

The Young Feminist

PLURIVERSE

SUMMARY REPORT

Weaving constellations of feminist organising

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DEFINITIONS

YFOs: We have chosen the term Young Feminist Organisations (YFOs) to refer to the diversity of collectives, groups, and organisations led by young feminists.

Pluriverse: A Pluriverse is 'a world where many worlds fit'. To express what we have learned in this research, we use the metaphor of a 'Feminist Pluriverse'. We borrow this metaphor from the Zapatista, indigenous women's movement in Mexico and Latin American based sociologists to help emphasise that each YFO represents a unique and co-existing realm of possibilities of how to go about young feminist organising

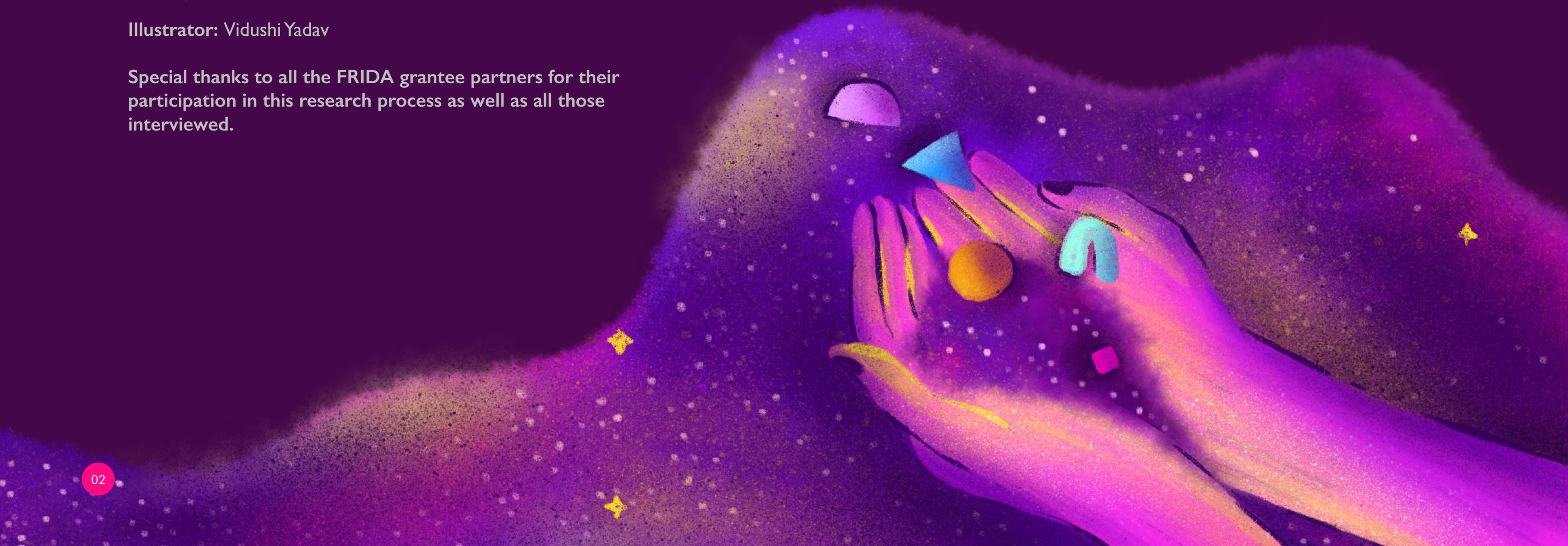


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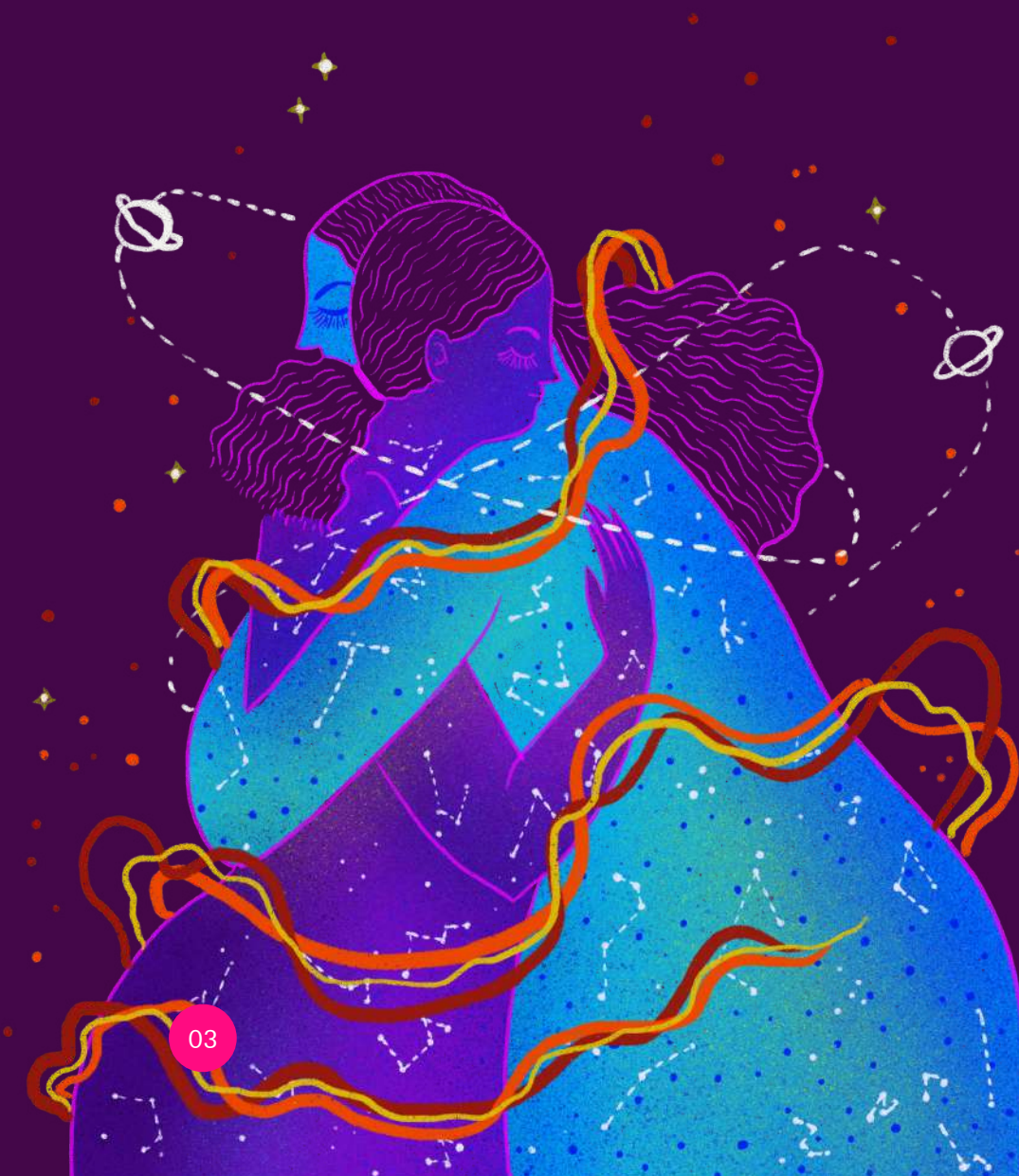
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In 2010, FRIDA became the first donor to exclusively support young feminist groups and organisations (YFOs) around the world. Almost a decade later, we take the time to reflect and understand how our grantee partners have evolved accompanied by FRIDA's continuous support. The Young Feminist Pluriverse is a narrative report that dives into the experiences of young feminist groups that have received continuous support by FRIDA over the last 5 to 9 years. It explores in greater depth the way continuous, flexible financial and non-financial support influences the strength and evolution of young feminist organisations and groups (YFOs). This research also inquires into how FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund's (FRIDA) accompaniment enables YFOs to create positive impacts with and within their communities. Based on FRIDA's theory of change, the research aims to illustrate the way continuous funding and support enables YFOs to create change under four areas: i) Changing individual or community attitudes, practices or consciousness, ii) Increasing access to resources and opportunities, iii) Changing norms, culture and exclusionary practice, iv) Changing laws or policies.

Overall, this research seeks to:

- Assess the impact of FRIDA's consistent support on the grantee partners;
- Explore the changes that YFOs have sparked and contributed to;
- Reflect on the theories, principles, approaches that inform FRIDA's funding and funding+ support;

- Observe the changes within a YFOs in terms of growth and
- development; Inspire and inform FRIDA's next 5-year strategic period.

