

WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform response to the questionnaire on the Policy Framework Strengthening Civil Society

General

Question 1. What would you consider to be the key strengths of the current Strengthening Civil Society Policy Framework? Where do you see bottlenecks and challenges?

Key strengths

The Netherlands is a critical donor to supporting women's rights, the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons and gender equality in the Global South. Dutch funding mechanisms such as Power of Voices (PoV) and the SDG5 fund (Power of Women, Women, Peace & Security (WPS) fund, SRHR fund, Leading from the South) are hugely important and quite unique, multi-year resources in support of women's and feminist movements and agendas in the Global South and worldwide. **The space to work on topics such as safe access to abortion, LGBTQIA+, women-led climate solutions, the WPS agenda and sex workers' rights that the Netherlands provides through PoV and the SDG5 fund, is important and impactful.** Through its policy framework on strengthening civil society the Netherlands is an ally to social and feminist movements in holding the lines on shrinking civic space.

The stand-alone funding and programming via the SDG5 fund (Power of Women, WPS fund, SRHR fund, Leading from the South) and gender mainstreaming in Power of Voices (PoV) have proven to be essential tools to move the funding to vital and feminist actors for change. Based on these strengths of the current policy framework WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform urges the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA):

= To continue substantially finance the two-track approach of gender equality and women's rights standalone programming (through the SDG5 Fund and its WPS fund, Power of Women and SRHR fund), and gender mainstreaming in the successor of Power of Voices (PoV) and all other financing mechanisms of the Dutch MFA.

= To enable access to long-term (i.e. 8-10 years) and flexible core funding to women-led and youth-led organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, organisations for people with disabilities, community-based feminist organisations and networks, with more direct access to funding for Southern-based and Southern-led organisations and initiatives.

A key strength of the SCS Policy Framework lies in its strategic focus on addressing the root causes of discrimination and inequality through lobbying and advocacy efforts. Unlike traditional approaches centred solely on service delivery, the SCS Policy Framework recognizes the importance of changing power relations to combat systemic and structural injustice, reflecting a more holistic understanding of development.

During consultations on the new Policy Framework, Southern-based and Southern-led partners frequently highlighted two additional strengths within the SCS Policy Framework. **Firstly, they emphasise the inclusion of grassroots structures such as community-based organisations (CBOs) and community volunteers.** This not only ensures the identification and prioritisation of community needs but also

empowers grassroots CSOs to effectively represent peoples subject to marginalisation including women, LGBTQIA+ persons, youth, and people with special needs, thus ensuring their voices are integral to all advocacy efforts. This, in its own way, demonstrated intersectionality of issues across the board of manifold social justice struggles and oppressions. **Secondly, the SCS Policy Framework facilitates the building of networks and coalitions among CSOs at various levels (the local, regional, and global), fostering collective impact and strengthening advocacy for shared issues.** By encouraging collaboration between CSOs and government entities, the framework enhances relationships and amplifies advocacy success through joint efforts.

Key challenges & bottlenecks

One of the main challenges continues to be the lack of direct funding for feminist movements. We need to clearly distinguish between funding feminist movements, and supporting generic gender equality programming that often does not reach the actual feminist groups, activists, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and communities on the ground. Direct funding intentionally delivers resources to those groups that allows them to determine their own priorities and strategies. Strong autonomous feminist movements are critical actors in achieving women's economic empowerment. **Another issue to highlight here is the time span of the current policy framework. Five-year funding is short for funding of a diverse consortium which aims for structural social change. New funding frameworks should consider 8-10 years commitment.**

A challenge remains internal policy coherence across policy spaces, the different MFA funding mechanisms and the several ministries working on Dutch external policies. The same feminist principles and requirements on gender-responsiveness and/or gender-transformativeness should be used in all (international) funding modalities. **The lack of policy coherence in the areas of climate change, peace and security, and trade and investments, is one of the key drivers behind the lack of development impact of The Netherlands globally (see [Spillover Index](#)).** Even so, the Dutch commitment to *Feminist Foreign Policy* (FFP) provides clear opportunities for both the Dutch government and civil society around the world to meaningfully connect and strategically cooperate through the new policy framework. The capacity of civil society to be meaningfully connected around the world offers a unique accountability mechanism in relation to the ecological, climate and human rights impacts of global supply chains.

