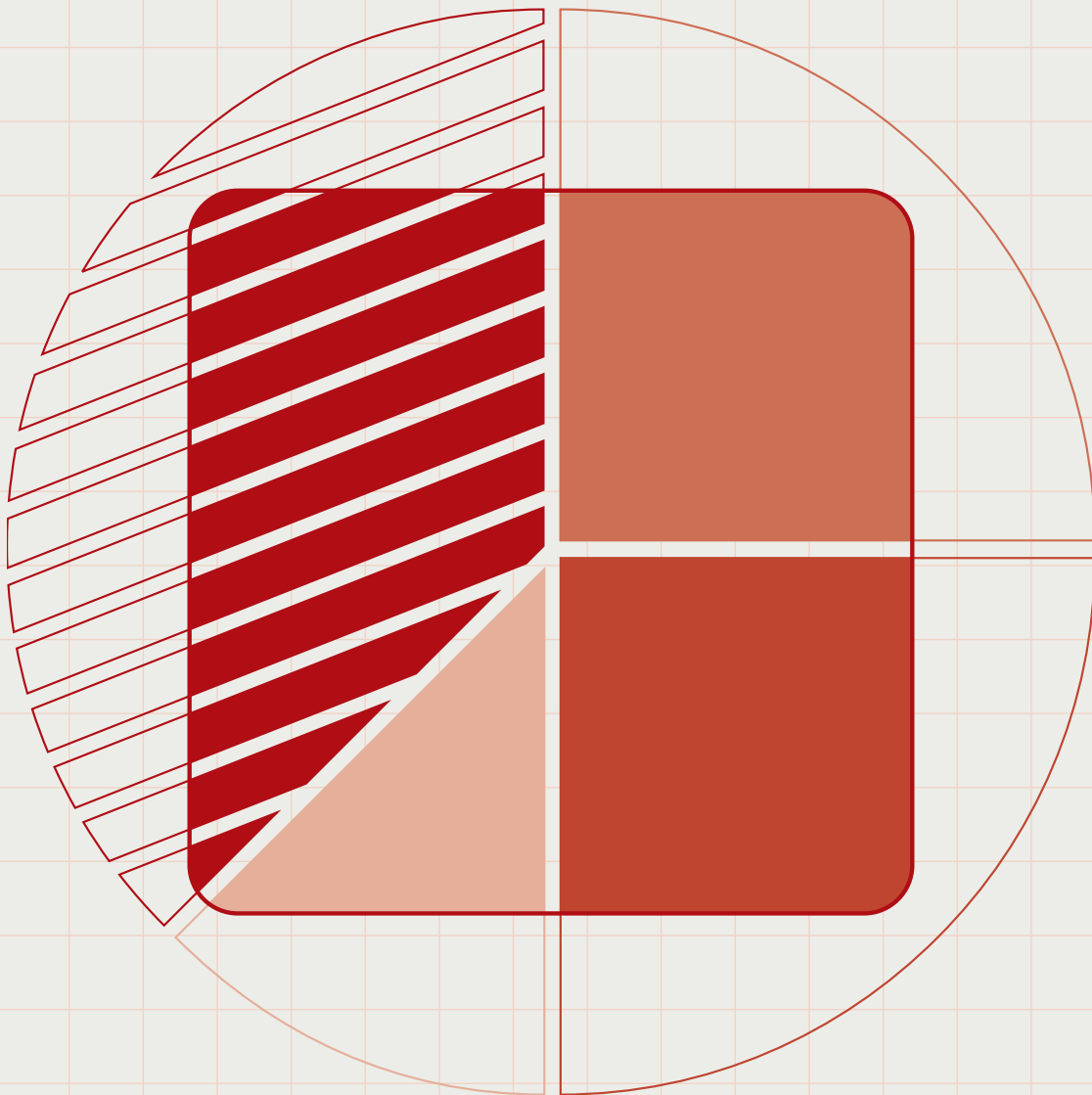


December 2022



# Improving Funding Transparency for Women's Economic Empowerment

# About us

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Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid and development transparency. We envisage a world where aid and development information is transparent, available, and used for effective decision-making, public accountability, and lasting change for all citizens.

## About this project

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In October 2020, Publish What You Fund embarked on a multi-year project to improve the transparency of funding for women's economic empowerment (WEE), women's financial inclusion (WFI), women's empowerment collectives (WECs), and gender integration (GI).

The project has assessed national funding to WEE, WFI, and WECs in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Uganda. The project has also tracked international funding to WEE, WFI, and WECs as well as assessed which funders have a gender integration approach in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Our full report series is available [here](#).

This report is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Its findings and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

## About this report

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This report examines the transparency of international funding for women's economic empowerment. Drawing on our research tracking funding to WEE, including unpaid care work, WFI and WECs in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria, we demonstrate that producing granular analysis is possible. However, there are limitations that prevent a deeper understanding of the funding picture. In this report we put forward evidence-based recommendations for how funders can improve their reporting and publication which would improve the quality and transparency of data and allow effective monitoring of funding to WEE. The findings of this report also have broader implications for international funders and for aid transparency more generally.

This report is intended primarily to inform data publishers (funders) and data platforms of the gaps in transparency of WEE funding and provide recommendations to improve their reporting and publication. In addition, we hope that data users such as policymakers, researchers, and gender advocates will use this evidence to engage in this conversation and advocate for greater transparency of WEE funding.

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Please note that participation in our project advisory committee does not necessarily equate to an endorsement of our findings or outputs.

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# ACRONYMS

CGAP	Consultative Group to Assist the Poor
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFIs	Development finance institutions
GBV	Gender-based violence
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
UCW	Unpaid care work
WECs	Women's empowerment collectives
WEE	Women's economic empowerment
WFI	Women's financial inclusion
WROs	Women's rights organisations

# Key terms

The table below outlines definitions for the key areas of focus in this study. These concepts are interconnected and integral to fully realising women's economic empowerment. Whilst individual reports explain our findings for WFI and WECs funding, unpaid care work was analysed in the context of tracking international funding to WEE. For complete details on how we tracked funding to each of these key areas, please see our [research methodology](#) and [international report series for Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria](#).

