

# FEMINIST REALITIES AND MOVEMENTS

## INTERVIEWS WITH TWO FEMINIST FUNDS

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*For detailed descriptions of both feminist funds — [FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund](#) and [JASS](#) — see [page 5](#).*


### What do you feel has been the greatest impact of the pandemic on feminist organisations/movements?

**Maria, FRIDA:** Due to pre-existing structural disparities, fuelled by global capitalism, young feminist organisers (YFOs) are among the most vulnerable and impacted communities. Young women-, girls-, trans and intersex youth-led organisations in the Global South, who have been historically limited financially, are really struggling to keep their sources of income during this time. Their activism and organising are jeopardised, shut down or being increasingly surveilled due to the pandemic.

**Alia, JASS:** We are seeing a growing trend of authoritarianism and state violence in our region. Because of the pandemic, we are forced to stay at home, there are more checkpoints, and in general it is harder to organise against repressive policies pushed under the excuse of the pandemic. In the Philippines for example, activists from an LGBT organisation advocating for a greater health-centred (and less militarised) approach to address the pandemic were jailed for violating 'health protocols', without there being a legal or judicial framework to penalise these acts. Also, alternative means of organising, like through online means, is very slow and inefficient. With face-to-face, there is camaraderie about what happens, but digitally it is hard to relate to people and it also requires a good internet connection.

**Di, FRIDA:** When analysing the challenges that grantee partners reported when applying to our Community Resilience Grant for Crisis Response (CRG), gender-based violence had risen to the top challenge grantees faced during the pandemic. Globally, almost all the groups working with LGBTQI people have reported growth of homophobia and transphobia, ranging from threats to physical and emotional violence and even widespread anti-queer rumor falsely accusing LGBTQI people for causing the pandemic in society.





## In which ways has your organisation's way of organising, especially with young people, changed or adapted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Alia, JASS:** A lot of the activists we work with are being targeted by their governments for their work, so we have had to adapt the means and platforms of communication to ensure the safety of our partners. We are also hosting more digital security workshops with our partners to strengthen capacities and knowledge about how to stay safe online.


**Maria, FRIDA:** In 2020, FRIDA co-created a care mechanism policy for staff during the crisis, which included additional leave days for staff and access to healers, therapy, and coaching, among others. We also collectively created a COVID contingency plan to support each other if we or our families got sick, while ensuring continuity of work, balanced workloads and stronger cross-team collaboration. This adaptation allowed the staff to breathe, pause, and rest while fulfilling FRIDA's mission.

## How have feminist movements changed or adapted their approaches to getting funding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Di, FRIDA:** In funding calls launched before the pandemic, most awarded groups used FRIDA's grants for networking and alliance building. However, since the pandemic their focus has shifted toward strengthening community resilience, security, and healing. This indicates a worsening of the situation on the ground as well as an increasing awareness of valuing collective's wellbeing and safety of communities. In addition, many grantees use funding to reflect on their organisational structures and develop long-term strategies, ranging from improving audit skills to developing safety policies. We have also witnessed a shift in resource mobilisation strategies. In the past, many grassroots collectives used ticket sales and individual donations to cover their minimum costs. However, lockdown restrictions have negatively impacted such efforts as event fundraising becomes increasingly hard online. Thus, more groups have turned to seeking funding from donors and funders like FRIDA.

**Alia, JASS:** In JASS, flexible funding has also been the most important adaptation we have made to supporting the funding of feminist groups. Along with a stripped back application, this has allowed partners in the Philippines, for example, to get immediate food packets out to LGBT organisations in the villages we work in. However, there are still many logistical challenges to giving flexible funding that require creative ways to get funding to partners in the face of increasing state scrutiny.





## Could you share an example of an experience this year of which you are particularly proud?

**Alia, JASS:** In Myanmar, there is a revolution going on, and our younger colleagues have been at the front lines demanding change. They are the ones amplifying the message through their own networks and social media and rallying people into action. They are also very creative, for example our partner Sisters2Sisters have brought attention to the issue of political prisoners, by writing and disseminating personal letters about what is going on in Myanmar. This makes the message more personal and less disjointed than putting out a political statement, and allows Sisters2Sisters to really touch the public's hearts and minds and garner people's attention. It is really hard and dangerous work for them.

**Di, FRIDA:** We are really proud to support creative and resilient youth-led feminist organising, such as Aroeira from Brazil. Starting in 2018, they have been meeting weekly to implement agroforestry systems, develop care practises and learn together. They have worked together with Tulipas do Cerrado to promote integration between the different populations of that territory: unhoused population, sex workers, young activists, among others. They shared: 'when we take care of the earth, plants and animals, we become more capable and willing to take care of ourselves.'