Levels of engagement between embassies and local partners vary, as reported during consultations. It seems not internalised in every embassy as standard practise to work with and see the added value in collaboration with civil society and/or step out of the singular donor role and accept a part in the programme as one of the actors. Capacity in embassies to do so may be absent. This was identified as a challenge/bottleneck in the previous policy framework *Dialogue and Dissent* as well.

The current Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system is overly time and capacity consuming, and it is questionable whether all data asked for are actually used. Especially for local organisations more flexible and easier formats are required.

The eligibility criteria of the current SCS Policy Framework posed obstacles because the set of requirements had been imposed on all applicants within consortia, regardless the size of an organisation, the organisational capacity, and the field of work. For example, the *Organisational Risk and Integrity Assessment* (ORIA) requirements applied to all partners equally, but this disproportionately affected smaller women's rights organisations in the Global North and South both. By equalising such requirements for large and smaller and medium-sized organisations, an uneven playing field was created

for the various organisations. **Eligibility criteria need to be designed specifically to ensure funding reaches key actors in feminist movements.**

Question 2. For representatives of civil society in the Global South, what are the main objectives for joining in a partnership with CSOs from the Global North?

Strategic partnerships with an inherent aim to shift powers between Northern and Southern partners enable global community building on the themes these consortia jointly work on, cross-learning and capacity sharing. Also, such partnerships lead to increased civil society access to human rights, international climate and biodiversity, international trade, finance and economic, international peace, security and humanitarian donor and decision-making fora and institutions. **Sharing of capacity and expertise between organisations and people and cross-learning is a sustainable investment that is crucial in the volatile contexts in which we work together. This becomes increasingly important in the face of the growing anti-rights and anti-gender movement.**

However, capacity sharing needs to be combined with meaningful access to international policy fora in order to work on systemic change. The strategic partnerships enable (privileged) Dutch actors to function as gateway for NGOs, women-led, youth-led organisations and CBOs, networks, and activists from groups in a marginalised position that are often excluded from decision-making fora, or who deal with travel and visa restrictions and/or individual and organisational safety risks.

Question 3. How could gender equality and women's rights be better addressed in policy formulation, programming, monitoring, evaluation and learning? What would you need to make sure that programmes are more gender-responsive or gender-transformative?

Representation, consultation and participation of feminist and women's rights organisations and WHRDs, specifically from the Global South, is essential across all policy fields of Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation. This approach needs to be structurally embedded in all steps of the policy cycle. To ensure that gender equality and women's rights are better addressed in all policies and programmes we need to ensure space for voices and lived experiences from those that are structurally silenced and marginalised, including but not limited to women from the Global South, LGBTQIA+ people, People with disabilities indigenous peoples and those doing precarious work including sex workers.

For more information on meaningful consultation:

= WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform (2022), Meaningful Consultation Factsheet:
<https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1662026286.pdf>

A structural intersectional gender lens is needed to recognize the reality of diversity among the people it serves and to take power inequalities based on multiple identities into account. This is critical to designing interventions that do no harm, and that are truly gender transformative. Therefore, a thorough gender analysis must be mandatory in all humanitarian, development, climate action, peace and security work. This demands sufficient time and resources to conduct a detailed and contextualised gender analysis to identify and address underlying gender disparities effectively. **Underlying theories of change need to include change in social norms (about inclusion of women in political, economic and social life) and interhuman relations, which really needs a long-term perspective and support.**

For the Netherlands to follow its Feminist Foreign Policy and meet the UN and EU GAP-III standards, along with upscaling standalone allocated funds for the work on gender equality and women's rights (including stand-alone WPS funding and SRHR funding), gender-responsive budgeting and procurement need to be become standard practise. CSOs that apply for funding for activities in these fields should be requested to show that at least 85% of their activities contribute to gender equality (are gender responsive at the least).