	Definition
<b>Women's economic empowerment</b>	Women's economic empowerment (WEE) <sup>a</sup> is central to realising women's rights and gender equality and reducing poverty generally. It is both a process and an outcome of enhancing women's skills, agency, access to and control over resources, and bargaining power. Structural factors within and outside of the labour market pose barriers to WEE. There must be recognition of these barriers such as discriminatory laws and social norms. To realise WEE there is a need to create an enabling environment from the household to the institutional level, including ensuring equitable social provisioning of resources outside of labour market activity, such as equitable access to healthcare, education, social welfare, and cash transfer programmes.
<b>Women's financial inclusion</b>	Women's financial inclusion (WFI) is meaningful access to, use of, and control over financial services that create economic and social benefits. <sup>b</sup> WFI is critical to realising gender equality and women's economic empowerment (WEE). Incorporating a WFI focus recognises the impact of gendered social norms. For women, meaningful participation in the financial sector goes beyond formal <sup>c</sup> and informal <sup>d</sup> types of banking services for individual, household, or business use. WFI accounts for the range of ways women's economic and social lives may benefit from financial services, particularly when such services embed women's unique needs. Financial services which contribute to WFI take into consideration demand and supply side constraints that may limit women's uptake and use of services.
<b>Women's empowerment collectives</b>	A women's empowerment collective (WEC) <sup>e</sup> is a women's group that features five critical elements: 1) group solidarity and networks, 2) pooled savings and shared risks, 3) participatory learning and life skills, 4) critical consciousness of gender, and 5) access to markets & services and collective bargaining. Together these elements build women's human, financial, and social capital. WECs are one approach for integrating and scaling positive financial, health, and livelihood outcomes for women and girls. These groups vary across country contexts and go by different names including savings groups, self-help groups (SHGs), and village savings and loan associations (VSLAs). Consequently, they have been identified as potential enablers for realising women's economic empowerment (WEE), alongside social and political empowerment. In our analysis we tracked funding to women's groups and WECs.
<b>Unpaid care work</b>	The provision of care services including unpaid care work (UCW) is predominately undertaken by women and girls. We utilised the 'Care Policy Scorecard' developed by a consortium of organisations as a basis for our framework and analysis on UCW. <sup>1</sup> The scorecard uses the ILO 5R framework to outline why the recognition, reduction, redistribution, rewarding and representation of unpaid and paid care work is critical for creating an enabling policy environment on care. We focused our attention on WEE projects that addressed UCW. We classified projects as implicitly or explicitly supporting UCW outcomes. A project was considered as explicitly addressing UCW when UCW or reducing women and girl's time on UCW was stated as a project objective or outcome.

<sup>a</sup> We recognise that there are various definitions of WEE. Our holistic definition of WEE was informed by existing research and was subject to extensive consultation with external researchers and other stakeholders working to advance WEE.

<sup>b</sup> We recognise that there are various definitions of WFI.

<sup>c</sup> For example, basic bank accounts, savings, loans, and insurance.

<sup>d</sup> For example, village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), and microfinance associations.

<sup>e</sup> As defined by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

# 1. Introduction

## Why funding to Women's Economic Empowerment matters

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is central to advancing gender equality, reducing poverty, and tackling climate change globally.<sup>2,3</sup> As evidenced by a growing body of literature, investing in WEE is critical for women to contribute to and benefit from economic activity and to have the necessary resources to support their livelihoods. When women are economically empowered, they can benefit from equal access to and opportunities within markets<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>

However, according to the 2022 report by the World Economic Forum it will take 132 years to close the global gender gap.<sup>8</sup> The social and economic fallout of the global COVID-19 pandemic<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> exposed structural inequalities and barriers to WEE that feminists have long been discussing. These inequalities include the insecurity of women's jobs and livelihoods, poor investment in social protection and social infrastructure, and the undervaluing and unequal distribution of paid and unpaid care work at a household and societal level.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup>

As governments look to rebuild their economies post COVID-19, gender equality advocates and feminists are pushing for transformative change, centred on an equitable, just, and sustainable economic reform.<sup>17</sup> This includes greater focus on addressing structural barriers, decent work, the care economy, and prioritising climate justice. Realising this urgently requires large and strategic investments, as well as thoughtful partnership between public and private bodies,<sup>18,19,20,21</sup> and the leadership and funding of feminist movements and women's right's organisations (WROs).<sup>22,23,24</sup>

Transparency has an important role to play if governments are to make meaningful progress on WEE. Although governments increasingly recognise the importance of funding WEE and it's potential to advance multiple development objectives, there is a limited understanding of who funds what, how, and with what results. Without this information, it remains difficult for policymakers, funders, and gender advocates to make decisions and/or advocate for the best funding allocations and approaches.

## Our contribution to the Women's Economic Empowerment landscape

While international funding is only part of the funding picture,<sup>f</sup> it still plays an important role in advancing WEE. As part of our [Women's Economic Empowerment: building evidence for better investments](#) project we sought to provide new insights into international funding for WEE, including unpaid care work (UCW), women's financial inclusion (WFI), and women's empowerment collectives (WECs). To do this we focused on international funding to Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria over a five-year period (2015-2019).<sup>g</sup>

The objectives of our project were threefold:

1. Produce new, granular insights into funding for WEE as outlined in our [country report series](#) for Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria.
2. Produce and pilot a replicable country-based approach to tracking funding that can be used by others to hold government/funders accountable. This is outlined in our step by step guides for tracking funding to [WEE](#) and [WFI](#).
3. In this final report, reflect on the data limitations and gaps encountered in our research which hinder a further robust analysis of funding to WEE, and provide recommendations on how funders can improve reporting and publication to these areas.

<sup>f</sup> As part of this project, we also partnered with in-country public expenditure experts to assess national funding for WEE, WFI, and WECs in six countries: Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Uganda. The full national report series can be found [here](#).

<sup>g</sup> Data from our four main data sources covers the period 2015–2019 and was the most up-to-date available information reported by international funders at the time of the research.

Ultimately, our aim is to provide solid evidence of funding data, so that those best positioned to advocate for and/or decide on how best to support WEE have the information needed to make informed decisions.

## Why does the transparency of Women's Economic Empowerment funding matter?

Our project to track and assess international funding to WEE builds upon Publish What Fund's previous experience of tracking gender financing more broadly.<sup>25</sup> We know that timely, accessible, and transparent funding data, combined with engagement, is critical to:

- Ensuring that WEE projects meet the goals of local stakeholders and that funders are accountable to local needs;
- Improving coordination amongst funders, helping to avoid duplication, and identify gaps;
- Improving decision making and collaboration amongst key stakeholders to ensure funding goes to what needs to be prioritised;
- Contribute to learnings on what works to advance WEE.

