Weaving the Threads

By Tynesha McHarris and Hakima Abbas

Summary
When we started the Black Feminist Fund, it was under the premise, and with the knowledge, that Black feminist movements globally were under-resourced and largely ignored by philanthropy. This knowledge came from our own experiences as activists and as Black women in philanthropy, as well as from that of the Black women, girls and gender expansive people in our communities and movements. Time and again, over a decade, as we seeded, built and discussed the possibility of a global fund for, by and with Black feminist movements, we heard the same refrain: we are overlooked, underfunded and expected to transform systems with crumbs. With a growing community committed to building the Black Feminist Fund, we are determined to change that.

One of the first undertakings of the Black Feminist Fund was to bring together Black feminist researchers and experts to gather the data on the state of funding for Black feminist movements and to examine the extent and the impact of that under-resourcing. Together, Awa Fall Diop, Cynthia Eyakuze, Maie Panaga Babker, Yannia Sofía Garzón Valencia and Timiebi Souza-Okpofabri, five Black feminists from around the world brought their brilliance to bear to create *Where is The Money for Black Feminist Movements?* This is not just a report, it is a provocation and a call to action. It is the outcome of a year-long process of unearthing and dialogue. The words are, at times, matter of fact, at other times it is filled with the emotion of our knowing, because the process was not disconnected from our own pain, frustration, joy and resistance. These pages are our own account, using fact and data, to uncover the story of a movement so poignant and powerful, deeply connected, yet neglected and harmed. A movement from which theory and practice are often drained, whitewashed, and commodified. These pages are a celebration of Black feminisms in their multitudes.

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Each chapter of this body of work is both a stand alone contribution and a piece of a story that should rattle philanthropy.

To get us started Timiebi Souza-Okpofabri put together an annotated bibliography of ten resources published in the last three years of relevance to funding and the intersections of racial and gender justice. Timiebi found that important strides have been made in analyzing and publishing data on philanthropy and aid that enable advocacy at multiple levels. Activist funds have, likewise, published several studies on the power of Black feminist movements in many contexts, and demonstrated their underresourcing. While many of the reports and data reviewed tackle a piece of the puzzle of funding to Black feminist movements, none provided a global picture of the funding ecosystem of Black feminist movements: Where is The Money for Black Feminist Movements? is an intervention in that space.

In her opening chapter, A Movement View, Awa Fall Diop undertook a groundbreaking and expansive study of Black feminist movements perspectives, relationships and insights into funding. Through interviews and a survey of close to four hundred Black feminist activists globally, Awa reveals the power and scale of Black feminist organizing as well as the deep seated biases Black feminists face in accessing the resources to sustain their work.

A Movement View provides insights into the types of formations that Black feminists create and organize, their strategies, priorities and their relationships to resources of all kinds. "Registration has a strong political connotation. (...) But the refusal to register also offers Black feminist organizations a space to challenge the power of the government and the power of donors." —Awa Fall Diop.
The precarity of Black feminist groups is starkly revealed by this new data:

- **61%** of Black feminist organizations have annual budgets of less than 50,000 USD.
- **59%** of Black feminist organizations have never received core funding.
- **75%** of Black feminist groups receive the majority of their funding through project-specific grants.
- **53%** of Black feminist groups do not have funds available for the next fiscal year.

While showing a clear pattern of under-resourcing, some may wonder whether the small amount of funding, in real terms, is enough. Are these groups, their goals and their impact small enough that the trickle of funding meets their needs? We asked. What we heard back is that **81%** of Black feminist organizations do not have the financial resources to meet their goals. This is more than a number; it is an indictment. An indictment of a sector that claims to want to see the transformation that Black feminist movements are creating but refuses to put the resources to bear for them to win.
Turning our lens towards the philanthropy sector, Cynthia Eyakuze takes a deep dive into the data and literature produced by philanthropy itself. Through the Philanthropic Lens uncovers that:

- a mere 0.1%–0.35% of foundation giving globally went to Black women, girls and trans people
- 5% of human rights funding went to Black women, girls and trans people
- 0.22% of climate funding went to feminist organizations and only two of the top 10 countries receiving climate related aid were in Africa
- 5.9% of US foundation funding for (what is called) sub-Saharan Africa went to local organisations
- 0.4% of international humanitarian assistance was received directly by local and national organisations in Africa
- many countries in the Caribbean did not receive any development aid for gender equality

Behind these numbers, is the indisputable verdict: the global funding system has a deeply rooted racialized and gendered trust gap. As Cynthia writes: “there are many ways that biases show up and are experienced in funding, from perceptions about capacity and risk, to opaque processes, to accessibility of funders and funding opportunities, funder proximity to certain organisations coupled with distance from marginalised contexts and communities, and burdensome application and reporting requirements. We must be clear that these barriers are not essential technical barriers for due diligence, but rather systemic barriers rooted in white supremacy that come from the ‘civilising’ and ‘charity’ roots of development and philanthropy.”