To better address gender equality and women's rights in a future policy framework, applicant consortia should be required to develop a Feminist MEL framework. Employing participatory approaches ensures the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ people in monitoring and evaluation processes, enabling their perspectives and experiences to be accurately captured, thus enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of programmes. For additional information on Feminist MEL, see question 11.

The thematic focus in the current SCS policy framework dates from 2019 and includes the following themes: climate mitigation and adaptation, trade and making value chains more sustainable, food security, sustainable water management and/or WASH (including water, sanitation and hygiene), freedom of speech or freedom of religion and belief, equal rights LGBTQIA+, security and rule of law, women's rights and gender equality, SRHR). The Netherlands believes that maintaining a sharp thematic focus is important for effectiveness and strategic cooperation between The Netherlands and partners, but perhaps an update is needed.

Question 4. Are there any urgent themes or trends that -in your opinion- are currently not addressed?

The issue of shrinking space for civil society is becoming more and more urgent. Worldwide critical feminist civil society faces decreasing support for activities, limited possibilities to engage in decision making and continuous shrinking financial resources. That is why the strengthening of gender equality and women's rights needs to be seen in a broader perspective. **This perspective includes the worldwide human rights and gender equality backlash, and the accompanying withdrawal of funding for gender related work, as we have seen with Sweden and previously the USA.** Addressing shrinking space means also including cross-regional work within the framework parameters. Furthermore, people with disabilities should be included in the relevant themes because if they are not explicitly included in the design framework they are often left behind and not a part of the programme.

More specifically, the civic space and protection of women human rights and environmental defenders needs to be a central urgent theme in the policy framework. Women human rights and environmental defenders' individual and collective action has been pivotal pushing for change across a wide spectrum of rights. They are advocating for their communities, their livelihoods, their safety, and wellbeing. This means they are challenging corporate and political power, often at great personal risk.

Furthermore, both advocacy for gender responsive corporate accountability and critical engagement with the private sector - and specifically transnational corporations - is crucial to prevent and mitigate potential gendered harm and human rights abuses in their global chains. Forthcoming regulations for the private sector enforcing alignment of business practices with human rights frameworks are structurally met with strong and well-funded resistance and backlash. Often gender is deprioritised in both legislation for enterprises and in business practice. Civil society, including locally led, women-led and

feminist organisations and trade unions have an important role to structurally advocate for gender responsive corporate accountability and to monitor and engage with corporate and private sector actors.

Gender equality and women's rights issues ask for holistic approaches i.e. system change and a breakdown of harmful and cultural norms by engaging men, boys and religious leaders, cutting across specific priorities or themes. Also, **cross-level and regional cooperation is important. Harmful gender norms need to be addressed at various levels: individual, relational, community, policy, and institutional level.** The new framework should therefore strive to include organisations and networks operating with various target groups at different levels: local grassroots level, to national, regional, and international level. **Implementation of programmes at regional and national level should not be limited to the focus regions of the Dutch development cooperation policy.** Progress on gender equality has been uneven within countries – therefore HMICs and LMICs should also be eligible in this framework.

In short, it is advised to allow for holistic approaches within the framework and refrain from limiting eligible funding to specific themes or regions. **Narrow priority themes and siloed approaches unnecessarily constrain local actors that are best placed to determine their own context-specific priorities and strategies.** It is important to acknowledge the interconnections among various sectors and prioritise tackling underlying structural issues. Embracing a holistic and inclusive approach will enable the policy framework to better navigate the complex challenges confronting societies today.

Locally led sustainable development

The Netherlands is a strong advocate of locally led sustainable development and signed the [Donor statement Supporting Locally Led Development](#). The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to ask your view on how to achieve this goal.

Question 5. In your opinion, what is needed to strengthen locally led sustainable development in programmes aimed at strengthening civil society? How can we, the Dutch MFA, make sure that demands of rights holders drive our programming?

