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Feminist Philanthropy: a new era for the philanthropy field?

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Abstract:

Feminist Philanthropy: a new era for the philanthropy field?

Women's funds and foundations are part of the global women's funding movement, which champions the mobilization of women's engagement in philanthropy and the role of philanthropy in the transformation of the lives of women and girls. Within this movement, an explicit identity with feminism has often proved controversial (Brilliant 2000). In recent decades, international philanthropic donors and foundations have also given increased support to women and girls' human rights in the Global South. Women's funds play a key role in channelling funding to grassroots groups. They provide flexible financial support, allowing women's rights organizations to set their own priorities, respond to unexpected opportunities and cover operating costs (OECD-DAC, 2016). However, there are wider concerns about the challenges that the funding landscape, including the range of philanthropic funders and the diversity of their approaches, pose for the depoliticisation of gender and development (Miller et al., 2013: 18-19). The purpose of this paper is to explore how women's funds negotiate a pragmatic need for resources, with a commitment to feminism in the current funding environment. The paper will present the findings from a study, which was carried out with members of Prospera-International Network of Women's Funds (INWF). Prospera-INWF envisions philanthropy from a feminist point of view. This exploratory research is based on a purposive sampling of women's funds, representative of funds of various size, age, capacity and geographical location. Between June-September, 2016, 16 interviews were

carried out with women's funds via video conferencing, guided by online research methods (Blank et al., 2008). The following research questions informed the study:

- (1) How do women's funds seek to incorporate feminist principles and practices into their daily work?
- (2) To what extent do women's funds aim to grow philanthropy? What challenges does this present? To what extent do they seek to (re)shape philanthropy in the process?
- (3) What do women's funds tell us about the relationship between activism, philanthropy and the women's movement?

The findings suggest that women's funds show how philanthropic vehicles can be used to reclaim the organisation and purpose of philanthropy for women's rights. In the process, they present new opportunities to examine philanthropy through the lens of feminism and movement building.

Most important references:

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Miller, J., Arutyunova, A. and Clark, C. (2013). *New Actors, New Money, New Conversations. A mapping of recent initiatives for women and girls*, Toronto, Association for Women's Rights in Development.

OECD-DAC (2016) Donor support to southern women's rights organisations: OECD Findings.

Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/donor-support-to-southern-women-s-rights-organisations.htm>