## Report Overview

This report draws on our experience of tracking funding at a country level to 1) illustrate what insights can be drawn using four data sources,<sup>h</sup> 2) outline the data limitations which prevent a more granular or complete view of international funding for WEE, and 3) provide actionable recommendations that funders and data platform managers can follow to address these challenges.

We hope that the findings of this report will inform conversations to improve data transparency between data users, data publishers, and data platforms.

This report is intended primarily to inform data publishers (funders) and data platforms of the gaps in transparency of WEE funding and provide recommendations to improve their reporting and publication. In addition, we hope that data users such as policymakers, researchers, and gender advocates will use this evidence to engage in this conversation and advocate for greater transparency of – and better outcomes for – WEE funding.

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<sup>h</sup> The data sources used are IATI, OECD-DAC CRS, Candid and CGAP and are discussed later in this report.



## 2. Understanding the open data landscape

To develop and pilot a country-based methodology, our main goal was to gather data on as much funding to WEE as possible. We used two publicly available data sources for this research: data reported in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard (referred to in this report as IATI) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) (referred to in this report as OECD CRS). We also used two data sources that are not publicly available: Candid and data from the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP) funder survey.<sup>i</sup> These four data sources contain financial and programmatic information on projects from bilateral, multilateral, development finance institutions (DFIs), and philanthropic funders.<sup>j</sup>

There are some key considerations when it comes to the open data landscape that influence how much WEE funding we are able to track. Most notably:

**Most funding is captured but some important flows are missing.** The two largest of our four data sources, the OECD CRS and IATI, largely capture official development assistance (ODA) financial flows. The OECD CRS is the standard for ODA reporting globally. However, not all countries and organisations report to the OECD CRS. This was a key consideration in using other data sources in our research. Other important sources of WEE funding are not captured in our research as they are not yet well reported to centralised open data sources. This includes:

- Private sector finance;
- South to South cooperation among prominent funders such as China, Brazil, and India;
- International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) that can be both implementers and funders of WEE programmes. The limited reporting by INGOs to these data sources makes it difficult to systematically track their contribution and role in the aid delivery chain;
- Organisations that self-finance through community mobilisation and membership fee structures, such as some feminist movements or WROs.

**The ability to access financial and programmatic information varies.** Accessible and usable data is central to transparency, accountability, and effective coordination between development partners.<sup>26</sup> While some data platforms are increasingly user-friendly, accessing, and robust tracking of funding portfolios is complex and resource intensive. Using this data can require a high level of technical knowledge, as well as significant time and resourcing (staff expertise and capacity). Better coordinated and integrated data management systems are critical for improving different actors' engagement. For example, national and even local governments are important partners in international funding. Country-based platforms such as Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS)<sup>27</sup> offer potential avenues for funders and partner governments to open and share international funding data and for citizens to effectively engage in the development process.

<sup>i</sup> These two data sources contain specific types of data: Candid contains reporting of philanthropic funding and CGAP contains reporting on financial inclusion data.

<sup>j</sup> For more details on our consideration of data sources, please see our data collection methodology document [here](#).

**Funding decisions are influenced by a range of issues in which equal decision making by different players largely does not exist.**

- Funders' decisions and the priorities they are implementing are largely driven by funders' strategies and national priorities<sup>k</sup> which are often political.<sup>28</sup>
- Engagement with key stakeholders, including national and community-based movements as well as INGOs, may be part of the decision-making process, but they – and especially local and national WRO's – are rarely able to set agendas.<sup>29</sup>
- Feminist movements and WRO's have raised the issue that some funders who support WEE may also fund activities that are anti-feminist and undermine progress toward equality and women's rights.<sup>30,31,32,33</sup>

Transparent and better-quality data alone cannot solve these issues, but it can help all stakeholders identify trends, priorities, and potential policy conflicts. Stronger engagement among national and local governments, civil society and WRO's and funders around compiling, sharing, and understanding data would help address existing power imbalances in setting priorities, designing programmes, and implementing projects and evaluations to distil learnings.

# 3. A synthesis of key findings across Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria

To provide context for our transparency findings and recommendations, part 3 of this report is a synthesis of the overall findings from our previous research that tracked funding to WEE, WFI, and WECs in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria. Below are our top findings but more detail can be found by accessing the full international country report series [here](#).

**Funding trends:** Although overall international funding to Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria increased between 2015–2019, WEE-related grant<sup>l</sup> funding remained largely unchanged. It was not possible to establish the same clarity of trends for non-grant<sup>m</sup> funding (loans, guarantees, and equity), as funding was dominated by a few large projects from a few large international financial institutions. Overall, drawing trends for WEE funding was easier than for WFI and WECs, where there were fewer projects. Funding for WFI and WECs projects generally was a small portion of overall funding to WEE.

<sup>l</sup> Grant funding refers to funders' reported disbursements for standard grants, cash grants, grants to individuals, reimbursable grants, and unspecified grants.

<sup>m</sup> In this report, non-grant financial flows refer to funders' reported commitments for standard loans, aid loans excluding debt reorganisation, investment-related loans, common equity, loan to private investor, and acquisition of equity in developing countries not part of joint ventures.

## Box 1: Overview of methodology

Our efforts to map international funding for WEE, including UCW, WFI, and WECs started with merging data from our four data sources to build individual country data sets. We then applied the following steps highlighted in this high-level overview of our methodology.

- 1. Gender marker:** We used the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker to identify an initial group of projects that potentially supported women's empowerment and gender equality. Projects with a score of zero were excluded from our review.
- 2. Gender search terms:** We identified additional potential projects using an expansive list of gender search terms. The search terms used can be accessed [here](#).
- 3. Identifying WEE, WFI and WECs projects:** We utilised slightly different approaches for identifying projects that supported WEE, WFI, and WECs respectively. For each approach we manually reviewed potential projects using guidance questions to determine if they did in fact support WEE, UCW, WFI, or WECs.
  - **WEE:** We used OECD sector and purpose codes to categorise projects according to our WEE framework. Our WEE framework encompasses a holistic definition of WEE and defines the scope of what we included in our definition of WEE. The full framework can be found on p. 19 of our methodology. We undertook a manual review of potential WEE projects using a set of comprehensive guidance questions which was developed in consultation with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). These are outlined in Annex 1.2 of the methodology. As part of assessing unpaid care work responsibilities amongst WEE projects, we utilised the [Care Policy Score Card](#) in conjunction with key guidance questions. Our unpaid care framework is available in Annex 1.3 of the methodology document.
  - **WFI:** We used a set of financial inclusion terms ([see here](#)) to identify potential WFI projects. We undertook a manual review using a set of comprehensive guidance questions (p. 25-26 of the methodology) to categorise projects with WFI activities against the market system.
  - **WECs:** We used a set of group terms which were refined to the country context ([see here](#)) to identify potential WECs projects and projects supporting women's groups. We undertook a manual review to classify projects into one of five group models. For further details please see p. 26-30 of our methodology.