In strengthening locally led sustainable development, it is important to create more direct access to funding for Southern-based and or Southern-led organisations to strengthen ownership, agenda setting and decision-making. However, **capacity strengthening should not maintain a focus on Southern-based and or Southern-led organisations becoming able to fit the existing mould in terms of risks and thresholds of a Northern-based donor such as the Dutch government.** Currently, contracts offered by the MFA include high risks for the partner implementing the contract. These risks include financial risks, risks related to delivery of the project itself, quantitative and qualitative reporting, budgets etc. **The MFA should strengthen its own capacity to absorb risks and take a thorough look when designing and assessing proposals at how risks are distributed.** Bureaucratic delays in fund transfers to contract partners can hinder timely programme implementation, particularly affecting smaller CSOs or local NGOs with limited financial flexibility to conduct activities without disbursements, thereby causing disruptions and inefficiencies in project execution.

It is important for the sustainability of women-led, youth-led, LGBTQIA+-led and gender equality organisations, as well as feminist networks and their work to move beyond a project nature of funding. Thus, to strengthen locally led sustainable development the available funding should contribute to their institutional capacities and organisational strengthening. This is needed to sustainably maintain their staff and be able to roll out long-term strategies. **It is also important to note that funding should be flexible**

in thematic focus to ensure organisations can respond quickly to the developments in their context and opportunities. In the context of a backlash against these organisations, support should contribute to their resilience.

Due to shrinking civic space and restricting banking environments, more and more national and regional, Southern-based women's funds are looking to register in the Global North to be able to continue their work. In truly realising locally led development, allowing for flexibility within the policy framework will remain important to respond to the ever-changing circumstances the sector is facing. We need to distinguish between Southern-led and Southern-based and use valid criteria to do so, as INGOs could classify as Southern-based and Southern-led organisations are sometimes forced to register in the Global North.

At last, central to locally led development is to ensure active participation of community members in decision-making processes, emphasising inclusivity through diverse representation. It is vital to amplify the voices of those directly impacted by desired changes, providing accessible platforms to express their perspectives and ambitions. Programmes should elevate local leadership within consortium decision-making structures and invest in the development of leadership skills within the community, building on existing local strengths, resources, and knowledge to facilitate sustainable outcomes.

Question 6. What are limiting or success factors for CSOs in the Global North and CSOs in the Global South in their efforts to achieve more balanced power relations?

Collaborations between women-led and youth-led organisations, women's rights organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, organisations for people with a disability, development organisations, peace organisations and labour unions, working in alliances have added value and deserve to be encouraged and strengthened. Consortia between organisations from the Global South and North foster synergies and complementary bring knowledge, experiences, and skills to a programme. **It provides feminist networks, women-led and youth-led organisations, especially CBOs, with avenues for cooperation with (I)NGOs and governments which would not otherwise be available to them. It often provides additional opportunities for women-led and women's rights organisations to engage with international policy and decision makers, and to speak at international fora.**

Experience has shown however the importance for consortia to jointly undertake an internal power analysis and develop an MOU to clarify roles and responsibilities between the various actors which is integrated in the governance structure aimed at power sharing and key documents. **To ensure all partner organisations within a consortium take part in this assessment, we recommend requiring a power analysis and how to balance inequalities in the inception phase. Finally, invest in transparent and timely communication with key stakeholders, and avoid consortia lead applicants to become the sole gatekeepers vis-a-vis the Dutch MFA.**

Learning from current strategic partnerships highlight the following key success factors:

- = Integrating the ShiftThePower philosophy into the TOC ensures that programme design, implementation, and evaluation prioritise balanced power relations, community engagement, and equitable partnerships;
- = Providing capacity strengthening opportunities, particularly for community-based organisations, empowers stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes and engage effectively in community-led initiatives;

= An adaptive management approach allows for the flexible allocation of resources, directing funding from global budgets to programme countries and from INGOs to national and local CSOs/CBOs, facilitating more localised and responsive interventions.

Role of stakeholders

Question 7. How would you describe the desired relation between a donor and a CSO?