This research builds upon what we already know about the state of young feminist organising based on the 2016 AWID and FRIDA publication: 'Brave, Creative, Resilient'². Young feminist organising has proliferated globally. They predominantly work in addressing gender-based violence, sexual reproductive health and rights, as well as political and economic empowerment for women. They engage with numerous communities including: Women Human Rights Defenders, at risk youth, students and LGBTQI youth. They tend to work collaboratively with other parallel movements across different generations. YFOs adopt and experiment with a variety of organisational models that best suit their context, location and political relationship. Although many YFOs are registered, a significant percentage either chooses or are forced to remain unregistered. They are critically under-resourced and face regular threats to their safety and security. They also use creative and innovative strategies to make their organising possible.



¹(Kothari et al, 2019)

²(AWID & FRIDA, 2016)

How does FRIDA support its grantee partners?

Through a model of participatory grant making, applicants of FRIDA's grants decide who will become a grantee partner. The selected YFOs have access to both funding and funding+ support.

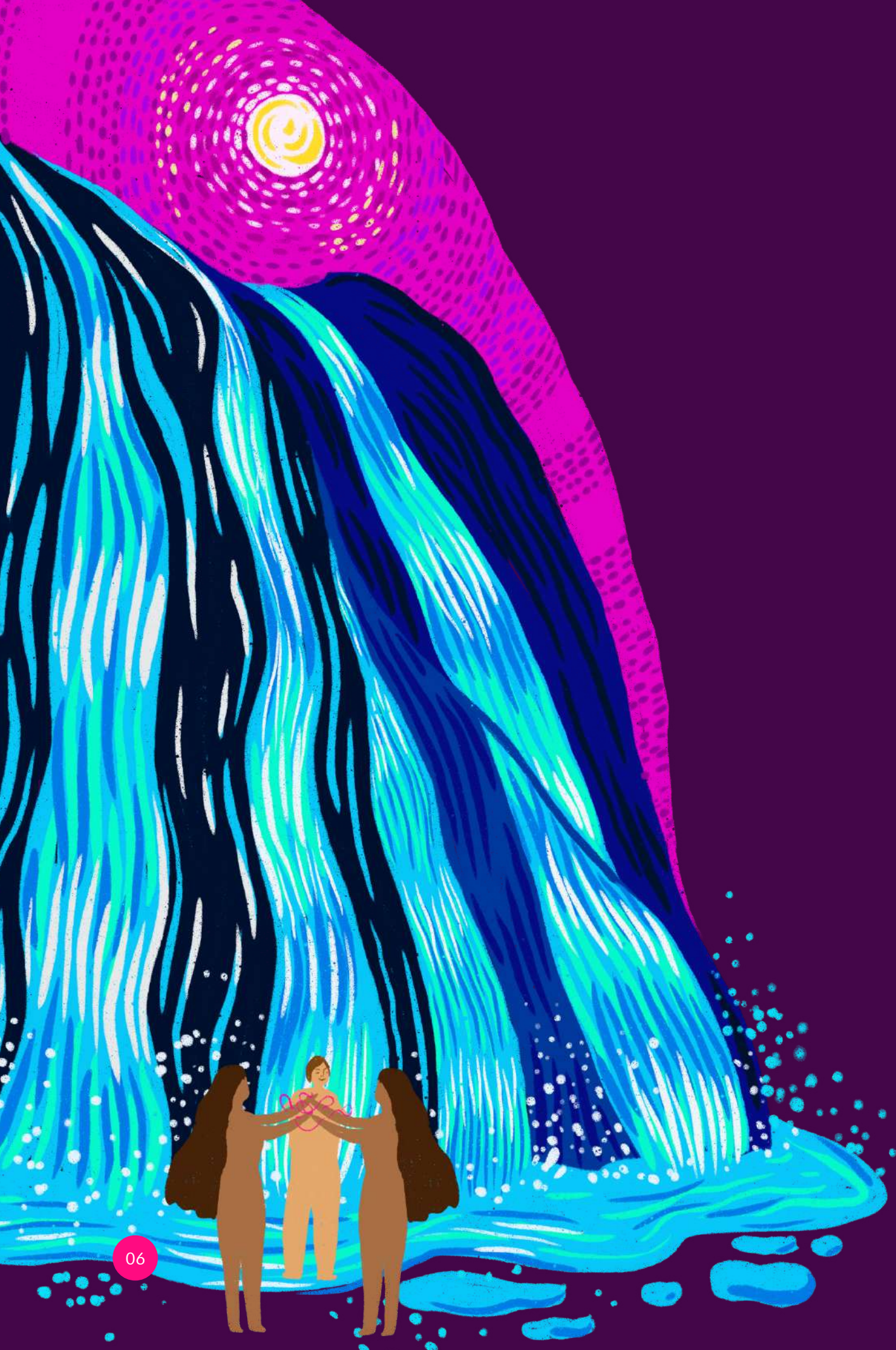
Funding Support:

- **Core Grant:** Flexible core funding that the groups may put towards any need they have as an organisation.
- **Capacity Building Grant:** A grant to strengthen the group, and to enhance the capacities, skills and abilities of their members.
- **Special Travel Grant:** A grant to support representatives of grantee groups to travel to local, regional, international meetings, convenings and forums that add value to their organising and contribute to their community, collective or organisation.
- **Solidarity Exchanges Grant:** A grant to enable groups to meet and learn from other YFOs.
- **Special Collaboration Grant:** A grant to support collaborative, intersectional and/or intergenerational projects led by two or more organisations.
- **Resource Mobilisation Grant:** A grant to strengthen grantee partners' capacity to fundraise and mobilise resources.

Transformation/Exit Grant: A grant to help groups graduating from FRIDA to adjust and prepare for the end of the funding relationship.

Funding + Support:

- **Accompaniment Program:** An advisor or a grantee partner are paired with another grantee partner for a 2-year period to accompany each other over a FRIDA journey of learning and growth. FRIDA provides them with financial and institutional resources to implement a grantee partner driven project.
- **FRIDA convenings:** FRIDA organises regional, international and thematic convenings to strengthen and encourage a community of learning between grantee partners, providing them with opportunities to create new skills, knowledge and networks.
- **Support from FRIDA regional focal points:** FRIDA has regional focal points who work to build and maintain a relationship with each grantee partner. Focal points also serve as the link between grantee partners and different parts of the FRIDA community (Such as advisors and grantee partners from other regions).
- **Webinars and online learning opportunities:** FRIDA organises online learning opportunities that speak directly to the needs of grantee partners. These opportunities are both regional and open to the FRIDA community at large.



A Pluriverse is 'a world where many worlds fit'.

To express what we have learned in this research, we use the metaphor of a 'Feminist Pluriverse'. We borrow this metaphor from the Zapatista and indigenous women's movement³ and Latin American based sociologists to help emphasise that each YFO represents a unique and co-existing realm of possibilities of how to go about young feminist organizing.

A pluriverse is 'a world where many worlds fit'. With this metaphor, the report makes a strong statement about how financial and non-financial support can enable each group to become precisely who they are, celebrating differences rather than promoting a standardisation of what feminist organising might feel or look like. Each group speaks and relates differently to feminist organising, and yet there are many experiences of growth that connect these groups to one another. Together, they create a forceful energy which allows for a local understanding of feminism, whilst enabling a connected social movement.

In a moment when the global feminist movement gains more visibility and donors increase support for women's rights and feminist work, there is a risk of homogenizing their experience⁴. Instead, the pluriverse celebrates how each group looks, speaks and behaves differently, and yet they co-exist and build common threads together to end the patriarchy.

This metaphor helps tell the story of why FRIDA's support matters. Funding is not an exercise that seeks to homogenise groups within a specific vision of feminism. The opposite, FRIDA's funding model is a curious one which accompanies diverse YFOs to become the most actualised and powerful versions of themselves. FRIDA's model wants to celebrate, support knowledge exchange, and hold space for the different parts of the feminist pluriverse. This report seeks to honor the voices of the girl, young women, trans and intersex-led groups.

Often, YFOs inhabit external environments that directly challenge the change they are trying to bring forward. What weaves these groups together is a commitment to push through and resist the boundaries they perceive as oppressive.



METHODOLOGY

This research does not profile all of FRIDA's long-term grantee partners. Instead, we go deeper into a handful of case studies. Each grantee partner has something specific to teach us about the significance of supporting young feminist organising. While these case studies are not representative of all grantee partners, they are meant to expand the awareness on the importance of funding young feminist organisers. **By spotlighting different grantees in detail, we set the intention of celebrating the various forms in which young feminists organise.**

This study was informed by a total of: 5 learning visits, 38 in-person and 5 online semi-structured interviews and the review of FRIDA's publications and internal documents.