For our full methodology document please see [here](#).

**Programmatic trends:** It was evident from our review that international funders often embed WFI and WECs projects into larger projects, including gender, WEE, or broader development projects. For WFI this reflects an existing pattern of embedding financial inclusion in non-financial sector programming.<sup>34</sup> The lack of budget information published by funders means that it was impossible to determine the amount of funding supporting WEE, WFI, or WECs activities when they were embedded in a broader project.

**Funding instruments:** We analysed data for grants and non-grants, reporting the findings for each separately given that these are distinct finance types which often support different types of WEE projects.<sup>n</sup> Overall, it was easier to track more grants funding for WEE, WFI, or WECs. Non-grant financial flows typically have less detailed reporting than grants funding. We commissioned a deep dive into this topic<sup>35</sup> which echoes our previous findings that this is a broader underlying issue with the transparency of DFI funding.<sup>36,37</sup>

**Top funders:** Our review suggests that there are similar top funders for WEE across these three countries. For grants, bilateral governments tended to be responsible for more than half of the total grant funding for WEE in each country. Table 1 shows the top five funders for grants and non-grants by country.

	Top five grant funders for WEE (USD\$)	Top five non-grant funders for WEE (USD\$)
Bangladesh	<p><b>FCDO</b></p> <p><b>USAID</b></p> <p><b>GAC</b></p> <p><b>DFAT</b></p> <p><b>BMZ</b></p>	<p><b>ADB</b></p> <p><b>JICA</b></p> <p><b>IDA</b></p> <p><b>KEXIM</b></p> <p><b>AFD</b></p>
Kenya	<p><b>USAID</b></p> <p><b>BMZ</b></p> <p><b>Denmark MFA</b></p> <p><b>FCDO</b></p> <p><b>SIDA</b></p>	<p><b>AfDB</b></p> <p><b>IDA</b></p> <p><b>IFC</b></p> <p><b>BMZ</b></p> <p><b>IFAD</b></p>
Nigeria	<p><b>EC</b></p> <p><b>FCDO</b></p> <p><b>USAID</b></p> <p><b>*US Gov</b></p> <p><b>GAC</b></p>	<p><b>IDA</b></p> <p><b>AfDB</b></p> <p><b>AFD</b></p> <p><b>*US Gov</b></p> <p><b>IsDB</b></p>

**ADB:** Asian Development Bank; **AFD:** French Development Agency; **AfDB:** African Development Bank; **BMZ:** Germany Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development; **Denmark MFA:** Denmark Ministry of Foreign Affairs; **DFAT:** Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; **EC:** European Commission; **FCDO:** UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office; **GAC:** Global Affairs Canada; **IDA:** International Development Association; **IFAD:** International Fund for Agricultural Development; **IFC:** International Finance Corporation; **IsDB:** Islamic Development Bank; **JICA:** Japan International Cooperation Agency; **KEXIM:** The Export-Import Bank of Korea; **SIDA:** Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; **USAID:** United States Agency for International Development; **\*US Gov:** United States government agencies (unspecified in reporting).

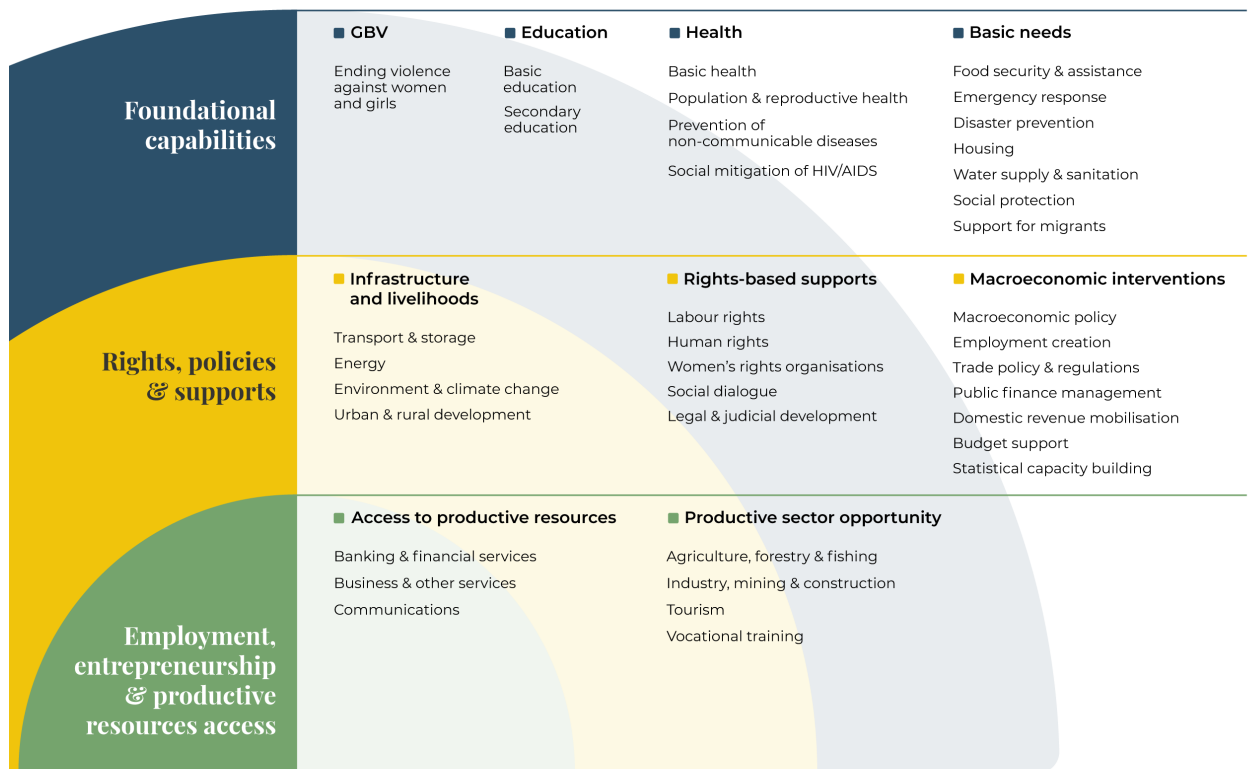
Table 1: Top five grant and non-grant funders for WEE in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria over 2015–2019, USD (\$)

<sup>n</sup> Due to the fundamental differences in grants and non-grants we decided to analyse these two funding amounts separately. This includes the ability to take funding amounts at face value due to the principles of repayment and that grants and non-grants typically fund different types of WEE projects. For more information concerning the key differences between grant and non-grant funding, please see our [reports](#) on tracking international funding to women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria (Box 1 in the methodology section).