The desired relation between a donor and a CSO is based on equality, trust, and transparency. **The Dutch government has a unique track record as a donor in that it allows CSOs to continue their role as independent watchdog alongside strategic collaboration.** Especially when it is the Dutch government that is being held accountable. This is a crucial component of a strategic cooperation relation between a donor and a CSO. Next to that, the notions of partnership and mutual trust are inseparable and have proven to be of added value. **Trust should however be better translated into restraining from a de-risking management style, require realistic and straightforward financing and reporting demands, and avoiding due diligence clauses that disproportionately limit CSOs' field of operations.** Redistribution of risk and increased risk appetite at the level of MFA and a larger core fund for organisations to fall back to if risks materialise is crucial for this to be successful.

The desired relation between the MFA and a CSO also includes joint (risk) assessments of the impact of Dutch policies and their implementation on the ground, and the active (diplomatic and financial) support and protection of individual activists such as WWHRDs and women-led and youth-led organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations, feminist peacebuilding and crisis response organisations.

Transparency in decision making and policy making processes following the consultation principle of 'comply or explain' is crucial to build an equal and constructive collaboration between the MFA and CSOs. If information about processes and decision-making is being shared with CSOs - in a timely manner - it allows them to be more strategic and effective in their approach of how and when to share their input.

Additionally, we recommend including partnership standards in contracts to help establish clear expectations. Part of this could be accepting two contact persons per programme to foster a shared co-leadership approach. This could be framed within the broader context of partnership relations and strategic engagement.

Question 8. What do you consider to be the key strength and role of International NGOs?

International NGOs can play an important role in redressing incoherence in policy implementation at the Dutch, European and international level by preventing policies from aggravating gender inequality or violating women's rights. Similarly, these organisations can make visible the impact of policy and companies on gender equality and the women's rights agenda based on experiences and evidence from Southern civil society at the level of Northern governments and parliaments at the domestic, EU and international level.

The role of INGOs - particularly Netherlands' based organisations - in creating an enabling environment is crucial for Dutch societal support for international cooperation on gender equality. These organisations engage directly with citizens in meaningful ways around gender equality and global challenges, through public awareness raising and driving the societal debate on global issues such as gender equality. **They also may have access to companies to effectively advocate for or support**

implementation of improvements in supply chains for example in relation to living wage for women workers.

In certain circumstances, INGOs can also take the lead in a strategic partnership. A critical point to take into consideration is that in certain contexts, transferring funds directly to Southern organisations might pose risks, for instance when this is considered as foreign state interference. This can result in money being confiscated by authoritarian governments, physical threats, bank accounts frozen, offices closed, and loss of legitimacy. In countries of implementation INGOs can sometimes speak out on issues where local organisations cannot; especially the role of international staff can be effective in certain circumstances.

Participation of INGOs in alliances is important, as for instance the above-mentioned gateway (question 2 and 6) to international policy-making spaces, support for administrative processes, and as a watchdog of foreign policy areas. Especially when one considers the complexity of the current state of global political affairs, the impact of the shrinking space on gender equality and women's rights issues and the strong interlinkage amongst CSOs. International organisations should actively identify and mitigate risks faced by local and national organisations, providing necessary support and resources to minimise potential negative impacts on their operations and sustainability. This can include financial guarantees, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy efforts to address systemic barriers and challenges. Again, international organisations should serve as a buffer for local organisations that may not have the capacity or resources to bear certain risks associated with programme implementation.

This also applies to the diaspora women's organisations in the Netherlands that advocate for gender equality and women's rights in their home countries. Often these organisations are run by feminist activists in exile. As they both understand the local context and the 'Dutch way' of doing things, they can offer unique support to local women's agendas and international advocacy work in gender equality and women's rights. In practice these organisations face several barriers to access funding as they fall outside the box of development cooperation funding and the box of domestic gender equality funding by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The new policy framework for civil society should allow for their access.

Question 9. What do you consider to be the key strength and role of national and local organisations?

