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Statement submitted by Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), MenEngage Global Alliance, Stichting CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, and World Young Women’s Christian Association, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

We welcome the priority theme the Commission will consider in this upcoming session, particularly the relevance of financing for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. This written statement sheds light on the importance of youth-friendly funding and its transformative potential to empower young people to dismantle existing power relations that perpetuate gender inequality.

Young people play a crucial role in shaping our present and future. It is imperative to prioritize their needs and ensure they have the necessary resources and capacity to become agents of change. Youth-friendly funding is designed and allocated for specifically youth-led programs, initiatives, activities, and thus, accessible, inclusive, sustainable and sensitive to youth needs. While several funding mechanisms exist- many claiming to be youth-friendly-, specific needs and priorities of youth often go unnoticed and youth are left out of co-designing them, resulting in lack of funding or even in tokenistic approaches.

Although many governments, international non-governmental organizations, donors, among others, advocate for meaningful youth participation, the allocation of financial resources for this cause remains extremely limited. On a global scale, the funding allocated to programs prioritizing youth and gender issues through official development assistance (ODA), typically directed towards United Nations agencies, remains limited when compared to the overall financial support for development. In the year 2020, only 5.56 per cent of the total ODA provided by the top ten donors dedicated to gender equality found its way to initiatives specifically targeting gender equality objectives and concentrating on individuals aged 10–24.

Existing funding often excludes youth facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, as it is bureaucratic, inaccessible, and relies on their unpaid labor (most youth advocates currently work on a voluntary basis). This limits participation to privileged youth, leading to interventions that do not represent diverse needs, failing to foster meaningful and inclusive youth participation.

Relevance of Youth-Friendly Funding for Gender Equality and Empowerment of all Young Women and Girls

Youth-friendly funding empowers young leaders, enabling their active participation in design and implementation of gender-related initiatives. It equips them with necessary tools that include funding, skills, knowledge for decision-making. Through youth-friendly funding young people can create solutions to tackle societal issues that affect their bodies, agency and decisions, such as gender inequality, poverty, lack of education and quality healthcare, lack of sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, harmful practices, among others.

Barriers Faced by Young People when trying to access funding

Many youth – particularly young women, girls and gender diverse people-, as well as youth-led organizations – particularly at a grassroots level- encounter several of the following challenges:

- Economic and social hardships curtail young people’s access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities and other essential conditions. When basic

needs are not met, participating meaningfully in decision-making processes and advancing development becomes a privilege for young people.

- Lack of access to quality education hinders young people’s ability to acquire literacy including reading, writing, digital, financial, and other forms of essential literacy to access resources and funding mechanisms.
- Stereotypes and biases undermine young people’s credibility in decision-making and funding, limiting their impact on gender equality and youth empowerment agendas. Age restrictions, bureaucratic hurdles, and information barriers disconnect many from policy spaces, impeding their participation.
- Digital divide exacerbates inequalities, limiting access to information, advocacy and funding related to gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.
- Grant-giving institutions’ requirements for legal registrations limits youth-led and grassroots groups, particularly those based in the Global South or dealing with politically sensitive topics, reinforcing colonial practices and a lack of trust in young grantees. This excludes informal but effective youth groups, forcing them to undergo formal registration processes that can attract scrutiny, especially if their activities are disapproved or even criminalized by the government.
- Complex application processes and requirements encompassing difficult language, significant documentation, and least required operation years lock out most youth led organizations on available funding.
- Language barriers, especially English-centric communication, exclude many young people from learning about funding opportunities, let alone applying.
- Divergent priorities (areas of focus, geographic regions) between young people and major donors lead to missed funding opportunities or compromising the core aspects of their work.
- Youth-led organizations often receive project-specific funding only, which does not cover core costs such as overhead, staff salaries, and office expenses. Organizations therefore depend on reserves or additional unpaid work to ensure sustainability, to continue securing funding, and to scale-up activities
- Restricted access to networks and peer intimidation within networks further hinder youth-led organizations.
- Youth focused networks do not have access to information, contacts and networks of donors along with limited knowledge of funding cycles or donors’ agendas.

Recommendations For the Agreed Conclusions:

Ensure Pre-Conditions for Meaningful Youth Participation

- Ensure inclusive and quality education, including digital and financial literacy, for young people in all their diversity.
- Commit to dismantle stereotypes that hinder young people from being taken seriously in decision-making processes related to gender equality and youth empowerment.
- Finance capacity-building programs for young people, providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes related to gender equality, poverty reduction, and institutional strengthening.

- Ensure that all young people have access to technology and digital skills to enable their participation in online advocacy, access to funding opportunities related to gender equality and overcome inequalities exacerbated by the digital divide.
- Promote funds that leverage technology to create innovative sustainable solutions for youth related challenges such as apps, online resources and digital educational platforms.
- Remove age restrictions and bureaucratic hurdles that hinder young people from participating in policy making and decision-making processes, including by creating accessible platforms for youth participation that have readily, transparent and accurate information.

Ensuring Funding Is Youth-Friendly

- Provide accessible, flexible, and sustainable public funding and increase domestic funding for youth-led organizations and groups; and, initiate policy changes to allocate resources more effectively to youth led and youth driven initiatives.
- Commit to put in place clear and accessible guidelines to access financial mechanisms in easy-to-read formats.
- Promote trust-based, multi-year, flexible, un-earmarked funding for youth-led organizations and youth independent activists.
- Review and revise grant application requirements, eliminating the demand for legal registrations like nonprofit status for youth-led and grassroots groups, to remove barriers to funding access and promote inclusivity.
- Simplify and streamline grant application processes, reporting mechanisms and compliance requirements, minimizing administrative burden, complex requirements, excessive documentation, offering submission forms in different languages, and restrictive eligibility criteria.
- Provide funding to cover core costs, including overhead, staff salaries, and office expenses to enable youth-led organizations to focus on their mission rather than struggling to cover basic operational expenses.
- Acknowledge that young women, girls and young feminist-led organizations not only work on youth-focused issues but are also leaders on several agendas that should also be funded.

Prioritize Inclusivity

- Commit to offer funding opportunities in multiple languages, reducing language barriers for young people who are not proficient in English or other dominant languages.
- Promote targeted support for marginalized and disadvantaged groups such as young women, persons with disabilities, youth from rural areas and gender diverse youth to ensure no young person is left behind.
- Acknowledge and ensure that young people must be at the center of the design, implementation and decision-making around funding opportunities for grant-making processes and systems to be truly reflective of young people's agenda and priorities.
- Prioritize participatory grant-making processes with youth community-led processes

Support The Strengthening Of Youth-Led Organizations

- Promote training and share the necessary tools with youth-led organizations and youth-led organizing groups, to ensure young people hold equal power in discussions and decision-making processes.
- Establish flexible (and optional) support and capacity-building programs, including for organizational development, that offers opt-in support tailored to the needs of youth-led efforts. Ensure that young people have the autonomy to choose the required support, including but not limited to wellness, organizational development, financial systems, mental health, and community-care.
- Establish programs and platforms to facilitate networking opportunities for young-led organizations to connect with potential donors and mentors.
- Create youth-led accountability frameworks that make organizations answerable to young people. These frameworks should include ways to involve young individuals in governance that align with organizational values, lived experiences, or participatory expertise.

Intergenerational And Cross Sectorial Solidarity

- Call upon collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to create funding for youth-led initiatives that work towards gender equality, including the achievement of sexual and reproductive health and rights.
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