**Groups of women and/or girls analysis:** For most WEE projects, funders specified a group or segment of women and/or girls that projects aimed to support in either the project description or the title.<sup>o</sup> For over 60% of WEE projects, 'girls or adolescents', 'rural', 'poor', and 'vulnerable' women were the most common segments cited by funders across all three countries. Other groups specified by funders include women with disabilities, women with HIV/AIDS, and individual communities, such as indigenous, marginalised, refugee, or Rohingya women. Some of these terms are specific to the country context. Reporting groups of women that funders intend to support through their WEE programming provides some understanding of how funders are adopting intersectional policies and approaches. However, additional information is needed to understand how funders may have considered intersectionality<sup>p</sup> in their gender analysis, 'do no harm' approaches, indicators, and measures of success.

**Targeted WEE areas receiving funding:** There are numerous and intersecting dimensions to achieving WEE. We tracked international funding to a broad range of projects that directly supported income earning, as well as projects which both support greater economic rights for women and girls and create an enabling environment for WEE. The first category of our framework focuses on income generation through business support and employment opportunities, the second on supporting greater economic rights through infrastructure, rights-based supports, and macroeconomic interventions, and the third on foundational capabilities, which create an enabling environment for WEE through health, education, addressing basic needs, and eliminating gender-based violence (GBV) (Figure 1). Gendered social norms are often key barriers to WEE,<sup>38</sup> and projects addressing social norms were treated as cross-cutting issues relevant to income earning and the enabling environment. Using this framework, we were able to identify which areas of WEE receive funding. For example, we found that foundational capabilities often received the most funding and projects that supported income generation through employment, entrepreneurship & productive resource access was typically the least.

### Women's Economic Empowerment Framework



*For a complete overview of sectors and purpose codes included in the framework, please see our full methodology.*

Figure 1: Publish What You Fund's Women's Economic Empowerment Framework

- o To conduct this analysis, we applied an expansive list of search terms which was developed in collaboration with a range of stakeholders at a country and global level. We included search terms that reflected diversity in gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, and migratory status. The full list of terms can be found [here](#) under the groups of women tab. Whilst not an exclusive list this approach attempts to identify whom projects are supporting.
- p Intersectionality is an approach that recognises "the complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). It builds on the work of scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). For more details, please see here: <https://iwda.org.au/what-does-intersectional-feminism-actually-mean/>

**Funding for women's rights organisations and movements:** Overall, our findings demonstrated that funding directed to this sector was very low.<sup>9</sup> According to our previous research on global gender financing, international funding captured to this sector code represented 1–2% of all international funding.<sup>39</sup> Our findings reflect the dire concern by many WROs that little international funding is directly reaching women's rights and feminist organisations despite local women's groups being recognised as important drivers of change.<sup>40,41,42</sup>

**Unpaid care work (UCW):** Globally, women and girls carry out a disproportionate amount of UCW responsibilities.<sup>43</sup> Our analysis suggests that in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria, only 3% of WEE projects addressed women and girls' UCW. Few projects explicitly addressed UCW as an objective or outcome. Of the projects we identified, funders mostly targeted broader care services, social protection benefits, and care-supporting physical infrastructure. There were fewer projects targeting measurement frameworks and data collection (for example, time use surveys) as well as social norms interventions.<sup>r</sup> Both are important to address the disproportionate responsibilities of UCW. Social norms interventions are critical to address the gendered nature of domestic tasks; measurement frameworks and data collection are important to monitor how much time is being spent on unpaid care work responsibilities.<sup>44</sup>

q There is a possibility for funders to report to the OECD CRS code women's rights organisations and movements, and government institutions (15170).

r Please see section 4.7 Unpaid care work and WEE funding of the WEE reports for more details on how funders are integrating UCW in their WEE funding.

## 4. Challenges to tracking international funding for Women's Economic Empowerment

In section three we synthesised the kinds of analysis and insights which are possible with the financial and programmatic data funders currently publish to centralised reporting platforms. However, there are limitations to this data that prevent a deeper understanding of the funding picture for WEE. This section of the report unpacks these data limitations and highlights the urgency of addressing these data gaps.

The main challenges we faced over the course of our research related to the consistency and quality of data reported. These fell into two main buckets:

- the differing reporting of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gender equality policy marker, and
- incomplete, poor, or inconsistent data.

Some of these challenges were specific to one data source while others were common across IATI and OECD CRS. This section focuses on OECD CRS and IATI as the Candid and CGAP platforms are not open access.

### 4.1 The OECD–DAC gender equality policy marker

The OECD CRS is the global reporting standard for ODA, and the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker (also referred to as the OECD gender marker) is a key tool for tracking most funders' intended financial support for gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>s</sup> The OECD-DAC Handbook<sup>45</sup> offers funders a comprehensive overview of the minimum criteria that projects must meet to qualify scoring projects against one of the three OECD gender marker scores.

- Not targeted (0) = gender equality is not a goal
- Significant (1) = gender equality is a significant, but not primary, objective
- Principal (2) = gender equality is the primary and explicit objective

As part of their annual reporting, DAC members are required to report against the OECD gender marker to show how their activities target gender equality according to the three-point scoring system.<sup>46</sup> The OECD gender marker can equally be applied in IATI.<sup>t</sup>

<sup>s</sup> We acknowledge that not all funders are part of the OECD-DAC network and that some funders utilise their own gender marking system at times in addition to the OECD gender equality policy marker internally.