By being embedded in the local context and in their communities, local and national feminist and women led organisations can identify the evolving needs of their communities and react and adapt quickly to opportunities and risks. They have the understanding and experience with the local culture(s) and ways of working. Leveraging established networks and relationships with community members, local leaders, government agencies, and other stakeholders, they demonstrate the ability to swiftly respond to emerging needs, adapt strategies, and innovate solutions in real-time. Local and national organisations are also much better informed on dealing with local security organs and better (local) security analysis.

By facilitating community-led initiatives, nurturing grassroots leadership, and promoting inclusive decision-making, local and national feminist and women-led organisations enhance people's skills, knowledge, and capabilities, enabling effective responses to local challenges. Advocating for the rights and interests of their communities, these organisations amplify voices and influence policy decisions across local, national, and international arenas through dialogue with governments, civil society groups, and other stakeholders. They design, implement, and monitor programmes addressing diverse

development issues in a holistic way while delivering essential services, driving community development initiatives, and tracking progress towards desired outcomes.

Within partnerships with Northern-based organisations in the lead it is crucial to emphasise that Southern-based and Southern-led organisations should take the absolute lead in program design and implementation. **As champions of local ownership and sustainability, these organisations empower communities to actively engage in decision-making processes, enhance their capacities, and take ownership of development initiatives**, thus fostering enduring sustainability and resilience within the communities. Finally, it is important to recognise that local organisations may work to bring about change across national, regional, and global levels and are not limited to working sub-nationally.

(Capacity) needs

Question 10. Besides funding, what types of support do civil society organizations in countries in the Global South need to be more effective in their lobby and advocacy efforts?

Financial support for women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality also need to be backed by political support of the government. including (complementary) policy/advocacy support by international (diplomatic) efforts. This includes advocating towards other governments / donors to implement feminist funding principles in their programming, as well as demonstrating stronger allyship on gender equality and women's rights on all political and diplomatic levels.

International genuine recognition of the importance of localisation is key, not only lip service: recognition of the added value of local structures and organisations and access to unconditional emergency funding, e.g. in providing humanitarian support and early access to affected communities. In the case of the Gaza/ Sudan conflict or Türkiye/ Syria earthquake: they are the only channels for humanitarian support as the international community has left for security reasons or has not yet arrived.

Ensure capacity for thorough strategic exchanges is present at the levels needed: in embassies and in key departments in The Hague. Protection in countries with limited space for civil society and people at risk because of their work is part of this. Avoid direct funding relationships between embassies and smaller NGOs in sensitive contexts, as this may politically compromise either side, rather channel support and strategic exchanges through umbrella organisations at national or regional level. In the case of global networks that have gender equality and women's rights as core objectives, channelling support through their country offices (often with Southern leadership in place) could be an alternative.

Access to legal support and protection mechanisms is critical, given the often hostile legal environments in which sexual and gender minority groups operate. Supportive legal frameworks, pro bono legal services, and advocacy for legal reforms are essential to safeguarding the rights and safety of marginalised communities. Legal assistance can help organisations navigate legal challenges, combat discrimination, and advocate for policy reforms conducive to their rights and well-being.

Capacity enhancement (targeted capacity trajectories, not blanket training), allow for learning by doing. Also know that in many cases there is no (longer) a need for capacity building, but a need for trust!

Finally, visa access remains a principal issue for global and regional lobby and advocacy efforts. Events happening in Global North are harder to access for people from Global South due to longer and more complicated visa processes. This has an impact on freedom of association and possibility to organise.

Question 11: Can you tell us how Monitoring Evaluation and Learning, including reporting, can be improved? Do you have specific examples of what type of reporting requirements and mechanisms work for your organisation?

Few of the currently used monitoring and evaluation methodologies of the MFA can understand or track transformational change. The current emphasis is on quantitative, rather than qualitative indicators. We acknowledge the need for quantitative indicators but recommend much more emphasis on qualitative methodologies. **Methodologies using outcome harvesting, stories of change, research vignettes and qualitative impact indicators better understand, track, and visualise (unilinear) transformational change.**

Above suggestions can be incorporated in a Feminist MEL system. Feminist MEL involves creating a culture of continuous improvement; fostering an environment where reflection and dialogue on the successes, challenges, and lessons learned from gender-responsive and transformative initiatives are encouraged. It also entails adapting programmes based on feedback from women, LGBTQIA+ people, women with disabilities and relevant stakeholders to better address the evolving needs. Lastly, sharing knowledge and best practices across organisations and sectors is vital to accelerate progress towards gender equality by leveraging collective insights and experiences.

