

ROCHELLE JONES, SARAH ROSENHEK AND ANNA TURLEY

Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and Anna Turley: This article was co-authored by AWID's Writer and Editor; Acting Director of Programs, and Director of Information and Communications, respectively. AWID is an international, feminist, membership organization committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights.

Email: contact@awid.org

ABSTRACT

Contemporary women's rights organizations and movements work in a challenging context of fewer resources, more risks, increasing violence and inequalities, and environmental uncertainty. As a 'movement support' organization, The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is responding to this context with a model of collaborative movement building - building our collective power, expanding the base of individuals and organizations engaged in women's rights struggles, and jointly articulating inclusive and transformative agendas for change both in the world around us and in our own practices. This article illustrates how AWID's 'movement support' model – based on collaboration and channels of dialogue with our membership and broader constituency – is helping to advance our shared goals of human rights, peace, gender justice and environmental sustainability worldwide.

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KEYWORDS

Women's rights – Human rights – Gender justice – Social movements – Movement building – Feminist movements – Collective power



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ESSAY

A 'MOVEMENT SUPPORT' ORGANIZATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT (AWID)

Rochelle Jones, Sarah Rosenhek and Anna Turley

1 Introduction

A cursory glance at the history of human rights and its intersection with gender issues over the past 25 years elucidates the important role that social movements, and women's rights movements in particular, have played in continually expanding the framing and conceptualization of human rights and gender justice. These expansions of the human rights framework were not the result of a sudden enlightenment on the part of governments nor the United Nations – but rather of the concrete demands for recognition of claims emerging from the collective struggles of indigenous people, domestic workers, sex workers, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) movements, migrants, rural people, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and others, and their consistent engagement with the human rights system at national, regional and international levels.

Few movements have changed the human rights framework more fundamentally and radically than women's rights movements¹ around the globe. Women's rights organizations play both a catalytic role in promoting women's rights and gender equality as well as in advancing other critical development and human rights goals, contributing to structural and legislative changes, sustaining communities, engendering institutions and normative structures, and transforming behaviour and attitudes. Enabling conditions that do not address the challenges faced by women's rights organizations, whose status in many respects serves as a bellwether for broader civil society, will undermine the progressive realization of human rights for all people.

Through 30 years of participation in women's rights organizing, we have

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learned that sustainable transformation to ensure that women's rights and gender equality are a lived reality for women and girls around the world is possible only when we work together through our organizations and movements and when these organizations obtain the meaningful funding they require. Recent research by AWID, for example, demonstrates the huge reach and transformation that is possible when organizations working to build women's collective power for change receive serious resources for an extended period of time (BATLIWALA; ROSENHEK; MILLER, 2013). As an 'infrastructure' organization, AWID is responding to this need to work together with a model of collaborative movement building – building our collective power, expanding the base of individuals and organizations engaged in women's rights struggles, and jointly articulating inclusive and transformative agendas for change, both in the world around us and in our own practices.

2 Context of women's rights organizing

Contemporary women's rights organizations and movements work in a challenging context of fewer resources, more risks, increasing violence and inequalities, and environmental uncertainty. In addition, valuable energy and resources are expended fighting regressive forces that seek to roll back hard-won rights. Several trends shape the context of work for women's rights organizations in general and AWID in particular:

The existing economic paradigm with its strong focus on market-based development, privatization and growth is increasingly recognized globally for its role in perpetuating inequality and poverty. This model often raises the costs of basic services, leading to clear gendered impacts and inequalities, while women's unpaid work, both in domestic subsistence, reproduction and in unwaged household production, continues to be exploited. Alongside this are multiple and concurrent systemic crises (energy, food, finance and climate), which continue to pose challenges for governments, donors, development practitioners, activists and policy-makers to reinvent the system in the long term, and mitigate the negative impacts in the short and medium terms.

Discussions and intergovernmental negotiations on a post-2015 development framework are well underway as we near the end of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. The disappointing outcome of the Rio+20 conference and the agreement made there to develop a new set of 'sustainable development goals' (SDGs) marked the beginning of a complex process for a new development agenda at the UN post-2015. Women's rights groups² have expressed their concerns about the narrow set of goals outlined in the report from the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons to the UN Secretary General and continue the struggle to advocate for a rights-based approach with women's rights at the center of a post-2015 development agenda. Other UN intergovernmental negotiations are already making evident the complexity and challenges women's rights organizations and movements will face in the coming years to defend what has been achieved, avoid backlash and put new ideas and proposals on the agenda.

