOs to adapt more effectively to changing circumstances and ensure project sustainability.

"Sometimes time frames cannot be respected, because sometimes we have a backlash [sic] in implementing activities and strategies, and we demand more time and extra expenses ... sometimes we need an extension of time actually to renew the project ... and to continue working in the same community in order to achieve much more sustainable results. So, the point was on flexible timelines and budgets." (Quote from participant)

TRUST, FLEXIBILITY AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The UN Trust Fund's commitment to staff self-care received strong praise for its feminist approach, encouraging organizations to prioritize this aspect. Making self-care costs a recommended budget line was recognized as a crucial factor for building resilience. The self-care budget offers a valuable entry point for supporting and fostering awareness of staff well-being within CSOs. Discussants urged the UN Trust Fund to maintain this support and explore additional initiatives to address staff stress, burnout and vicarious trauma.

"We also talked about the emphasis that the UN Trust Fund put on self-care and how that's kind of made the grassroot organizations and civil society organizations also focus on that. And for the first time have a realization that actually, we need to spend money on this, and we need to spend money on ourselves and not just on our work and our beneficiaries." (Quote from participant)

Participants expressed their appreciation for the UN Trust Fund's extensive capacity development training and its constructive approach to enhancing staff skills through accompaniment, with one discussant sharing the following:

"The high expectations of the UN Trust Fund supported by extensive training and mentoring have really helped our organization to develop." (Quote from participant)

Participants cited examples, such as the collaborative support given to CSOs when transitioning from the project concept stage to project implementation, as well as the appointment of portfolio managers as dependable focal points for each project. Through these efforts, the UN Trust Fund is now perceived not only as a donor or grant provider but also as a source of guidance and mentorship.

41 The UN Trust Fund currently provides a budget allowance of 20% of the grant awarded for personnel costs, which increased to 30% from 2023. Core funding for small grassroot organizations increased from 7% of project activity costs to 10% in 2022.

March against gender-based violence organized by Public Law Interest Center (PILC) with other local organizations. Credit: PILC (Chad)

"The UN Trust Fund has a different approach ... from other donors. The process of submitting the proposal was a mentoring process, the UN Trust Fund is giving priority to grassroot organizations. The work done with survivors of violence from small organizations. We are considered a small organization even though in our community we are not considered small, but compared to other CSOs, we are considered small. Prioritizing support for small organizations, especially grassroot ones, is so important, and the UN Trust Fund is doing it." (Quote from participant)

Another successful strategy involved providing staff with capacity development training to create organizational policies and procedures, such as those related to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), anti-fraud measures and risk management. This approach was highly praised for strengthening organizational resilience. The guidance and webinars covering both organizational and programmatic aspects also received positive recognition. During the discussions, participants expressed the need for more frequent and recurrent capacity development training sessions and multilingual knowledge exchange events. These initiatives would enable CSOs to learn from the UN Trust Fund and share insights with one another.

"The training and learning and teaching process [from the UN Trust Fund] has allowed a number of our organizations to really develop their capacity, and in terms of the kind of documentation in terms of organizational management. And this has allowed these organizations, then, to be more successful in getting funding from other donors as a result of their increased capacity." (Quote from participant)

The opinions of participants on the UN Trust Fund's administration and reporting requirements were somewhat divided. Some participants expressed concerns about the significant administrative and reporting burdens. They suggested adopting more innovative reporting methods, such as conducting oral reporting through interviews, to alleviate these challenges. However, despite recognizing the bureaucratic aspects, other participants appreciated the UN Trust Fund's rigorous yet supportive approach, in particular its focus on assisting smaller organizations throughout this process, which includes mentoring.

They acknowledged that the UN Trust Fund's rigor and dedication to developing and strengthening organizational policies and procedures ultimately enhance the ability of CSOs to access funding.

"...although bureaucracy is annoying ... [being] demanding for a reason is actually really helpful, you know. So, like no one could say that working with the UN Trust Fund is easy.... But kind of bringing us through that process and supporting us through that process they're really developing. And they really improve your capacity. So, if these challenges are helpful and well supported, then I'm really in favor of being challenged.... But also, in terms of being supported. But with people who are really engaged in that process rather than some donors." (Quote from participant)

In general, participants acknowledged the presence of a genuine partnership between CSOs and the UN Trust Fund. While some advocated for increased flexibility in budgets and deadlines, as well as reducing bureaucracy and simplifying reporting requirements, most did not voice significant complaints.