The baseline for this report are FRIDA's publication and unpublished documents such as the end-of-year reports that long-term grantee partners have submitted to FRIDA. Yet, the learning visits source the richness of the 5 stories shared in the core of this report. Grantee partners in Georgia, Mexico, Nigeria, Afghanistan (but visited in Morocco), and Lebanon came together as a team to share their stories and experiences in a two-day participatory workshop hosted in each country. The methodology utilised in the 2-day workshops pulled on experiential techniques, reflective practice exercises, and participatory action research (PAR) traditions. The research exercises utilised theatre, painting and creative writing to make the research process stimulating and accessible. As a practice, PAR breaks away from the idea of research as distant, extractive and singularly defined by the external researcher. Instead, PAR honors the experience of people in the room and their different ways of knowing. Moreover, PAR integrates system thinking and power analysis inspired by the experience of diverse social movements, feminist, critical-race and queer theory and practice.

Over the course of two days, each team mapped the group's evolution, tracing their path from their foundation to present day. On this map, the groups displayed three factors: external factors, internal factors, and their relationship to FRIDA.

Each group profiled in this study was invited to review the case studies in which they feature.

Reading each case study, you can learn more about: who they are and what they bring to the world [Vision and Impact], the contexts they find themselves in [External Environment], their internal dilemmas and discoveries [Organisational Growth and Learning], and, finally, what it has meant for them to be funded by FRIDA.

KEY LEARNINGS

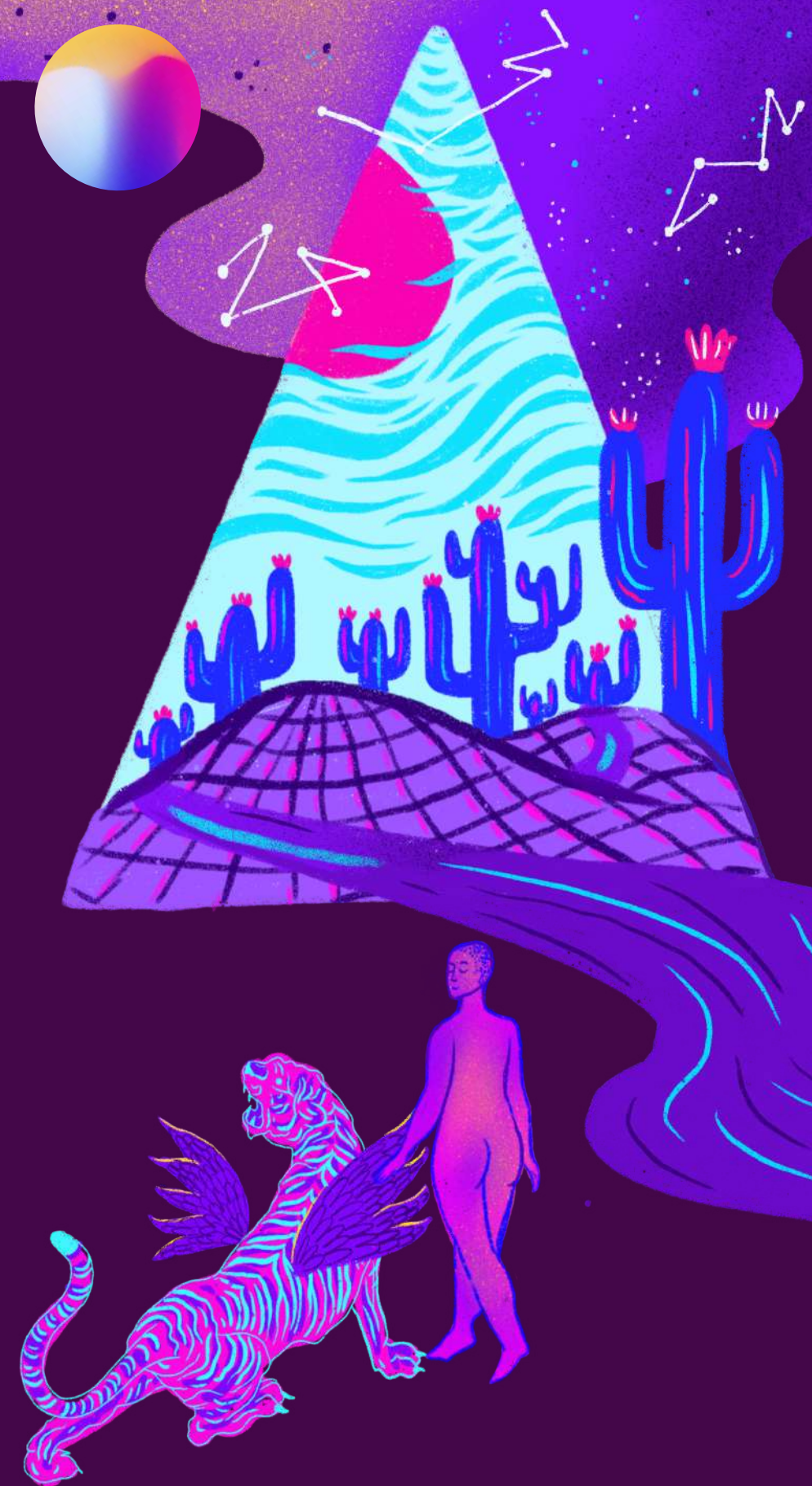
So, what have we learned about the way FRIDA's support enables YFOs?