## How are young people from gender-oppressed identities leading today compared to older generations?

**Maria, FRIDA:** In FRIDA's experience, most young feminist groups are unregistered, emergent organisations, disrupting traditional leadership structures by choosing collective, informal, and horizontal structures. YFOs are usually made out of the identities and communities they primarily work with, which provides them with a deep understanding of the most pressing issues, their unique and volatile contexts and their needs. YFOs also often employ creative strategies like theatre, performances, music, painting or activism as their primary strategies to create lasting change. When it comes to differences with older generations of movements, we notice that while young women, girls, and trans, and intersex youth are actively involved in social justice and transformative change, they often lack the visibility, access, resources, influence, and support structures compared to more established and older activists.

**Alia, JASS:** The concepts of SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression) are new to many of our partners. In Southeast Asia, there are conservative views on queer people, but now it has started to change as people are interested to find out more about the experiences queer people are having during the pandemic, even just things like pronouns. In general, young people have a better understanding and have been leading the way in sharing information about the LGBTQ community, such as 'what is trans?', 'what is non-binary?'. They are bridging the knowledge gap about these issues with the older generations.



## Do you see a change in civil society as to how they are incorporating feminist principles into their approaches and programming?

**Alia, JASS:** Yes, there is a change, especially with the growth of collective care and the importance of fostering safe spaces for each other. We are seeing a lot of cross-movement collaboration happening; women's organisations are working with labour organisations and human rights organisations. It's more inclusive now rather than just for women. We also recognise more now that burnout exists and the need to be kinder to ourselves.

**Maria, FRIDA:** In recent years, holistic care, collective wellbeing and healing justice have been spotlighted in the funding and development landscape. Yet, more resources are needed to transform those conversations into actual mechanisms of support. As funders and INGOs, we need to model this support system within our own organisations and for our own staff members. We need to walk the talk, inviting grantee partners to hold us accountable.

## What types of support do feminist organisations or movements need to amplify their impact?

**Maria, FRIDA:** Providing flexible, core and long-term funding is critical to sustain young feminist movements, inclusive of new infrastructures to reduce administrative burden and changing traditional, donor-driven MEL frameworks. Funding should also be holistic, responsive, multi-year, and timely to ensure that despite any crisis, collectives and organisations will have the capacities and resources to respond and rebuild new and better futures.

**Alia, JASS:** It's important that development actors don't drown out local grassroots organisations, but give way to them. Despite many foreign INGOs not having a full understanding of the local context, they hold more influence and reach than grassroots actors. These organisations should share the space, stand in solidarity with and listen to local grassroots groups, to foster movement-building and avoid monopolising the sector. Meanwhile, governments should stop attacking and harassing women activists. Governing spaces are often occupied by cis-heterosexual men. These men should not make decisions without the participation of women's groups and women representatives. Give us space to share what we are going through and say what our demands are. It's important to pass the mic to someone else.



## How can we think differently about how to give more space to YFOs to take the lead?

**Alia, JASS:** Older generation activists need to be a bit more flexible when it comes to organising with younger generations and meeting halfway. Remember, 'What is this for?', 'Who are we fighting against?' Because it's definitely not each other. In the Philippines we say: 'No-one is born with their fist raised'. We cannot become better feminists or activists by ourselves. That is the importance of being with other activists to practise that collective culture.

**Di, FRIDA:** Young feminist activists' solutions to the pandemic have presented us an intersectional and context-specific blueprint to rebuild our society. This new generation of feminists recognises that gender equity is inherently inter-connected with racial, economic, environmental, and health equity and justice. Young women, trans and intersex youth and queer people are strengthening solidarity and foregrounding collaboration to systematically address structural inequalities for all people.

**Alia, JASS:** While we are experiencing a lot of struggles at the moment, we must keep remembering the reasons why we are doing this. There won't be a fully-liberated society if women are not liberated from our specific chains. We need to keep breaking barriers, finding hope in each other and moving forward with courage for a better tomorrow that is already unfolding.

*This spotlight chapter is part of the State of Youth Civil Society global, youth-led publication.*

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 2010, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund is the only youth-led fund that focuses exclusively on supporting global young feminist activism to advance social justice movements and agendas.

<sup>2</sup> JASS is a feminist movement support organisation dedicated to building the voice, visibility, and collective power of women for a just and sustainable world for all.