<sup>t</sup> There are other markers that may be helpful for analysing aspects of gender-focused financing, such as the SDG marker in IATI or the IASC GAM (Gender with age marker). Given the prevalence of the OECD gender equality policy marker we decided to use this in conjunction with gender search terms and manual reviews for this research (Box 1).

## Differing reporting of the OECD-DAC gender equality marker across platforms leads to an incomplete funding picture for WEE

A key challenge in tracking international funding to WEE is the different reporting of the OECD gender marker in IATI and OECD CRS.<sup>u</sup> Table 2 shows that the OECD gender marker is consistently less reported for IATI data than OECD CRS data. Of the raw data we pulled from each of the data portals for this project,<sup>v</sup> 72% of IATI projects had not been assigned an OECD gender marker score, while only 17% of OECD CRS projects had no score. The mandatory reporting of the OECD gender marker may contribute to the higher number of projects in the OECD CRS as opposed to IATI (which is voluntary). This difference in funders reporting to OECD CRS and IATI is reinforced by our previous research at Publish What You Fund,<sup>47</sup> as well as external research.<sup>48</sup>

Data source	OECD gender marker score not assigned (blank)	Not targeting gender equality (score 0)	Gender equality is a significant objective (score 1)	Gender equality is a principal objective (score 2)	Total projects <sup>w</sup>
IATI	13,168 (72%)	2,176 (12%)	2,089 (11%)	832 (5%)	18,265
OECD CRS	3,710 (17%)	9,800 (46%)	6,104 (29%)	1,777 (8%)	21,391

Table 2: Distribution (%) of OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker applied across distinct project titles in raw data retrieved from IATI and OECD CRS data sources for 2015–2019 combined for Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria

The difference in reporting of the OECD gender marker between OECD CRS and IATI data is critical to address because it means that researchers face a choice between using timely data from IATI compared to OECD CRS data, which is at least 11 months old by the time of final publication due to “compilation and validation” processes undertaken by the OECD.<sup>49</sup> By comparison, most publishers update their IATI data on at least a monthly basis. For stakeholders looking to understand areas of WEE that receive funding for the purposes of informing policy, advocacy, or the coordination of resources to avoid duplication, timely data is critical.

Data platforms, especially OECD CRS and IATI, have a responsibility to facilitate and encourage funders to achieve greater consistency in reporting available gender markers across data sources.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, though, funders have the responsibility to publish their data and report the gender marker.<sup>51</sup> If funders report on the OECD gender marker both to IATI and OECD CRS it will greatly improve the ability to track gender-related financing, and by extension WEE funding, in a complete and timely manner.

### It is often unclear why WEE projects have a particular OECD gender marker score

It is often difficult to understand from published project information *why* a funder has assigned a particular OECD gender marker score of 0=not targeted, 1= significant, 2= principal.<sup>x</sup> The titles and descriptions, even when the project is marked principal, can be very limited and do not provide any meaningful information on how projects target gender equality and women's empowerment.

<sup>u</sup> Although Candid and CGAP which are closed data sources have their own internal gender markers, the approach to these markers is different from the OECD-DAC gender marker and as such are not comparable. Please see our methodology for more details <https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/download/wee-methodology-document/>.

<sup>v</sup> For information, OECD CRS data is available here: <https://stats.oecd.org/DownloadFiles.aspx?DatasetCode=CRS1>. One way to access IATI data is through d-portal, available at: <http://www.d-portal.org/ctrack.html#view=search>

<sup>w</sup> When referring to the number of 'projects', this report refers to unique ('distinct') project titles. Our team has checked for slight variations of project titles by the same funders across platforms, such as different US/UK spelling or use of blank spaces but has accepted larger variations to be considered as separate projects - for example when a funder adds 'phase 1' or 'phase 2' to a project title.

<sup>x</sup> Please review the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker Handbook: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Handbook-OECD-DAC-Gender-Equality-Policy-Marker.pdf>



The OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker handbook states that DAC funders<sup>y</sup> are required to screen all aid activities against the gender equality policy marker through a gender analysis at the design stage, even if the project is then assigned a 0=not targeted score.<sup>52</sup> The minimum criteria set out by the OECD<sup>z</sup> for projects scored as significant (1) or principal (2) requires that funders demonstrate:

- A gender analysis of the project/programme has been conducted;
- Findings from this gender analysis have informed the design of the project/programme and the intervention adopts a 'do no harm' approach;
- Data and indicators are disaggregated by sex (where applicable);
- A commitment to monitor and report on the gender equality results achieved by the project in the evaluation phase. Where a project is marked principal, gender specific indicators must be embedded in the results framework.

*Source: Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker (2016), p.10-11.*

Despite funders undertaking these mandatory steps to score their projects, the underlying documentation for how a project meets the criteria for the assigned OECD gender marker score is not published in either OECD CRS or IATI. The OECD is not able to verify gender marker scores and this responsibility currently lies with funders.<sup>53</sup>

The lack of supplementary detail on OECD gender marker scores in centralised databases makes it difficult to understand why a certain score is applied. While we acknowledge that publishing this information is an additional step for funders and that currently only IATI allows the publication of supplementary documentation, this information would allow country partners, other funders, and gender advocates to understand how a particular project is expected to advance either gender equality or WEE. Wider publication of the underlying analysis for all gender marked projects could improve accountability, funder coordination, learning, and potentially impact if coupled with results data.

## 4.2 Incomplete, poor, or inconsistent data challenges the ability to conduct granular analysis

Our research aimed to capture as much WEE-relevant funding as possible. However, due to incomplete, inconsistent, or poor data, it was not possible to capture all projects and WEE activities. The primary reasons for these data challenges included:

**Titles and project descriptions:** Quality project titles and descriptions are essential to understand the basic information about a project and how it might be contributing to WEE. In our comprehensive review of projects, we often found that titles and descriptions made little sense or contained no detail. This made it difficult to review projects against our comprehensive guidance questions to assess if a project contributed to WEE. Titles and projects descriptions should be robust enough to provide an understanding of what the project is doing, and the type(s) of interventions planned. In addition, the key objectives of the project, as they relate to advancing gender equality should be clear. For gender equality and women's empowerment projects it is particularly helpful to include any specific segments of the population that activities intend to support, inclusive of other characteristics such as age and ethnicity. This is elaborated below.

<sup>y</sup> While this is a requirement for DAC donors there is also an increase among non-DAC funders using the OECD gender marker.