"To support civil society, you need to invest in civil society, civil society has the links to grassroots... And in order for us to use our voice, to use our knowledge, to use our understanding of context, a true partnership of learning and mentoring with donors is so important, and we in the group all felt that this was something that the UN Trust Fund did very well in terms of taking a collaborative and mentorship approach, both through the application process, both through feedback monitoring, mentoring throughout the whole project to kind of combine international best practice with really allowing you to take ownership for your context and your understanding on the ground." (Quote from participant)

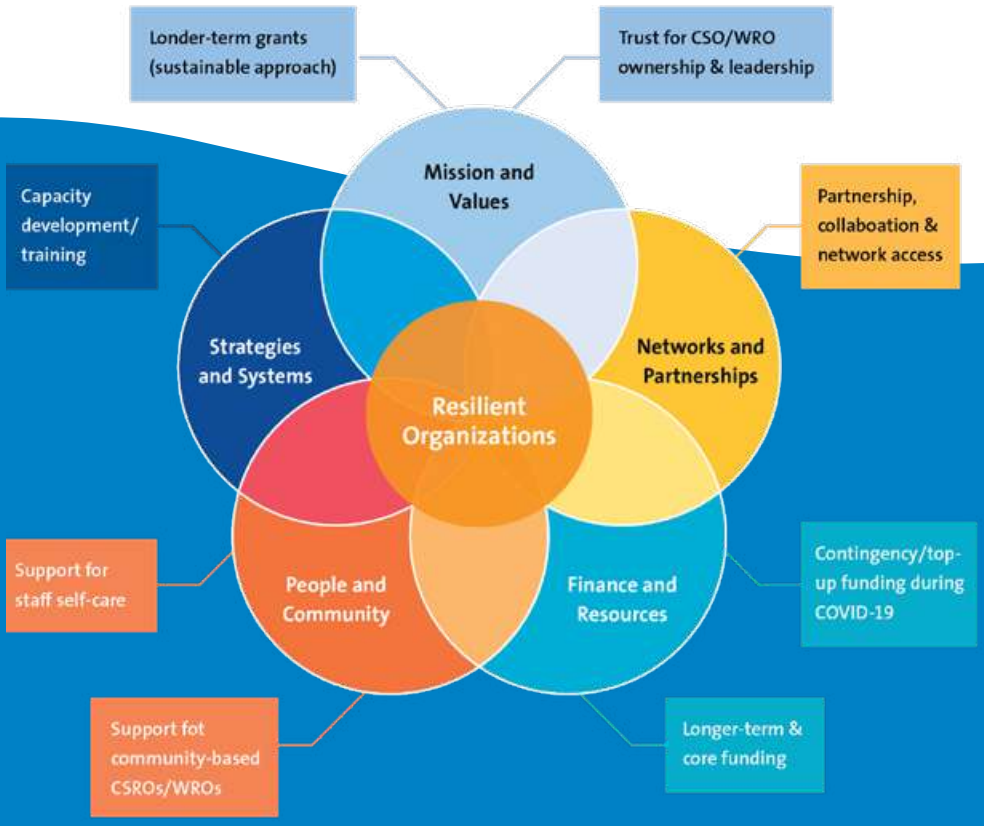


Figure 9. A visual **depiction of the UN Trust Fund's contribution to organizational resilience (boxes surrounding the Venn diagram denote the main contributions of the UN Trust Fund, according to participants)**

5. Conclusions

This section outlines the researcher's conclusions based on the findings and aligned with the research questions and objectives. As a reminder, the overall objectives of the study were: 1) to unpack the concept of organizational resilience based on practical experience; 2) to analyze the key characteristics defining an organization's ability to be resilient, by context and region, which should be documented and shared with the EVAW/G community to guide decision making; and 3) to understand how the UN Trust Fund's work has enabled organizational resilience of CSOs and WROs. This last objective will be explored in more depth in the second part of the study.

