



REPORT
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“DUE TO BUDGETARY LIMITATIONS...”:

A Policy Brief for Feminist, Sustainable and
Youth-Focused Funding and Resourcing
under Our Common Agenda

İnlayda Eskitaşçioğlu



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MESSAGE TO READERS

GWL Voices, our advocacy, pushes for the inclusion of women's voices in all spheres of society, particularly in peace and security, global governance, human rights, gender issues, international peace and security, environmental diplomacy, global health, and sustainable development.

Hence, as a collective voice of women's leadership, backed by the support of our partners, this report reflects our stance on an issue whose time is long overdue.

In the wake of unending global challenges, providing adequate resources for feminist youth activists and grassroots feminist organizations will ensure their full participation and enhance their contribution to shaping global issues.

We want to thank our partners, GGIN, C4UN, Bahá'í International, and the International Alliance of Women, whose foresight and support have enabled us to carry out this critical work.

Here's to elevating our voices for change and inclusion while advancing the issues we care about most.



AUTHOR



İlayda Eskitaşcioğlu

İlayda Eskitaşcioğlu is an award-winning feminist youth activist, human rights lawyer and a Ph.D. student researching international human rights law at Koç University in Istanbul, Turkey. She is an attorney-at-law at Ankara Bar Association and a fellow at the Koç University UNESCO Chair for Gender Equality and Sustainable Development. She is the co-founder of We Need to Talk, an NGO which aims to fight against period poverty and menstruation stigma in Turkey, which was selected as one of Turkey's Changemaker organizations and has reached out to more than 80.000 menstruators since 2016. She has served as a member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (formerly known as Beijing+25 Youth Task Force) led by UN Women and was selected as one of the 17 Young Leaders for Sustainable Development Goals, endorsed by the United Nations. Alongside her activism on menstrual justice and sexual and reproductive health and rights, her academic research expertise is on business and human rights. She is currently writing her PhD thesis on a triple comparison between the business and human rights mechanisms available in Turkey, Colombia and South Africa from a feminist legal theory lens, analysing the accessibility and gender-responsiveness of these mechanisms for women workers in value chains. She is the chairperson of the Turkish Impact Council (IMPACT 2030) Youth Committee. She is an international consultant at the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, supporting the regional efforts for meaningful youth participation in decision-making and youth mobilization.

Dependency on funding increases as young people are only provided opportunities with (and therefore pushed to) when they deliver projects meeting expectations of funders and producing pre-determined outcomes envisioned by the funders. Dependency on short-term and non-sustainable funding increases as the number of tasks and committed projects increase while there is no time or opportunity left for increasing capacity. This eventually causes pushing the limits of shrinking resources with an expanding workload.

Our Common Agenda is “an agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals” including key proposals across the 12 commitments from the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and proposed key moments.

A few among the addressed topics are prominent: the renewed social contract with a focus on inclusion, participation and protection, especially of women and girls; a significantly strong commitment for solidarity with younger generations and youth leadership, marked with the successful establishment of the United Nations Youth Office with the unanimous GA Resolution A/76/L.85¹; and an understanding of networked, inclusive and effective multilateralism with an increased role for and influence of private sector. This policy brief aims to compile and summarize an analysis of Our Common Agenda Report with regard to the listed above aspects focusing on a crucial, specific issue. This issue has been repeatedly voiced by feminist and youth stakeholders yet has not been adequately addressed at the UN political arena: gender-responsive, sustainable and youth-focused funding and resourcing. The analysis and recommendations in this policy brief is informed, among others, by global consensus documents such as the Beijing Platform for Action; CEDAW; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the UN Youth Strategy Youth 2030; barriers faced and lessons learned from the collective efforts of grassroots feminist youth activists throughout the Generation Equality Youth Journey, the Young Feminist Manifesto crafted by youth constituencies throughout this process.

¹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/587/26/PDF/N2258726.pdf?OpenElement>

“LISTENING TO AND WORKING WITH YOUTH” REQUIRES CORE, FLEXIBLE, NEED-BASED FUNDING

Representation, active and inclusive participation and meaningful engagement of youth, women and girls is clearly prioritized especially under the key proposals “placing women and girls at the center” and “listening to and working with youth.” Lack of resources and funding which feminist youth activists and grassroots feminist organizations often experience is the main source of power imbalance and undermines the active, substantive and meaningful participation of these groups. Specifically young feminists are often expected to attend meetings with various UN entities and public events and dedicate their limited time and resources to provide input for working documents. Underfunded grassroots local feminist organizations, adolescent girls and youth from underrepresented constituencies often push their resources to the limit in order to sustain their engagement and eventually disengage from long-term political processes due to burnout or running out of resources.