The private sector, particularly corporations and individual philanthropists, have become central players in the development and philanthropic sectors. We have seen an increase in funding from new private sector actors towards women and girls, often instrumentalizing their contributions to economic growth. ‘Investing in women and girls’ has been heralded as a new key strategy by diverse actors such as the World Bank, Newsweek and Walmart (THE WORLD BANK, 2012; VERVEER, 2012; WALMART, 2011) – but this rhetoric has not necessarily translated into real resources for women’s rights. AWID’s recent research (MILLER; ARUTYUNOVA; CLARK, 2013) illuminates key characteristics of 170 different partnership initiatives focused on women and girls, with 143 of them collectively committing USD 14.6 billion dollars. At the same time, the research finds that 27% of the 170 initiatives supporting women and girls engaged women’s organizations as partners, and only 9% directly funded them. The results illustrate a complex panorama of new actors and new resources for women and girls that defies simplistic categorizations and brings with it new opportunities and challenges.

Religious fundamentalist movements are continuing to gain power. Increasing violence by state and non-state actors towards the general population, and particularly against social movements and activists, undermines and seriously challenges democracy, peace and human rights. In many regions, this is directly linked to the growing influence of fundamentalisms with arguments based on religion (as well as culture, tradition and nationalism) used to violate and deny the rights of women, LGBTQI people, and religious, ethnic and cultural minorities. Fundamentalists and their supporters have also been successfully advancing arguments based on cultural relativism in multilateral processes as occurred at the 56th UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2012.

Violence against women human rights defenders (WHRDs) continues to grow. This increase in the number and severity of attacks on WHRDs by both state and non-state actors has serious impacts on the sustainability of women’s rights movements. In the past year, important advances have recognized WHRDs and the violence they face because of their role in defending women’s rights, the environment and their communities. This includes greater attention by international human rights mechanisms; in particular, the inclusion of WHRD language for the first time in the CSW57 agreed conclusions³ and the November 2013 adoption of the first-ever resolution on women human rights defenders by the United Nations General Assembly’s Third Committee⁴.

Despite the challenges this landscape presents, there are important opportunities, openings and signs of hope for advancing women’s human rights agendas. Progressive social movements have been organizing to withstand and respond to these trends. At the forefront have been women’s rights activists and young people demanding structural change, protecting their communities, opposing violence and holding the line on key achievements. Women’s rights movements and organizations however are facing significant challenges. Access to adequate financial resources continues to affect the sustainability of women’s rights organizations and their capacity to protect themselves if needed. Many women’s rights activists

and their organizations are also working within a context of increasing risks and security concerns. As highlighted above, attacks on women's rights defenders and activists are on the rise, with extreme forms of violence dramatically increasing. Against this backdrop of fewer resources and more risks, women's rights organizing remains fragmented with the diverse expressions of women's organizing still not coming together in the most strategic ways as movements to collectively address pressing challenges. Building our collective power and increasing our capacity to work together are key strategies to address this.

3 AWID as a 'movement support' organization

AWID seeks to be a driving force within the global community of feminist and women's rights activists, organizations and movements, strengthening our collective voice, influencing and transforming structures of power and decision-making and advancing human rights, gender justice and environmental sustainability worldwide.

As a 'movement support' organization, our work serves to support, resource and strengthen women's rights organizations and movements so that they in turn can be more effective in their work and struggles at different levels. We do this by filling strategic gaps (for example in knowledge production or information dissemination), by leveraging our access to key spaces and influence with relevant actors where few other women's organizations are present or where we have added value to contribute, and by providing different kinds of direct support (bridge-building, capacity development, strategic convenings, resource mobilization). AWID's commitment to building stronger and more effective women's rights organizations and movements is supported through our membership model. As an international feminist membership organization, we have 4,546 members from 156 countries (595 institutional members and 3,951 individual) – mostly from the global South. Having a large and diverse constituency is central to effectively advancing our mission and, at the same time, is integral to our identity, legitimacy and credibility as a global women's rights 'infrastructure' organization. Our members play an important role in our governance – nominating and voting for members of our Board of Directors. We also engage our members in our research, knowledge building and solidarity actions. We value and work towards building a broad constituency, including but not limited to AWID members, to strengthen collective awareness, action and solidarity on women's rights and gender equality. This includes bringing together organizations and activists from different social movements and different levels of organizing (local-global), further expanding and sharpening our analysis and agendas, and above all, exploring new ways of working together, bridging the divides of our issues, sectors, constituencies and movements.

AWID's experience and work priorities serve as examples of how we can create mechanisms for local participation in defining women's rights agendas – we play multiple 'movement building' roles, which are then brought to life through our various program areas⁵, combining strategies ranging from knowledge building and

multilingual information dissemination, action-research, advocacy and engagement with influential actors, fora and institutions, alliance building among women's organizations and movements and with other civil society sectors, convening strategic dialogues on specific issues, and resource mobilization to support women's rights organizing. Following is an outline of these primary movement building roles, with concrete examples from our programs that demonstrate how we engage our diverse members and broader constituency to meet our collective goals.