ON UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

First, it is clear that the CSO and WRO participants in the study see the concept of organizational resilience as a highly relevant concept with commonalities in how it is described. A common definition of organizational resilience arose inductively from the discussions: *"The ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal, external and within the context of systemic discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups) while remaining dedicated to organizational mission and vision and the long-term goal of ending violence against women and girls and sustaining feminist and women's movements."*

Notably, the researcher observed that the topic of resilience resonated across different organizational settings, from those in regions with no functioning government and/or systems of prevention and response to VAW/G, to countries with more progressive policies, legislation and (on paper at least) actions in response to violence against women and girls. While the topic gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, for many discussants, the crisis only highlighted a systemic issue. CSOs and WROs need to be resilient to support survivors and women and girls at risk of violence, facing ongoing discrimination, the absence of adequate State service provision, insufficient funding and, in many cases, active resistance to women's human rights globally.

Therefore, secondly, the researcher concludes that within the context of EVAW/G, organizational resilience pertains to how CSOs and WROs navigate a spectrum of internal and external challenges, considering their intersection with power dynamics and systems of oppression and discrimination. These dynamics, which particularly impact WROs and the women, girls and marginalized groups they serve, were reported to create a multiplier effect, intensifying the scale of crises, challenges and adversities that demand resilience. Numerous participants drew parallels with the challenges faced by organizations in a broader context with the opposition to women's and feminist movements at large. In essence, they underscored the inseparable connection of these challenges for those engaged in the field of EVAW/G, justifying the inclusion of this context in the definition.

ON ANALYZING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

Thirdly, the participants explored the characteristics of resilience and described the qualities, features or attributes that determine whether an organization can "be resilient". Five key, interconnected themes emerged: (1) people and communities; (2) mission and values; (3) networks and partnerships; (4) strategies and systems; and (5) finance and resources (see Box Two in the Key Findings section for a recap of each theme). Although

Strengthening/empowering the women's group in the four local government areas. Credit: Center for Women Studies and Intervention (Nigeria)

these themes are interconnected rather than linear, not all participants reported all five facets, with some emphasizing only one or two. These characteristics were reported by participants as often being dependent on the enabling environment and conditions (such as the availability of donor/government funding).

Unpacking this further, organizational resilience was consistently portrayed by participants as both a mindset and an ability. The ability to adapt and respond to crises was seen as a prerequisite for resilience, requiring capacities and resources. Simultaneously, it demands a mindset of perseverance, determination and adherence to values and principles even in the face of adversity. This mindset, as discussed, seemed particularly prominent in feminist WROs and CSOs. Participants drew comparisons with the perseverance of feminist activists throughout history and activists representing the needs of individuals facing various forms of discrimination.

A fourth conclusion revolves around the researcher's observation and peer review feedback indicating that the characteristics of organizational resilience are very similar to those commonly described under the broader concept of "organizational development". Organizational development can be characterized as the process by which organizations enhance their capacity to change and achieve greater effectiveness through the development, improvement and reinforcement of strategies, structures and processes.[42] Therefore, a natural question arises from this discussion topic: "What is organizational resilience NOT?"

Participants themselves pondered the distinctions between adaptability, sustainability and resilience, with several concluding that resilience elevates the importance of organizational development (including the ability to adapt) in the context of EVAW/G interventions and women's and feminist movements. In other words,

42 See examples in this resource: Thomas G. Cummings & Christopher G. Worley (2008) *Organization Development & Change*, 9th Edition https://www.mcs.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Organization-Development-and-Change.pdf

organizational resilience encompasses traditional aspects of organizational development but, in the context of EVAW/G, frames these within the necessity to be resilient to the multitude of intersecting crises and challenges, systematic oppression and power dynamics facing CSOs and WROs. It identifies the key feminist attributes that ensure organizations develop in a resilient manner, contributing to broader movement aims (such as maintaining trust with the community, investing in the next generation of feminist activists, or accessing flexible funds that enable the autonomy of the WROs). From a feminist perspective, the attributes of a resilient organization closely mirror the ideal state for supporting women's and feminist movements and EVAW/G.