These priorities can only be actualized if a significant proportion of funding is directly provided to youth, as the subjects and agents of change. Youth constituencies should be supported through core, flexible and responsive funding to support their self-identified needs, and to strengthen their capacities without the expectation of project-based outcomes and outputs.

Secretary General’s vision for meaningful, diverse and affective youth engagement covers both within and outside the United Nations, which is applaudable, and the focus is on better political representation, transforming education, skills, training and lifelong learning. These priorities can only be actualized if a significant proportion of funding is directly provided to youth, as the subjects and agents of change. Youth constituencies should be supported through core, flexible and responsive funding to support their self-identified needs, and to strengthen their capacities without the expectation of project-based outcomes and outputs. Funding opportunities should be designed for capacity-building based on self-identified

needs (hiring youth activists, supporting cost of utilities and digital memberships, investing in learning and skill-building programmes) and not on pre-determined and assumed needs. Currently, a majority of funding opportunities are exclusively focused on projects with relatively visible and measurable outcomes. Dependency on funding increases as young people are only provided opportunities with (and therefore pushed to) when they deliver projects meeting expectations of funders and producing pre-determined outcomes envisioned by the funders. Dependency on short-term and non-sustainable funding increases as the number of tasks and committed projects increase while there is no time or opportunity left for increasing capacity. This eventually causes pushing the limits of shrinking resources with an expanding workload.

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Through detailed research and due diligence, background checks, by building safe and sustainable accountability and regular reporting mechanisms, and by keeping in regular, close contact with grantee youth organizations, funders can ensure that their funds will be used in line with the purpose of the grant to create impact. Instead of pushing for relatively more measurable and visible outputs (i.e., for a youth organization working on period poverty, this expected outcome would be a high number of hygiene kits distributed) which tend to have short-term impact for beneficiaries, these funds should primarily support movement building or transformation of current spaces towards youth-friendly spaces that can serve their purpose better (i.e. for the same organization these more impactful investments would be long-term training of trainers, toolkits and travel funds for lobbying activities at local governments, establishing a sustainable donation system for sanitary products, creating youth-focused safe spaces for honest conversations). The Young Feminist Fund,² led by FRIDA, can be listed among best practices: their use of participatory grantmaking models, the availability of flexible fund for core support allow grantee young feminists to define their budgets, use funds based on their needs, and provides space to listen to the changing demands of communities, to adapt and to respond, instead of putting young feminists in an imbalanced power dynamic or pushing them to stick strictly to their submitted initial plans. The diverse categories of support they offer, not only limited to core funding support, but also special funding, an accompaniment program designed to create a feminist solidarity model and to strengthen communication, online learning programs and regional and global convenings, are among good examples for diversified and flexible ways of resourcing young feminists.

² <https://youngfeministfund.org/>

Commitment to meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational solidarity requires young individuals, activists, collectives and youth-led organizations to be recognized and compensated for their time, effort and expertise. As abovementioned, while monetary compensation, grants and funds are of great value, young people demand their efforts to be also recognized through offering learning opportunities, trainings, education (which can be documented or certified for career prospects), and opportunities for internship and mentorship.³ These forms of skill-based, non-monetary resourcing is in line with Our Common Agenda's focus on creation of green and digital economy jobs, and an improvement in labour market for youth. Resourcing young feminists is equal parts about providing monetary support and remuneration, and equal parts about skill-building. Youth constituencies have often struggled between both extreme ends: On one side, they have been provided with rigid funds with a pre-determined agenda and strict rules and they have been expected to oblige to the demands of the funder due to imbalanced power dynamics. On the other hand, they have been provided with skill-building workshops and toolkits with inadequate content, designed and implemented with a top-down approach which do not fulfill their needs, and expected to accept these programs as remuneration, or a learning experience for their future careers. Finding a balance among these two kinds of resourcing and improving their quality should be the way forward for youth-focused funding under Our Common Agenda.