Black feminist funds are critical in the funding ecosystem for Black feminist organizations and a clear intervention in a funding landscape that otherwise under-resources Black feminist organizing. Despite the growth in recent years in the number (and budgets) of Black feminist funds, our research found that these institutions can still only meet between 12–40% of the demand they receive for funding from Black feminist groups. We cannot make the change alone. Rather we need philanthropy to heed the long echoed call for investment at scale for Black feminist movements.
Through the Philanthropic Lens reveals that only a single grant for Black women, girls and trans people went to the Middle East and North African regions. As Maie Panaga Babker writes, “this contrasted with our knowledge of Black feminist contributions and movements in the regions.” Maie took on the task of mapping Black feminist organizing and interviewing Black feminist activists in the regions. In Embarking on a Quest, she brings together both a critique of so-called feminist activism that ignores or obfuscates Black women, girls and trans peoples existence and realities, and sheds light on the ways that Black feminists are not only resisting the intersections of the oppression they face but also creating their own narratives and knowledge.

Rather than empty hope, Maie’s contribution is filled with anchored aspirations for the power of Black feminists in the regions to turn their visions into concrete freedoms. She poignantly writes: “we have the ability and potential to create discourses that are fueled by the political imaginary, extending from the ancestral heritage to the generations that will prosper in the change we will achieve.”

Philanthropy is not monolithic. There are large swaths of philanthropy that are against Black feminist ideas and agendas and are supporting agendas that harm Black women, girls, and gender diverse people. In her chapter, Yannia Sofía Garzón Valencia, reveals that trillions of dollars are channeled every year to causes that are against bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, just economies, dignified labor, peace, ecological care and stewardship, all of which are agendas that Black feminists advance.

“It is then the hegemony of such dismissive discourses, ones that override racism as a secondary topic, as opposed to freedom, economic and social rights, that makes it hard to open an effective, profound, and critical debate on race and its various intersections.”

—Maie Panaga Babker
Since 2007, the Christian Right in the United States has delivered at least $270 million dollars globally against the rights of women and gender expansive people. Contrasting Black women’s mobilization for peace and life, Sofía takes a deeper look at the billions pouring in and made in profits by the global military industrial complex: “During 2020, military spending reached 1,981 billion dollars in the world.” Going further, she shows the link between extractive industries and militarisation and far right agendas, using the example of Colombia: “Over 70 companies in the mining-energy sector have signed more than 1,229 military cooperation agreements for the defense of the sector’s infrastructure and welfare programs for the military, who participate in 20 special mining, energy and roadside barracks that exist in the country.” In her scathing critique, Sofía underscores the corporate profits drawn from the prison industrial complex in which “racialization continues to be one of the criteria that determines which womxn are present in the criminal justice system” the world over. Despite the myth that Africa and countries in the Global South are resourced by the Global North, Sofia emphasizes that Africa’s losses to capital flight (i.e. theft and siphoning, exceed the development cooperation Africa received by over USD 6 billion), “in other words, the African continent has become a net creditor to the world.” Placing philanthropy and aid in the broader context of racial, gender and economic justice, In Opposition to Black Feminist Agendas, reminds us that overlooking Black feminist movements is ruinous.

If the last few years have proven anything, it’s that we have to recreate this world. Those who are able to get us out of this ecological crisis, away from the precipice of war, out of the scourge of mass impoverishment, are those who against all odds have survived, those whose creativity and innovation have enabled their communities to thrive, despite the hegemonic system. Black feminism is a thought and practice that emerges from the realities and the alchemy of Black women and gender diverse people. Black feminism offers the solution to a world in crisis. Continuing to ignore, under value, overlook and under-resource Black feminist movements will cost us everything.
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