3.1 Knowledge-builder & agenda setter

With our members, AWID collectively builds knowledge from a feminist perspective of the forces, trends, processes and institutions undermining or impacting women's human rights as well as strategies and innovations used to counter these influences and advance our agendas. We contribute as a provocateur to putting new issues or analysis on the agendas of women's organizations and movements and other influential actors and provide an ongoing feminist critique of development and human rights trends – producing multilingual research publications and weekly analysis through our 'Friday Files'⁶. Responding to the need expressed by our members and broader constituency to build knowledge on how to counter the tactics and strategies used by religious fundamentalist actors, for example, AWID produced *Religion, Culture and Tradition: Strengthening Efforts to Eradicate Violence Against Women* (GOKAL; DUGHMAN MANZUR, 2013) – providing women's rights activists with key arguments and excerpts from human rights instruments that affirm that religion, culture and tradition cannot be used to justify non-compliance with international human rights standards. This briefing note was successfully used by AWID and its members at the 57th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57), Commission on Population and Development (CPD46) and at the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean conference (ECLAC) to challenge the cultural relativist arguments of fundamentalist actors in these international human rights venues.

Our research on funding trends⁷ and actors influencing women's rights organizing has been built on participatory research and a dialogue with our members and constituency. AWID's 'Where is the Money for Women's Rights?' project has surveyed members and other women's organizations over the past eight years on their funding situation, with the resultant publications shared back with members for their own advocacy with donors. For instance, our report, *Watering the Leaves and Starving the Roots: The status of financing for women's rights organizing and gender equality* (ARUTYUNOVA; CLARK, 2013), is based on a survey of over 1,100 women's organizations in every region of the world. Since its launch in October 2013, the report has been widely disseminated amongst our members and constituency. AWID members have been specifically supported through convenings in this process. For example, three webinars in conjunction with Catapult⁸ were held in 2013 to introduce members to the results of our funding research and the concept of crowdfunding as a potential method of resource mobilization for their work.

3.2 Clearinghouse for global feminist information and analysis

Recognized as a key 'go-to' source for multilingual information and feminist analysis on current and emerging trends, AWID serves as a clearinghouse for information to and from our members and broader women's rights movements. In doing so, we contribute to increasing the visibility of women's rights groups, perspectives, places and issues that are commonly excluded in the work of mainstream organizations and encourage connection among issues and actors. AWID's trilingual website (<http://www.awid.org>) and e-newsletters feature information, analysis and resources produced by both AWID and our members and constituency, equipping a global subscribership of over 48,500 women's rights advocates with the latest information and analysis. AWID also disseminates members-only information and resources and increasingly engages our membership through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter⁹.

AWID's partnership with the Guardian Online and Mama Cash and the launch of a new women's rights and gender equality in-focus section of the Guardian's global development website¹⁰ opens an important new channel of dialogue for women's rights organizations. AWID and Mama Cash aim to act as a bridge to a significantly larger and more diverse audience on the pressing issues affecting women, girls and trans people while also focusing a lens on the critical work being carried out by women's rights and feminist movements.

3.3 Convener & connector of diverse actors and constituencies within and outside women's movements

AWID's significant convening power is used to promote dialogue, build bridges, help overcome fragmentation and strategize on key issues. We organize and facilitate constructive spaces for our members and other diverse women's organizations, donors, development agencies, human rights and other CSOs to explore and strengthen connections within and across diversities of generations, issues, regions and sectors and to bring together groups that have not yet found common ground. For example, through our Young Feminist Activist (YFA) program, we connect our YFA members with other young women from around the world, raising awareness of their different forms of organizing and facilitating their meaningful engagement with key international processes and events.

AWID's International Forum on Women's Rights and Development is the largest recurring event of its kind, responding to emerging challenges, filling gaps and promoting stronger and more coordinated alliances. AWID's 2012 Forum, *Transforming economic power to advance women's rights and justice*, brought together 2,239 women's rights activists from 141 countries – 65% from the global South and 15% young women under 30. Members attend the Forum at reduced rates. The Forum convenes diverse groups to learn from each other and influence the agendas of women's movements and other related actors. Beyond the Forum space, follow up initiatives strengthen the connections and ideas created: for example, the 2012 Forum website (<http://www.forum.awid.org/forum12/>) was transformed into a resource and learning hub, which builds on content generated by participants.

We also supported 24 Forum Seed Grants¹¹ from 19 countries across all regions with \$5,000 each to implement innovative activities related to the Forum theme. Grantees represent both commonly excluded sectors from – and the diversity within – women rights movements, including sex workers, young women, garment worker trade unionists, home-care workers, environmentalists, rural agriculture and fisherfolk, grassroots, economists, Roma and trans people.