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³ https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/girlstothefront_report_web.pdf

FROM BETWEEN FORMS, BANK STATEMENTS, AND BUREAUCRATIC STEPS

Paperwork and bureaucratic workload for receiving funds (even individual grants for one-time/ short term participatory events) as well as eligibility criteria should be simplified. While the need for documentation is understandable, national and regional UN entities should be able to provide seed-funding or individual funding to support and “work with” youth activists, as envisioned under Our Common Agenda. Currently, in order to receive small grants or funds, or to be compensated for their work, young people are expected to fill and submit P11 (personal history) forms, Consultant and Individual Contractor Personal Status Profiles, and bank-issued proofs of bank accounts. These kinds of detailed documents may be needed for hiring procedures, however, due to the requirements of financial departments, these documents are also often required when young people are receiving individual grants or are compensated for their short-term work. Young people might not have bank accounts, might not have access to international financial mechanisms (due to the limited capacity of banking systems in their communities/where they are based), or may not be able to provide invoices since they do not own or are not affiliated with a company. Similarly, for non-profit organizations, providing invoices can be challenging. Alternatives, such as availability of payment in person, and documentation systems, such as expense vouchers, donation receipts, or individually signed declarations should be available at the in certain local, national and regional events, if not at large-scale global events.

Accountability can be ensured by strong communication and reporting. However, when funds are provided and a majority of crucial decisions are controlled (agenda, language, list of participants), it is difficult to speak of youth co-leadership, and the events turn out to be youth-focused, not youth-led.

Many international gatherings and conferences crucial for effective lobbying and networking are only open to the participation of legally registered, large-scale civil society organizations with recognized status. For example, only ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations are able to attend Commission on the Status of Women and youth activists often find themselves reaching out to the accredited NGOs and negotiating with them to be included within their list of representatives. Initiatives and platforms led by youth often lack legal personalities, let alone

ECOSOC accreditation. While supportive NGOs with such accreditation are often in solidarity with youth and provide support with regard to access to registration, young people often have to search for funding for in-person participation. A significant increase in campaigns started by youth activists from low-income countries, as well as youth organizations with hopes to cover travel and accommodation costs to attend international United Nations conferences, such as COP27 in 2022⁴, is a clear example of how youth participation should be prioritized by feminist and youth-focused funding.

Lack of resources and funding which feminist youth activists and grassroots feminist organizations often experience is the main source of power imbalance and undermines the active, substantive and meaningful participation of these groups.

When youth organizations do have a legal status and are selected for a grant, they are expected to provide detailed and certified financial audit reports, Rules of Governance, proof of legal status provided only by certain institutions etc. Youth organizations with legal status are often expected to act as intermediary organizations in order to fund young individuals who may not be affiliated with them. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's individual funding for the members of Generation Equality Youth Task Force provides an example for such challenging cases. Transfer of the provided funds to youth task force members were delayed significantly, because an intermediary organization was first needed to distribute the funds. After a long and detailed selection process, an intermediary non-profit organization was appointed for the distribution of funds, which then had to withdraw due to limited capacity, and each youth task force member was individually provided with funds by the UN Women HQ. Although Youth Task Force members' activism work was eventually supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's generous donation with the strong support of UN Women team, the process was unexpectedly delayed despite the hardwork and commitment of all parties, causing an intense workload both for the Youth Task Force members (doing uncompensated work for searching, selecting and communicating with intermediary organization) as well as United Nations teams, who are often understaffed. Young individuals and youth organizations are often required to provide many documents and go through heavy paperwork, which surpass their capacity or require intense time and effort. Our Common Agenda addresses crucial points with regard to working with young people, as well as financial obligations, yet it does not address the need for simplifying financial and bureaucratic processes to make (often vital) funding more accessible to youth and other underrepresented and vulnerable constituencies.

⁴ <https://www.gofundme.com/s?q=cop27>

“TICKETS” FOR SEATS AT THE TABLE: ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

While the proposed actions under Our Common Agenda on solidarity with youth and future generations are promising, they solely focus on the establishment of new structures and mechanisms. The underfunding problem with regard to youth mobilization and the need to support youth leadership with financing and tangible resources are not mentioned under Chapter III. Instead of channeling resources and momentum exclusively to the new institutions envisioned under Our Common Agenda; United Nations’ funding system should be improved structurally. There has been a constant production and publishing of online toolkits, reports and short-term online workshops focused on capacity building. While young people are more often invited to and included within online consultations before major political gatherings such as CSW or HLPF, once inputs and feedback are collected, the consultation organizers rarely get

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back to youth constituencies with results or actual proof that their inputs were integrated within policies or statements. On one hand, active engagement in online consultations require time, energy and resources for young people (although more accessible, as expressed within one youth activism circle, “contrary to popular belief, online participation is not without cost”). On the other hand, during the recovery from COVID19 pandemic, effective discussions with concrete results, negotiations and policy making are often done in-person, within rooms where young people are very underrepresented. The organization committees of high level political events should prioritize funding for youth representatives’ participation, and the capacity and commitment to fund youth participation should be a criteria to be taken into consideration while building partnerships with private sector or sponsorship contracts for the organization of large-scale conferences. Creating a funding quota for the participation of youth representatives to be provided by private sector partners based on their financial capacity could be an innovative solution. Women’s Forum for the Economy and Society Conference⁵ adopting a system where major corporate sponsors were expected to fund the participation of specific numbers of young women participants can be shown among good practices, and through this sponsorship system the Conference has significantly improved and diversified youth representation, allowing non-European young women from diverse constituencies and low-income communities to attend.

