LEADING FROM THE SOUTH
A FEMINIST SOUTH-SOUTH ALLIANCE
Context

Leading from the South (LFS) is a feminist consortium led by four women’s funds from the global South: the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS), International Indigenous Women’s Forum (FIMI)/AYNI Fund (AYNI), and Women’s Fund Asia (WFA).

Leading from the South, currently in its second cycle - initiated in 2021 and extending until 2025 - represents an innovative approach to international development cooperation in which resources go directly to the southern-led women’s funds from its main donor, the Dutch Government.
Founded in 2007, FMS has coordinated Leading from the South in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2017, reaching over 20 countries through a collaborative model with other women’s funds based in the region.
Leading from the South is putting the concept of localisation into practice, and localisation

“is much more than thinking about how funds flow from north to south, but rather to be able to generate another distribution of power, which has to do with trusting organisations in the south to define their own agendas, to manage money and to raise questions that have to do with: what are the issues that need to be addressed? What are the issues to be prioritised?”

(FMS’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning coordinator)
The Big Idea

Leading from the South is the result of collective action, with feminist organisations and women’s funds from the global north and south coming together to support novel donor relations.

Moreover, it signifies a significant political commitment from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
The collaboration between the women’s funds consortium and a bilateral donor was not only innovative but also substantial in its financial commitment. The initiative dedicated a significant sum—42 million euros in the first phase and 80 million euros in the second phase—to joint endeavours, reframing bilateral relations.
Actions

FMS works across four strategic areas: political participation, economic justice, elimination of violence and discrimination and socio-environmental and urban justice.

Through Leading from the South and collaborating with other women’s funds in Latin America and the Caribbean, FMS support initiatives from grassroots, intermediate, and large organisations dedicated to advancing women’s rights within these areas.
They have developed a comprehensive structure to reach organisations even if they lack official registration or legal status in their countries, devising effective ways to disburse funds to them and navigating countries with numerous restrictions.

In 2021-2023, they reached over two hundred organisations in 25 countries with financial and technical support, including core funding.

In addition, they aim to foster a sense of community among the organisations they support and build alliances between grassroots organisations and women’s funds and organisations.
Coming together as a consortium, Leading from the South reinforces the leadership of the four women’s funds based in the South within the landscape of international cooperation, as they mention, “we sit down with donors or potential donors differently than if we were alone.”

(FMS’s Deputy Director)
Outcomes

The success of Leading from the South is significantly attributed to its implementation through alliances across the global south. These alliances facilitate horizontal learning, experience sharing, and developing a collective vision among women’s funds and organisations.

Leading from the South has enhanced leadership both at the individual and organisational level, contributing to increased legitimacy within their communities and, in some cases, increased opportunities for accessing additional resources.
On a macro level, Leading from the South in Latin America and the Caribbean has contributed to changes in laws, public policies, and regulations.

Leading from the South has demonstrated that alternative forms of support are possible within international cooperation. Women’s funds from the global south, based in the global south, can effectively manage and successfully handle large resources from development cooperation.
Learnings

• ICSOs can foster greater South-South learning and harness the expertise of other organisations by dedicating resources to regional learning events, mirroring the approach of initiatives like Leading from the South.

• Leading from the South embodies an innovative collaboration between women’s funds and a bilateral donor, reshaping external perceptions of women’s funds and resource distribution dynamics. This was achieved by implementing fair decision-making processes and maintaining direct communication with the donor through a designated focal point.
Collective advocacy and alliances have led to the distribution of flexible and adaptable funds and trust-based partnerships. ICSOs can model this shift in donor-grantee relations, seeking to forge partnerships with smaller grassroots organisations based on collaboration. They should refrain from imposing their own agendas and instead empower these smaller organisations to define their own priorities.
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