The definition and conceptual exploration of organizational resilience in the context of EVAW/G have the potential to humanize and integrate a feminist approach to organizational development. This approach places significant importance on individual self-care, mental health support and adequate resourcing for staff, including fair compensation, access to health insurance and other benefits, and improved working conditions. These elements are essential to empowering the current generation of feminist activists and supporting the next generation, ensuring the sustainability of EVAW/G efforts and women's and feminist movements worldwide.

ON WHICH CHARACTERISTICS OF A RESILIENT ORGANIZATION SHOULD BE DOCUMENTED FOR THE EVAW/G COMMUNITY

Fifth, the study unequivocally highlights the fundamental importance of organizational resilience as a prerequisite for effective and sustainable EVAW/G interventions. Across all discussions, it was undisputed that CSOs and WROs involved in EVAW/G must exhibit resilience as both supporters of movements and integral components of women's and feminist movements themselves; one cannot exist without the other. Participants argued that only through resilience can these organizations and their staff adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring the continuity of efforts to end VAW/G and sustain women's and feminist movements.

Without the ability and conditions to be resilient, particularly for WROs, CSOs would simply cease to exist, and the endeavor to end VAW/G would lack momentum. Critically, there would be a void in essential service provision for survivors of violence and women and girls at risk, as well as in the movement to hold governments and duty-bearers accountable. In essence, resilience does not exist in isolation but is intrinsically linked to broader movement objectives.

This leads to the sixth conclusion arising from the study: the ability of CSOs and WROs to be resilient depends on the enabling environment and conditions, often shaped by the actions of donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers. The characteristics determining resilience shared by participants often relate to the capacity or ability of CSOs and WROs to access resources, skills or expertise to plan, adapt and adjust to crises and change. This cannot happen in a vacuum but relies on the ecosystem surrounding the organizations. If there are no resources to access, resilience will inevitably suffer. The participants identified five key areas that require attention: (1) accessible, flexible long-term funding; (2) long-term commitment for sustainable approaches; (3) partnerships, collaboration and networks; (4) trust, flexibility and capacity development; and (5) policy, research and action to address root causes (see section 4.5 for more details).

ON HOW THE UN TRUST FUND'S WORK HAS ENABLED ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE OF CSOS AND WROS

The seventh conclusion relates to how much the UN Trust Fund's support enabled organizational resilience. The insights provided by the discussants provide valuable lessons that could be beneficial for both the UN Trust Fund and other donors. On what the UN Trust Fund has done particularly well, four key areas arose inductively from the discussion: (1) support for staff self-care; (2) enhancing resilience during crises (such as through additional funding and flexibility); (3) maintaining project continuity (three-year projects, at minimum); and (4) trusting civil society ownership (through empowering grantmaking and management practices) (See section 4.6 for more details). The discussants recommended that the UN Trust Fund should continue, enhance or build on the positive work already undertaken to support CSO resilience, with one plea for less bureaucracy, for example by making application, grants management and reporting processes simpler whenever feasible, especially for smaller grassroot organizations with less staff. More detail on specific implications and recommendations for the UN Trust Fund will be detailed in the second part of this study.

Bi-monthly meeting of women's groups run by Mrs. Chunly, one of the community women leaders. Credit: Cambodian Health and Education for Community (Cambodia)

The final conclusions are based on the researcher's own analysis and suppositions from the PBK. As an eighth conclusion, the researcher determines that the practice-based knowledge and insights shared in this paper, have the potential to shape and influence the design of EVAW/G approaches, programming, policies and budget planning (for the whole EVAW/G community). This can be achieved through a clearer and more relevant conceptual framework for organizational resilience, directing action in support of CSOs and WROs. Consequently, this could lead to a more effective, sustainable and long-term impact on VAW/G. Insights from practitioners make it abundantly clear that the characteristics of a resilient organization are profoundly significant for EVAW/G and women's and feminist movements. There is a repeated emphasis on the critical role of resilient local WROs.