5 <https://www.womens-forum.com/>

THOSE WHO HOLD THE FUNDING HOLD THE CONVEYING AND AGENDA-SETTING POWER: FUNDING EVENTS FOR MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In addition to the emphasis on civil society participation in paragraph 130, which is welcomed, meaningful youth engagement (although not specifically mentioned within the text) is strongly integrated within Our Common Agenda. For meaningful and effective participation and engagement of young, and to push the further step, which is youth co-leadership, the funding methods for youth-led events (not necessarily organized by United Nations entities, but often supported) should change.

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The institutions which hold the funding for the organization of youth-focused events hold the power to convey and the power to set the agenda. When providing funding for youth-led events, UN entities should provide bulk funding (or encourage private sector partners to do so) and leave the control for purchasing, individual funding, services, as well as the list of participants to the youth organizations. Accountability can be ensured by strong communication and reporting. However, when funds are provided and a majority of crucial decisions are controlled (agenda, language, list of participants), it is difficult to speak of youth co-leadership, and the events turn out to be youth-focused, not youth-led. The Generation Equality Forum Young Feminist Unconference in 2021 organized by young activists before Generation Equality Paris Forum is a good practice in this aspect, where youth co-leadership was ensured through funding mechanisms and Restless Development, as a fiscal sponsor, was able to pay out 88% of their grant directly to the young feminist activists leading the conference with less and simpler requirements for paperwork.⁶

⁶ <https://restlessdevelopment.org/generation-equality-forum-young-feminist-unconference/>

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS AND IMPRESSIVE PLEDGES: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FINANCIAL COMMITMENTS

Paragraph 124 of Our Common Agenda is welcomed for its dedication to effective fulfillment of Member States' financial obligations and resolving the financial crisis. A clear vision to improve budget processes, possibly repurposing existing funds and adopting less rigid budgetary procedures, which would be necessary steps to ensure youth-friendly and gender equal funding to reach out to grassroots youth-led feminist organizations. Having said this, Secretary General's invitation to Member States to consider examining the mechanisms for reviewing the budgets and improving how they are formulated and executed should be further expanded to include feminist youth groups. Young people have been actively involved in negotiations with regard to the preparations for the United Nations Youth Office, however, their active, inclusive and meaningful engagement should also be ensured, and their inputs should be integrated through discussions regarding the Youth Office's independent budget; and throughout general budgetary discussions and improvement efforts suggested by the Secretary-General.

Resourcing young feminists is equal parts about providing monetary support and remuneration, and equal parts about skill-building.

Large-scale international gatherings are often closed with impressive, bold financial pledges. In addition to the pledges announced during United Nations Climate Change Conference, Generation Equality Forum has been a recent example: at the end of the Generation Equality Paris Forum, a groundbreaking USD 40 billion of financial pledges was announced.⁷ While UN Women has followed up with an Accountability Framework and platform, and continues to push commitment makers for regular reporting and implementation, young feminists and civil society has expressed concerns⁸ about the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms, as well as transparency with regard to the unanswered questions on how much of the pledged USD 40 billion will directly reach and support the grassroots feminist organizations, youth groups, and underfunded and underrepresented constituencies. Large-scale global events often lack the motivation and momentum in the aftermath period, once pledges are announced. Transparent accountability and follow-up mechanisms, with active engagement of youth (and if these mechanisms exist, their improvement) as well as coherence and standardization of funding commitments should be prioritized.

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/7/press-release-generation-equality-forum-concludes-with-commitments-and-global-acceleration-plan>

⁸ <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/us-40-billion-us-2-billion-unpacking-real-numbers-behind-generation-equality>

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

A respectful and contextual approach that allows young people space for autonomous organization and decision-making power on where funds are spent and how is a must. Young people are often discarded from budget negotiations and major financial decisions due to lack of experience. However, intergenerational collaboration requires respectful dialogue, equal participation and being mindful of power dynamics. Building sustainable and feminist funding and resourcing mechanism can be done by mutual learning and experience sharing among generations.

Alternatives, such as availability of payment in person, and documentation systems, such as expense vouchers, donation receipts, or individually signed declarations should be available at the in certain local, national and regional events, if not at large-scale global events.



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