3.4 Advocate and Mobilizer

AWID is actively engaged in policy advocacy to collaboratively develop positions with members and other allies and advance those positions in relevant international spaces. In addition we use general influence strategies to transform the practices and agendas of powerful institutions such as large human rights and development organizations and other CSOs. We believe that women's organizations must have a stronger knowledge of and voice in development policy-making to ensure that it is responsive to their needs, rights and realities and that resources being allocated in the name of women and girls are effectively reaching those groups. AWID is active in processes such as the SDGs, the UN post-2015 development agenda, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, CSW and other fora, collectively strategizing with and amplifying the diverse perspectives of our members and broader constituency.

Given the increasing violence and severity of aggressions against WHRDs in most regions, we aim to improve the responses offered by international institutions, UN mechanisms, and human rights NGOs and work with regional and international networks to help strengthen protection mechanisms and responses to WHRDs at risk. For example, as a member and in coordination with other members of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRD IC) and the Norwegian government, AWID contributed to joint advocacy that resulted in the adoption of the first-ever resolution on protection of WHRDs¹² by the UN General Assembly's Third Committee. To mobilize our members in support of WHRDs, we use AWID-alerts¹³: an online urgent action alert that invites members to act in solidarity with WHRDs who are facing threats and violence. Online mobilization is an important way we engage with our diverse and global constituency. For this year's 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 58)¹⁴, AWID used its increasing social media presence to send a strong message that women's rights needs to be at the core of the new development agenda¹⁵. AWID members, partners and allies from over 50 countries joined our social media mobilization, reaching 1.7 million people through our Twitterthon.

4 Conclusion

AWID's multiple 'movement support' roles illustrate how a collaborative approach with our members and broader constituency is at the heart of our work and reflect our belief in the power of movements to create momentum for change. The current and upcoming UN processes (post-2015, +20 reviews, Sustainable Development

Goals – SDGs) will be key moments for women's rights movements, beyond the intergovernmental process, to come together to continue strategizing and debating new proposals and ideas on alternative economic and development models, and to ensure the integration of gender equality and women's rights as central to the agendas being developed. There is an urgent need, therefore, to build shared agendas across a broad array of actors and sectors, strengthening and deepening those connections in order to act together for a more just social order. We believe that deep, sustainable change for women's rights requires women's collective action and power, so to that end, supporting and strengthening diverse women's rights movements is essential.

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NOTES

1. For an understanding of how we define 'movements' please refer to our publication: Batliwala (2012).
2. The Women's Major Group (www.womenrio20.org) brings together 400 organizations and individuals working on sustainable development from a women's rights perspective at local, national, regional and global levels. Their critical analysis of the High Level Panel Report can be found here: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3767women3.pdf>. The High Level Panel Report can be accessed here: <http://www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
3. Refer to the CSW Agreed Conclusions, Point A. Strengthening implementation of legal and policy frameworks and accountability, Paragraph (z) "Support and protect those who are committed to eliminating violence against women, including women human rights defenders in this regard, who face particular risks of violence" (UNITED NATIONS, 2013).
4. See AWID's article about the adoption of this resolution (TOLMAY; VIANA, 2013).
5. AWID's programs are divided into Core and Thematic areas. Core programs represent permanent priorities for the organization that are central aspects of our role as a 'movement support' organization, supporting and strengthening the infrastructure and capacity of women's rights organizations and movements globally:
 - 1) International Forum on Women's Rights & Development;
 - 2) Membership and Constituency Building;
 - 3) Bridging Knowledge and Practice;
 - 4) Women's Rights Information & Communication;
 - 5) Young Feminist Activism.Our thematic programs relate to themes that are closely linked to the dominant contextual trends mentioned earlier:
 - 1) Challenging Religious Fundamentalisms;
 - 2) Economic Justice & Financing for Women's Rights;
 - and 3) The Right to Defend Rights: Women Human Rights Defenders.
6. Friday Files are weekly analyses and interview pieces related to women's rights issues at the international, regional and national levels and on current trends and timely events from a feminist perspective, produced in English, French and Spanish. They are available at <http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/AWID-s-Friday-Files>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
7. AWID's publications on funding for women's rights, spanning 2005 to 2014, are available at: <http://www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Funding-for-Women-s-Rights>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
8. Catapult is an online crowdfunding platform specifically focusing on projects that benefit women and girls. See: <http://www.catapult.org/>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
9. AWID's Facebook page can be accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/AWID/351068122677> and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/AWID>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
10. The website can be accessed at: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/series/womens-rights-and-gender-equality-in-focus>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
11. The full list of 2013 Seed Grant winners can be found at: (ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT, 2012).
12. Members of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition: AWID, Amnesty International, Just Associates and the International Service for Human Rights released a statement about the resolution (ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT, 2013c).
13. See <http://www.awid.org/Get-Involved/Urgent-Actions>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
14. For more information about the fifty-eighth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, see: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014>. Last accessed on: 30 Apr. 2014.
15. See the original (ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT, 2014).