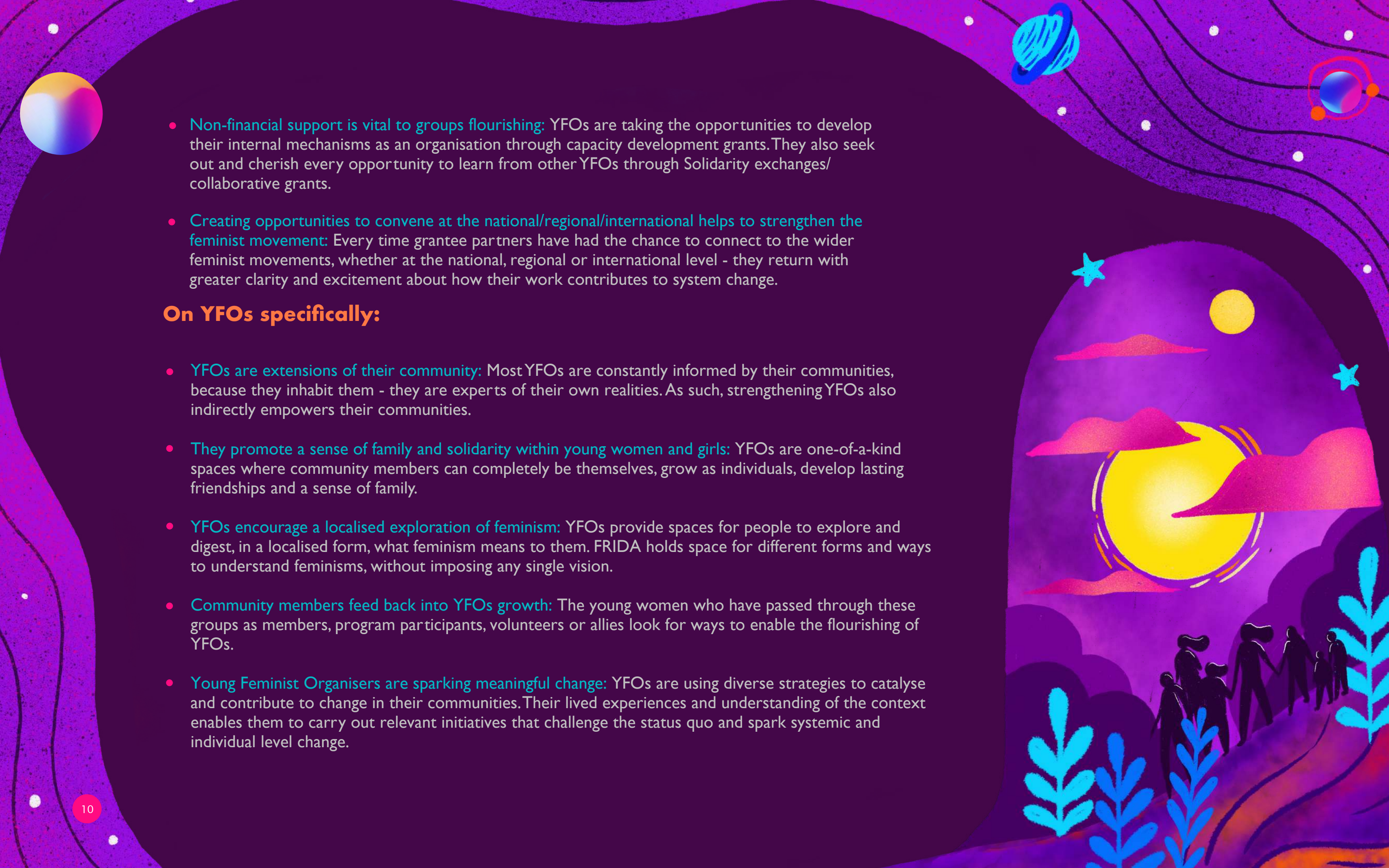
- **Small flexible funding makes big waves:** Continuous small funding alongside non-financial support act as key building blocks towards sustainability. FRIDA was the first donor for many groups; they used the funding provided to pay a staff person, secure an office, or pilot their dream projects. The early steps they take with these funds paves the way for their desired growth or sustained organising.
- **Encouraging autonomy and confidence:** First-time funding, and continuous financial and non-financial support directly boosts the confidence of groups. Groups develop skills and know-how around managing funding, which can provide the confidence and support to attract other donors.
- **Providing the freedom to shape their own organisational trajectory:** FRIDA is adamant about reaffirming to groups that they hold the decision when it comes to defining the direction, pace and trajectory of their evolution. YFOs value this freedom. Unrestricted core funding paired with capacity development opportunities attends to the soil and roots of the groups.
- **Supporting underfunded areas:** YFOs channel resources towards areas that are hard to source funding for, such as work in conflict-affected areas, legal work, marches, healthcare of a staff member, stipends etc.
- **Being integrated into a wider feminist pluriverse:** YFOs value being able to connect with other YFOs, women's rights CSOs and women's funds at regional and international levels through FRIDA.