<sup>z</sup> The [Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker](#) (2016) includes guidance and recommendations for scoring projects with the OECD gender marker. The [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: Guidance for Development Partners](#) (2022) contains guidance relating to the full policy cycle including planning, implementation, and evaluation.

**Groups of women and/or girls analysis:** In addition to taking an intersectional approach to gender assessments and project design, specifying which segments of women a project intends to support and through which activities allows a more comprehensive mapping of WEE funding. Women and girls are not a homogenous group. Women and girls' experiences, economic opportunities, and access to resources differ based on gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, migration status, religion, sexuality, class, and caste.<sup>54</sup> Such an intersectional lens is increasingly being prioritised by governments in their foreign and development policy.<sup>55,56,57,58</sup> However, this project level information needs to be published by funders to open data sources. It is equally important that funders provide this information consistently across all project information, including for outcomes, results, and evaluations. Improving the quality of descriptions and being transparent about whom projects aim to support is important both for funder coordination as well improving accountability when it comes to knowing which segments of women funders are prioritising.

**Finance type:** There are fundamental differences between various finance types<sup>aa</sup> which requires separate analysis. Our research grouped finance types into grants and non-grants, with the latter including loans, equity, and guarantees or insurance. Our initial analysis discovered that international funders who favour grants publish more disbursements, whilst the majority of loan-giving organisations favour the publication of commitments. As such, we split each country's data into non-grant commitments and grant disbursements for our research.<sup>ab</sup> Analysing the raw data revealed the differences of reporting on finance type between IATI and OECD CRS. Whilst OECD CRS reporting was high, 20% of IATI data did not include a finance type (Table 3). Within this 20% there may have been additional WEE projects that were subsequently excluded from our analysis.

Data source	Total number of projects	Number of projects missing finance types	Percentage of projects missing finance types
OECD CRS	19,871	0	0%
IATI	18,101	3,710	20%

**Table 3:** Number of projects missing a finance type [grants and non-grants data] retrieved from OECD CRS and IATI raw data sources for 2015–2019 combined for Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria

**Sector codes:** To understand which areas of WEE funders aimed to support, we relied on funders' publication of OECD sector and purpose codes.<sup>ac</sup> However, across our three country datasets, 1% of OECD CRS grants and non-grants data, 7% of IATI grants data, and 12% of IATI non-grants data reported 'blank' or 'unallocated/unspecified' sectors.<sup>ad</sup> Manually reviewing projects to assess which sectors projects may have supported is time-consuming and can lead to misinterpretation.

**Implementer name and type:** Understanding who is implementing WEE programmes is key to understanding the funding picture, especially whether funding is directed through national government, national or international private sector organisations, national or international non-governmental organisations (NGO's), grassroots organisations, feminist movements, or WRO's. We found that across our three countries, the implementing organisation fields, including name and organisation type, were often not completed. Even when one or both fields were completed, inconsistencies and errors in the data made it difficult to determine who was implementing the project. Table 4 demonstrates the extent that implementer name and type was reported in OECD CRS and IATI.

<sup>aa</sup> The OECD uses [codes](#) used to distinguish between different financial instruments.

<sup>ab</sup> Please refer to our [data collection methodology](#) for a more detailed description.

<sup>ac</sup> OECD CRS provides [codes](#) which can be used to map funding to different sector and thematic areas, for example, health, education, agriculture, banking, and financial services.

<sup>ad</sup> The databases used in our project included country allocated aid. Whilst we recognise that there are legitimate instances where funders use the 'unallocated' sector code, for projects reported in-country this should be avoided.

Data field	Percentage of OECD CRS grant projects missing data	Percentage of OECD CRS non-grant projects missing data	Percentage of IATI grant projects missing data	Percentage of IATI non-grant projects missing data
Implementer organisation names	13%	15%	6%	18%
Implementer organisation type	10%	16%	71%	82%

**Table 4:** Percentage of WEE projects missing implementer name and implementer type [grants and non-grants data] retrieved from OECD CRS and IATI data sources for 2015–2019 combined for Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria

The missing data issues discussed here limit stakeholders' ability to understand who is ultimately responsible for a project's implementation. Using recognised organisation references in IATI and OECD CRS would help overcome inconsistencies and inaccuracies in identifying implementers.

**Inconsistent use of funder names:** Organisation names are not currently standardised and multiple names can be used for the same entity. As a result, we found various instances where funders used inconsistent names in reporting and provider organisation fields. Often this was a case of names with or without acronyms, typos, extra information added such as a country office, department, or unique data IDs. At times, funders reorganised or re-branded their organisation — such as when the UK Department for International Development (DFID) merged with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in 2020. While such changes can be straightforward and well-known, it adds additional work for researchers and advocates to clean up the data and treat multiple organisation entries as one funder. As with implementers, using recognised organisation references in IATI and OECD CRS data would overcome these problems and allow data users to consistently identify funding organisations.

The result of missing, incomplete, and poor data meant that some projects which provided support to WEE were not captured when creating a database of WEE projects for review.

### **Funders' lack of results data limits the ability to determine the impact of funding**

There are different levels of results data, including outcomes, evaluations, and impact reports. Results data is critical for shared learning, identifying catalytic investments, and better coordination of funding for WEE. Results data is currently very sparsely reported to the sources utilised in this study. As it stands, only the IATI platform provides funders with the ability to report on results/outcomes and to upload project documents.

As part of our analysis, we sampled WECs and women's groups projects across all three countries to determine to what extent results information was published by funders. Out of a total of 116 WECs and women's group projects in [Bangladesh](#), [Kenya](#), and [Nigeria](#), only three projects provided a project completion review specifying results whilst nine projects reported on achieved outcomes or results, albeit in varying detail. This is consistent with Publish What You Fund's Aid Transparency Index findings. The most recent 2022 Index found that funders are more likely to publish basic project information compared to standardised impact data. Of the organisations reviewed, only 38% published results and only 34% published evaluations.<sup>59</sup>

Low publication of results undermines our ability to determine the impact of funding and progress towards WEE and gender goals, including best practice. How does impact differ between gender mainstreaming versus a sole focus? What about embedding WEE into a larger program versus a standalone WEE project?