And finally, as an overarching conclusion, the PBK makes case that cannot be stressed enough: that CSOs and WROs working on EVAW/G are severely underfunded and under resourced, and they are expected to fill gaps in essential service delivery in the absence of State provision, amidst resistance and pushback against women's human rights. Even the basics, such as providing flexible, long-term, accessible funding, remain lacking.[43] This results in a continual burden on WROs, CSOs and women's and feminist activists who courageously put their lives on the line daily to "*keep moving forward*" and to "*fall down seven times, get up eight*" (in the words of two discussants). This should not be deemed acceptable to donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers, and the broader ecosystem of duty-bearers and stakeholders.

The practice-based knowledge in this paper serves as a call to action and a stark reminder that CSOs and WROs dedicated to EVAW/G are facing severe underfunding and resource constraints. This financial shortfall puts at risk the progress achieved by women's and feminist movements thus far, as these resilient CSOs and WROs form the bedrock of these movements. The attention brought to the challenges faced by frontline WROs during the COVID-19 pandemic must be maintained, especially since government services remain inadequate and gender backlash is on the rise in many contexts. In certain situations, organizational resilience of WROs and CSOs is the sole means of addressing the needs of survivors and women and girls at risk of violence.

43 An example of the lack of funding can be found in this report: "*What counts? The state of funding for the prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls*" (2023), Equality Institute and the Accelerator for GBV Prevention

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are divided into two groups: first of all, those expressed by study participants (in recognition and appreciation of the perspectives directly shared by WROs and CSOs); and then those identified by the researcher, stemming from conclusions drawn through PBK analysis. This paper, along with its recommendations, is primarily directed at donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers. While specific recommendations for the UN Trust Fund are mentioned, a more detailed elaboration will be provided in an accompanying paper, which will follow the second part of the study. This intentional approach ensures that the PBK insights in this paper remain relevant to a broad spectrum of partners within the audience.

1.7. Recommendations from the participants

Donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers wield considerable influence in fostering organizational resilience. The ability of CSOs and WROs to effectively implement EVAW/G interventions and sustain the women's and feminist movement hinges on their capacity to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and dynamic circumstances. This includes both internal and external factors, exacerbated by systemic discrimination and oppression, all while remaining steadfast in pursuit of their organizational mission and vision.

The effectiveness of WROs and CSOs in building resilience is contingent upon the investment and support received from donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers. These stakeholders play a pivotal role in shaping the conducive (or inhibitive) environment for organizational growth. The participants in this discussion unequivocally advocated for specific actions deemed essential to fortify organizational resilience:

RECOMMENDATION ONE – PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE, FULLY FLEXIBLE (INCLUSIVE OF CORE) FUNDING FOR WROS AND CSOS:

- Provide fully flexible funding for CSOs and WROs working on EVAW/G including adequate core organizational/operational costs (for example, salaries and related personnel costs such as self-care and mental health support).
- Offer emergency funding during crises and emergencies, ensuring that organizations have the necessary resources to navigate these challenges.
- Ensure funding is accessible (including for smaller organizations) with simple application processes and minimal requirements and complexities.

RECOMMENDATION TWO – MAKE LONG-TERM, MULTI-YEAR COMMITMENTS TO CSOS AND WROS TO ENABLE SUSTAINABLE APPROACHES:

- Prioritize long-term organizational and programmatic support for CSOs and WROs, according to their needs, over multiple years, recognizing that transformative change to end VAW/G can take decades.
- Avoid short-term, one-off, project-based, or solely donor-driven support that does not embed a sustainable approach that could result in suspension of service provision and/or other critical inventions.

RECOMMENDATION THREE – FACILITATE PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND NETWORKS THAT ENABLE THE LEADERSHIP AND CENTRAL ROLE OF WROS AND CSOS WORKING ON EVAW/G:

- Facilitate collaboration between WROs and CSOs to form networks and alliances on EVAW/G, amplifying their voices and promoting knowledge-sharing among them.
- Provide access to decision-making forums on EVAW/G through global networks and platforms to shift power dynamics, challenging systemic discrimination through inclusion.
- Ensure WROs and CSOs play a central and leadership role in all relevant multi-stakeholder forums on EVAW/G.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – EMBRACE TRUST-BASED, FLEXIBLE PARTNERSHIP MODALITIES AND ENSURE DEMAND-DRIVEN CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT:

