

Why and How Feminist Movements Can Engage Strategically with CSR

White Paper

A Paradox of Intersecting Crises

Feminist NGOs and civil society actors, especially those in the Global South/Majority World, are facing an alarming paradox: their work is more urgently needed than ever, yet public funding for feminist causes is at an all-time low. An already precarious situation (in which only around **1%** of all gender focussed aid goes to feminist organisations) has worsened - A 2025 UN Women **survey reveals** that nearly half of women's organisations responding to crises may be forced to shut down within six months due to global aid cuts, further deepening the precarity of feminist civil society actors.

At the same time, there is a **resurgent global backlash** against gender rights. From legislative rollbacks on reproductive autonomy, to attacks on trans and queer communities, anti-gender ideologies are being mainstreamed by powerful state and non-state actors. These intersecting crises are unfolding within the broader context of accelerating climate change. The gender-climate link is well established: women, girls, and marginalised genders, particularly in the Global Majority, bear the brunt of climate change. Whether it is climate-induced displacement from floods or disasters, food insecurity due to droughts and extreme weather events, the climate crisis deepens existing inequalities. And yet, existing climate finance mechanisms continue to overlook the need for gender-transformative solutions.

Over history and against all odds, feminist movements have survived many challenges. What is different today is that climate change is multiplying these existing risks. It is not a cyclical crisis - it is compounding and is irreversible without intervention. We argue, based on our research paper *How Climate Response and Mitigation Financing Intersect with Feminist Funding*, that an underexplored mechanism is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Our findings show that (1) CSR has the potential to fill critical funding gaps in feminist organising, and that (2) It is currently underutilised as a mechanism for feminist movements to access climate-aligned and equity-based funds.

The Ethics of Engagement

We fully recognise some of the ethical considerations of drawing on private sector funds for climate action, given that many corporations **are complicit** in the climate emergency. But the corporate landscape is shifting. Corporations are increasingly advocating for DEI efforts, net-zero accountability frameworks, and ESG metrics. Feminist organisations and civil society can help shape what an equitable, socially just private sector could look like, by engaging with these stakeholders.

While existing systems may present problematic power dynamics or tokenization of critical issues and communities, the first step towards shifting these systems is gaining a seat at the table - and using that seat to demonstrate the benefits that investing in feminism can bestow for every stakeholder.

What follows are our targeted recommendations, aimed at ensuring feminist and civil society actors in the Global Majority are more than recipients of aid, but also architects of climate resilience and justice.

Recommendations: Minority World Feminist Organizations

- **Integrate climate adaptation into mandates:** Identify specific intersections between feminist advocacy and climate resilience to access CSR and climate finance opportunities. Partner with environmental organisations to embed a gender lens in climate solutions and increase funding relevance.
- **Offer gender-transformative advisory services:** Position feminist organisations as technical experts on equity, inclusion, and sustainability. By advising on CSR programme design, they can help multinationals meet DEI goals while embedding systemic justice into climate interventions.
- **Engage with government and oversight bodies:** Advocate for the mandatory inclusion of feminist perspectives in CSR frameworks and decision-making processes. Work with national regulators to ensure CSR policies mandate participatory planning that centres gender equity.
- **Build networks for collective impact:** Create or join regional feminist consortia that can pool expertise, visibility, and donor engagement capacity. Shared infrastructure improves access to larger CSR contracts and avoids duplication of efforts.

Recommendations: Majority World Civil Society Organisations

- **Advocate for inclusive CSR frameworks:** Pressure corporations and state actors to develop CSR standards that prioritise gender justice and grassroots participation. CSOs should shape how “impact” is defined in CSR metrics.
- **Build capacity for CSR engagement:** Invest in internal systems for CSR compliance: develop capabilities in financial reporting, proposal writing, and impact evaluation. Readiness can be a key differentiator in competitive CSR grant processes.
- **Form coalitions to increase influence:** Work across sectors and movements—feminist, climate, Indigenous, disability rights—to co-create proposals and frameworks. Collective action makes CSOs harder to ignore in CSR strategy spaces and opens up larger funding pools.
- **Engage in partnerships with MNCs:** Act as implementation partners who bring contextual knowledge, legitimacy, and accountability. These relationships should be co-designed to reflect community needs, not corporate PR goals.

This white paper was authored by Aditi Mukund, Founder of the Women in International Relations Network (WIRN). It forms the second in a series of three white papers offering tailored recommendations for civil society, governments, and the private sector, as part of the Walking the Talk Consortium’s Financing Feminist Futures research initiative. The full research paper can be accessed with this QR code.