This is especially relevant in for instance WPS contexts like conflict settings or contexts with decreasing space for women rights organisations to manoeuvre. Examples are patterns of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, women's and youth's perception of physical security, and women's and youth's ability to participate in public life: [Indicators & Monitoring: Women, Peace and Security | PeaceWomen](#). Such qualitative impact mechanisms allow for more insight on progress and challenges in the implementation of long term WPS strategies that contribute to social transformation and normative change.

With regards to the organisational mechanisms of MEL, embassies could play a more active coordinating role in MEL, fostering cross-partnership learning on key themes and facilitating regional/global initiatives. Embassy Coordination Platforms could streamline training efforts on similar topics within the same countries or regions, preventing redundancy and promoting voluntary collaboration among partnerships.

Other sources, based on feminist approaches to MEL:

= Partos et al (2024), Rethinking MEL - a Guide for a Feminist Approach:

<https://www.partos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Rethinking-MEL-a-guide-for-a-Feminist-approach.pdf>

= Count Me In! (CMI!), 2023, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Should Centre on Care, Trust and Flexibility

<https://cmiconsortium.org/monitoring-evaluation-and-learning-should-centre-care-trust-and-flexibility/>

= Equality Fund (2023, Feminist Approaches to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:

<https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1688563396.pdf>

= AWID (2019), Toward a feminist funding ecosystem: A framework and practical guide:

<https://www.awid.org/publications/toward-feminist-funding-ecosystem-framework-and-practical-guide>

= Oxfam Canada: Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning

<https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Oxfam-Canada-Feminist-MEAL-Guidance-Note-English.pdf>

Question 12: What are the possible benefits of getting access to core funding through fund managers instead of by joining a consortium partnership?

Both models have their own benefits:

Consortium partnerships represent an opportunity to build on key lessons from collaborating with mainstream and feminist civil society organisations, as well as development partners and funders at national, regional, and global levels. To maximise impact for marginalised communities supported through consortium work, it would be critical to deliberately fund Global-South-led consortia/networks directly. Such partnerships are generating valuable evidence on the impact of having Global-South led consortia.

Strong feminist leadership to ensure real impact on gender equality is key when outsourcing fund management to a fund manager. Feminist and women's funds are key partners in managing funds, both for their technical know-how and connections to feminist movements. This also provides an opportunity to resource and strengthen management expertise and capacity rooted in feminist movements themselves. **Regranting by funders connected to the feminist movement has proven highly effective. Given their location within movements, a fundamental aspect is the particular kind of relationship they have with their partners, one that is grounded in trust that partners know best their multiple and interrelated challenges and how to solve them.** This kind of relationship lends itself to women's funds providing core, flexible, predictable, and long-term funding, as well as other supports like capacity strengthening, networking, and shared learning.

However, it is important to note that for the MFA to choose the route of fund managers and implement it in a way that is empowering - not burdening, certain guardrails need to be put in place. These include but are not limited to:

- = Being outspoken about the roles and responsibilities of the fund managers;
- = Clearly specifying the risks that MFA is looking to transfer to them;
- = Defining the (reporting) requirements between the fund manager and MFA in a way that providing core funding is still achievable. This requires a monitoring framework that moves away from quantitative and project outcome and output driven to being more holistic and qualitative. Any restrictions put on fund managers, inevitably will have to be transferred to grantee partners;
- = Resourcing women's funds adequately to perform this role of intermediary in a way that is in line with their feminist values. Shared governance models and participatory grant making are resource-intensive for good reasons - this needs to be reflected in the contribution received for taking up this role.