Harmonising instruments for measuring the impact of WEE can be contentious. The differences of definition and approaches between funders and other stakeholders alike can present difficulties when defining a set of metrics to inform monitoring and results.<sup>ae</sup> As experts work to advance efforts to measure WEE, and as evidence around catalytic investments grow,<sup>60,61</sup> transparency should play a key part in this conversation. Funders own monitoring and evaluation instruments need to be made publicly available for us to better understand how funders measure the success of their women's economic empowerment programs. Results data helps us understand cases of best practice and strengthens collective learning. Ultimately the ability to analyse results data is a necessary requirement to ensure that, above all, projects meet the goals of local stakeholders and that funders are accountable to local needs. This necessary shift starts with robust engagement with local actors on all parts of the project lifespan. With scarce resources and a growing urgency to address equality issues, this needs to be a strong priority.

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<sup>ae</sup> In terms of what gets measured, it is worth noting that different definitions exist when it comes to WEE. The [extent](#) to which this can be harmonised is still contentious and is also country dependent. The ['Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: A Compendium of Selected Tools'](#) (2020) consolidated existing tools for measuring WEE.

# 5. Conclusion and recommendations

This report sought to provide new insights into the transparency of international funding for WEE, including unpaid care work, WFI, and WECs. The first half of the report demonstrates the types of granular analysis that is possible with international funding data published to open data sources. The second half of the report details the data limitations that prevent a clearer picture of WEE funding and critically, of the impact of this funding.

Addressing data limitations across OECD CRS and IATI will require conversations between funders and data platform managers. Data improvements would have implications beyond tracking women's economic empowerment and could improve transparency for a wider range of investments in the development space. Funders will need to address limitations in data quality, and data platforms will need to ensure a data architecture that enables and supports funders to better report.

Quality, consistent, and accessible data is an essential part of accountable and effective funding. There is increasing urgency for the international funding community to address these data gaps which are preventing an understanding of progress and obstacles towards WEE and global gender equality goals as well as broader goals to end extreme poverty and reduce inequality. Complete and transparent data is a foundational step towards being able to accurately identify those gaps. Funders and data platform managers should prioritise improvements based on the following recommendations.

## 5.1 Recommendations for funders and data platforms

**1) Publish the OECD gender equality policy marker to both OECD CRS and IATI:** Gender markers provide critical information on how funders intend to support gender equality and women's empowerment. Funders should:

- Apply the OECD-DAC gender equality policy marker consistently across all open data platforms, especially OECD CRS and IATI.
- Publish the underlying documentation for how a project meets the criteria for the assigned OECD gender equality policy marker score. This includes a gender analysis, how the findings of the gender analysis informed design and a 'do no harm approach', gender objectives and indicators, and how a funder intends to monitor and report on the gender equality results. This should be made accessible both through OECD CRS, IATI, and a funder's own portal. Publication of gender analyses will enhance accountability and promote more robust coordination and comparisons of funders commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

**2) Publish to key fields and check for errors and consistency:** Key fields such as finance types, sectors, implementers, and funder names and organisation types are important for gathering a complete picture of international funding. Funders (with relevant guidance from data platforms) should:

- Report finance types for every project. This is essential to know the nature of how a project is financed and avoids underestimating the amount of funding.
- Use the OECD CRS code list, including sector/purpose codes and parent-channel (implementing organisations type) codes to the extent possible.<sup>af,ag</sup> Conduct internal quality checks to remove room for error. Whilst we recognise that there are legitimate uses of 'unallocated' sector codes, specific sector codes should be used whenever possible.

<sup>af</sup> We recognise that reporting to the OECD codes may not accurately reflect funders' internal processes as they currently exist. We encourage further conversations between funders and data platforms to rectify this and harmonise codes so that reported data may accurately reflect international funding.

<sup>ag</sup> The DAC and CRS list of codes can be found here: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/dacandcrscodelists.htm>

- Add implementer organisation names and types, including for multi-year projects within datasets. Avoid “blank” reporting in these fields. Implement reference approaches to distinguish between government entities and private sector companies.<sup>ah</sup>
- Where possible, data platforms should encourage the use of recognised reference approaches for reporting organisations.<sup>ai</sup> This would remove the room for inconsistencies and errors when tracking who is funding.

**3) Publish complete titles and robust project descriptions:** These are often the first and sometimes only qualitative insight into what a project is aiming to achieve and whom it intends to support. Accurate and descriptive project titles are a relatively easy fix and would have a significant impact on the level of granular detail that can be gained when analysing funding data. Funders should:

- Provide clear titles and detailed project descriptions and clearly indicate WEE objectives. This allows for more reliable and robust WEE identification and analysis.
- Specify which groups of women are targeted by funding, even where WEE is a sub-component of a broader project. This provides better insight into whom is included/excluded in WEE programmes and how this might be addressed, specifically for marginalised groups. For example, funders can report information on gender identity, sexual orientation, age group, race, ethnicity, disability status, social class, and religious affiliation.

**4) Publish evaluations and results.** Sparse reporting of project evaluations and results significantly limits the ability to measure impact and learn from investments in WEE. Funders should:

- Publish evaluations and results information as soon as they become available. Providing results information which can be accessed in one place is more time effective. Results data can be added to IATI as standardised data<sup>aj</sup> which is probably the best way to publish results as it's machine readable.
- Publish on all aspects of programme activities, including disaggregating data by sex, age, disability status, and other characteristics as appropriate for the project. This is particularly relevant where WEE is a component or objective of a larger programme.
- Data platforms should enable and encourage funders to publish evaluations and results information where possible.

**5) Improve engagement and data accessibility:** Improving accessibility and engagement around programmatic and financial data is vital to accurately track funding for individual projects. Funders should:

- Strengthen engagement with potential data users including national and local organisations, as well as women rights organisations and feminist movements. This is particularly important for advancing WEE. Our previous work on [gender financing](#) included specific recommendations for increasing data engagement for funders and data platforms alike.
- Make project lists and the results of project searches exportable in CSV or other formats compatible with common software suites.
- Where possible keep project documents up to date and make them easily located and downloadable. This is particular the case where several project documents are spread across platforms or funders' own portals.

<sup>ah</sup> The 2022 Publish What You Fund Aid Transparency Index noted new approaches being used to reference government partners. The code for IATI project provides a 'government organisation ID finder' which includes accessible codes for government entities in 51 countries. Please see here: <https://gov-id-finder.codeforiati.org/>

<sup>ai</sup> For example, the code for IATI project. Organisation Registration Agency. Please see here: <https://codelists.codeforiati.org/OrganisationRegistrationAgency/>. The OECD uses Agency code. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/dacandcrscodelists.htm>

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