- Embrace flexibility in funding and grant management approaches to allow CSOs and WROs autonomy to adapt programmes and operations to evolving needs and various contexts.
- Foster transparent and trusting relationships between funders and CSOs/WROs to empower organizational decision-making.
- Invest in demand-driven capacity development, tailored to the needs of CSOs/WROs, including training that empowers women leaders and feminist and community-based activists.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE – INVEST IN POLICY MAKING, RESEARCH AND ACTION THAT ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF VAW/G

- Invest in research led by CSOs and WROs on issues related to EVAW/G to inform evidence-based decision-making and advocacy.
- Advocate for, and invest in, national, regional and global programmes, policies and strategies that tackle the root causes of VAW/G and respond to key emerging challenges (for example, the intersection of global issues including migration, climate change and conflict with VAW/G)
- Promote women's human rights, including the right to live a life free of violence, and actively address resistance against gender equality and women's empowerment in key national, regional and international forums (for example, working with like-minded donors to develop strategies to handle pushback against women's human rights at the Commissions for the Status of Women).

1.8. Recommendations for the UN Trust Fund:

This section presents four additional recommendations for the UN Trust Fund, derived from the PBK analysis and addressing the initial research questions and study objectives. It is important to note that the five previously mentioned recommendations also hold relevance for the UN Trust Fund. Participants acknowledged the Fund as a commendable example in certain aspects, yet identified areas for potential improvement, which will be explored more comprehensively in the second part of the study.

RECOMMENDATION ONE – REFINE THE CURRENT DEFINITION OF "ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE" TO ENCOMPASS SPECIFIC TRAITS AND CHARACTERISTICS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS.

- A proposed definition has been presented in this paper as a starting point, to be tested, validated and refined further with a larger group of practitioners. This will ensure the UN Trust Fund's objectives in enabling organizational resilience are clearer to all involved and more relevant to CSOs and WROs (see below).

Livelihood asset assistance and "hand holding" support to trained survivors of violence in the Thoothoor cluster, India.
Credit: Organization for Capacity Development (India)

"Organizational resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond, adapt to and learn from crises, challenges and changing circumstances (both internal, external and within the context of systemic discrimination against women and girls and marginalized groups) while remaining dedicated to organizational mission and vision and the long-term goal of ending violence against women and girls and sustaining feminist and women's movements".

RECOMMENDATION TWO – ARTICULATE A MORE SPECIFIC CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OUTLINING HOW THE UN TRUST FUND WILL FACILITATE ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE.

- Building on the insights provided here and the original theory developed by the UN Trust Fund (articulated in the Strategic Plan 2021–25), this framework should guide specific actions, inputs and resources necessary for truly enabling grantees to build resilience. It should incorporate the traits and characteristics identified in this paper, with further refinement and testing among a broader sample of CSOs and WROs to ensure ongoing relevance. This framework should inform specific grant-making, operational, knowledge management and advocacy actions to be taken by the UN Trust Fund (to be explored in the second paper).