Fund managers, especially when based in-country and/or understanding the local civil society culture, can combine funding with targeted capacity building and accompaniment when needed, something the MFA or embassies cannot undertake.

For more information on how funders can resource feminist movements:

= AWID and Mama Cash with the support of CMI! (2020), Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements:

https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/MovingMoreMoney_FINALFINAL.pdf

Other

Open question 13: Do you have any suggestions or remarks about topics that are not addressed above?

Cater for diverse financial needs and capacities by creating separate windows for funding to avoid unnecessary competition and a non-level playing field for different sizes of organisations. The funding needs and financial capacities of diverse organisations and networks differ from one another and do not benefit from 'one size fits all' funding modalities. Within the successor of the SDG5 Fund an opportunity could be created that caters to different capacities by creating for instance separate distinct windows with different annual minimum and maximum grant sizes (for instance 5 to 20 million maximum). When starting with lower amounts (such as five million euros), the MFA would encourage more Southern leadership and participation.

We also urge the Netherlands to invest in participatory grant making and include women-led and youth-led organisations, LGBTQIA+ organisations and feminist networks and organisations of people with disabilities in the design of the fund, subsequent programme and in the decision-making structure. It is important to acknowledge that additional resources for this type of fund administration and grant making is a prerequisite for genuine transformative change. Additionally, we recommend building in time and resources to adequately undertake these consultations with local actors and investing in their institutional and technical capacities to meaningfully engage in these consultations.

Finally, **the establishment of a feminist fund to which countries (aspiring) a Feminist Foreign Policy contribute but which is entirely run by feminist organisations in the Global South** could be something the Netherlands, as part of the new framework, takes leadership in. This could be done by supporting the setup of the fund, but also by donating to the fund and stimulating other countries to do the same.

About WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

WO=MEN is the member platform in the Netherlands of women's rights, diaspora-, development, humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations, entrepreneurs, military, academia and activists that strive for worldwide gender equality and women's rights. WO=MEN is the largest network in Europe in this field. More info: www.wo-men.nl

Questionnaire on new Policy Framework Strengthening Civil Society

A strong civil society is an essential element of a properly functioning democracy governed by the rule of law. A society becomes more inclusive and more stable when people can express themselves freely and their views are heard, when they can meet freely and organize to achieve common goals. Furthermore, civil society organisations are vital to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, civil society is under pressure in many countries worldwide. According to the global coalition civil society alliance [CIVICUS](#), only two percent of the world's population has the freedom to associate, demonstrate and express dissent. Through its current [Policy for Strengthening Civil Society](#) the Netherlands supports civil society organisations to contribute to reducing inequality, combating corruption and to amplifying the voice of citizens to stand up for their rights. The main objective is to strengthen civil society organisations in their role of lobby and advocacy, for them to contribute to inclusive and stable societies and to achieving the SDGs. Specific attention goes to the realisation of women's rights and gender equality. The current policy is mainly targeted at countries that have a development cooperation relation with the Netherlands. Through various programmes and funds, the Netherlands supports civil society both through partnerships with civil society organisations and through direct contributions to local organisations.

Aim of this questionnaire

The current policy for strengthening civil society has been operationalised in a [Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society \(SCS\)](#), which will end in 2025. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently in the process of creating a new policy framework. Therefore, we engage in various ways with different target groups, stakeholders, and experts, both in the Netherlands and abroad. This questionnaire provides those not yet included in this process with a possibility to join.

Your response

You are invited to provide answers to the questions listed below. Please feel free to only insert answers to the questions you consider relevant to you. Under question 13, you may include suggestions and remarks not covered by questions 1 to 12. Please substantiate your responses as much as possible and include sources where relevant.

Submitting your response

You can respond to this questionnaire by replying via e-mail to scs-policyteam@minbuza.nl. Please use the following subject line: "Questionnaire new SCS – [Your name or Name of responding organization]".

Privacy

Responses will not be publicly disclosed and will only be shared and used by colleagues within the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Information gathered will solely and anonymously be used as input for the creation of the new policy framework.