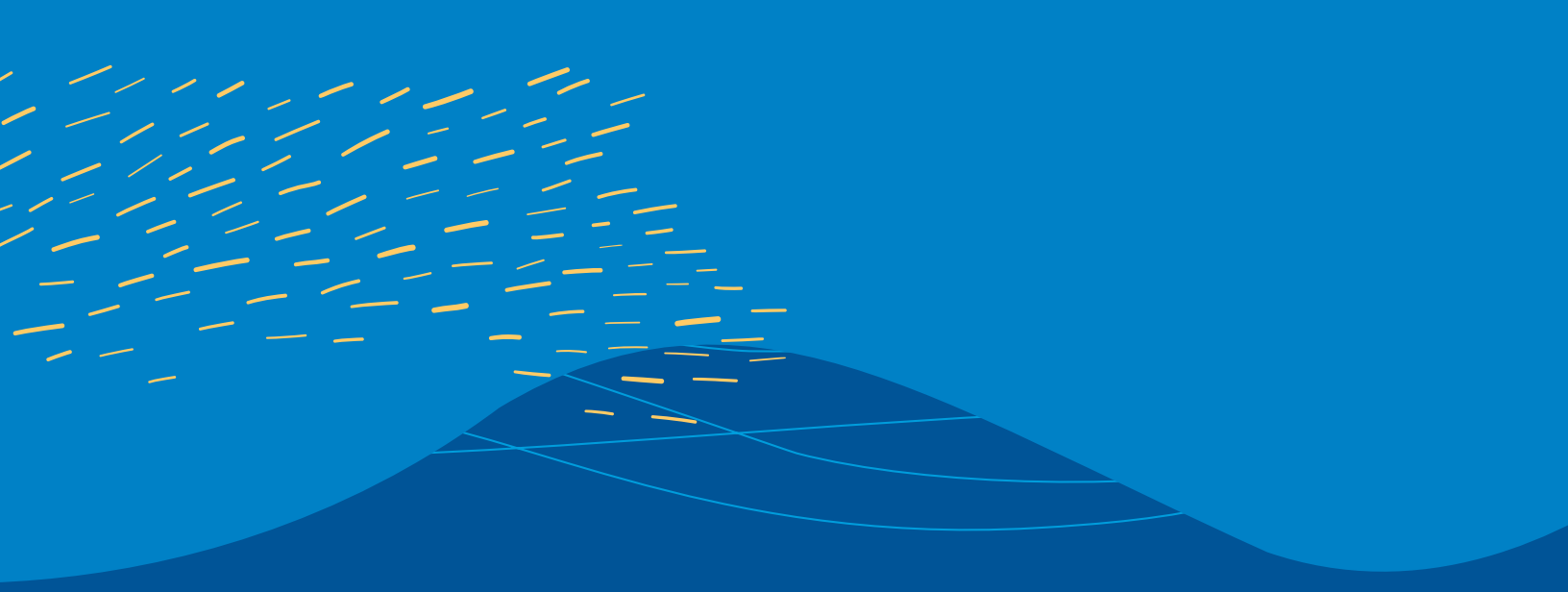
RECOMMENDATION THREE – USE THIS BRIEF AS A CALL TO ACTION TO MOBILIZE DONORS, POLICYMAKERS, GRANTMAKERS AND DECISION-MAKERS, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE EVAW/G COMMUNITY, AROUND THE CRITICAL NEED TO INVEST IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE OF WROS AND CSOS.

- Leveraging its unique position as an inter-agency UN mechanism, the UN Trust Fund should use its platform and its position within the UN system to jointly draw attention to this issue, collaborating with partners like the Accelerator for GBV Prevention, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) and other women's and feminist networks to ensure that messages are heard, amplified and discussed at key decision-making forums, including the Commission for the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council, the UN General Assembly and events like the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women, as well as leveraging UN Women's partnerships and networks, including at country and regional level.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – EFFECTIVELY DISSEMINATE PBK FINDINGS ON ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND ENGAGE IN FURTHER COLLABORATION WITH PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHERS TO GENERATE ADDITIONAL PRACTICE-BASED INSIGHTS ON THIS TOPIC.

- Ensure widespread sharing and dissemination of knowledge for effective integration and application in partners' policy, programming and advocacy efforts. In any subsequent stage of this research, consult with practitioners on key research questions to ensure the production of the most valuable insights for CSOs and WROs. For practitioners, especially those dedicated to EVAW/G, the experiences and perspectives of other organizations regarding resilience can serve as valuable inputs for shaping their organizational strategies and development plans.

The practice-based knowledge in this paper serves as a call to action and a stark reminder that CSOs and WROs dedicated to EVAW/G continue to face severe underfunding and resource constraints. The progress achieved thus far by women's and feminist movements and the resilience of WROs and CSOs in the face of such challenges has been extraordinary, but this continued deficit in addressing a worldwide health and human rights emergency should be a global scandal. The attention brought to the challenges faced by frontline WROs during the COVID-19 pandemic must be maintained, especially since government services remain inadequate and gender backlash is on the rise in many contexts. In certain situations, organizational resilience of WROs and CSOs is the sole means of addressing the needs of survivors and women and girls at risk of violence. **By implementing the above recommendations, the UN Trust Fund and other donors, policymakers, grantmakers and decision-makers can play their key role in enabling CSOs and WROs to implement EVAW/G interventions and help eradicate the need for resilience through sustained, long-term, flexible support and efforts to tackle the root causes of VAW/G.**



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