What does the research tell us about FRIDA's theories, principles and approaches?

This research unearthed reflections and perspectives which confirmed our assumptions, theories and ways of working:

- **Young feminist organising is a niche area of funding:** YFOs face challenges to resource their work. This may be because they work in thematic areas different from that of donors or because of a lack of formality in their internal systems. In some cases, being unregistered disqualifies YFOs from obtaining resources. Within the broader spectrum of feminist funding, young feminists have limited options. This is why FRIDA's niche is critical



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- **Non-financial support is vital to groups flourishing:** YFOs are taking the opportunities to develop their internal mechanisms as an organisation through capacity development grants. They also seek out and cherish every opportunity to learn from other YFOs through Solidarity exchanges/ collaborative grants.
 - **Creating opportunities to convene at the national/regional/international helps to strengthen the feminist movement:** Every time grantee partners have had the chance to connect to the wider feminist movements, whether at the national, regional or international level - they return with greater clarity and excitement about how their work contributes to system change.

On YFOs specifically:

- **YFOs are extensions of their community:** Most YFOs are constantly informed by their communities, because they inhabit them - they are experts of their own realities. As such, strengthening YFOs also indirectly empowers their communities.
- **They promote a sense of family and solidarity within young women and girls:** YFOs are one-of-a-kind spaces where community members can completely be themselves, grow as individuals, develop lasting friendships and a sense of family.
- **YFOs encourage a localised exploration of feminism:** YFOs provide spaces for people to explore and digest, in a localised form, what feminism means to them. FRIDA holds space for different forms and ways to understand feminisms, without imposing any single vision.
- **Community members feed back into YFOs growth:** The young women who have passed through these groups as members, program participants, volunteers or allies look for ways to enable the flourishing of YFOs.
- **Young Feminist Organisers are sparking meaningful change:** YFOs are using diverse strategies to catalyse and contribute to change in their communities. Their lived experiences and understanding of the context enables them to carry out relevant initiatives that challenge the status quo and spark systemic and individual level change.

Highlights from the Case Studies

Below is just a snippet of what emerged from engaging with the groups. Here we share a short description of the group, one of their main challenges, as well as reflections on FRIDAs support.

HELPING HAND, GEORGIA

Helping Hand is an organisation committed to sparking the civic engagement of young women and girls in Georgia. Through a powerful network of volunteers, they nurture the leadership, life skills and sense of self of young women and girls in Tbilisi, and in conflict-affected regions.

Challenges:

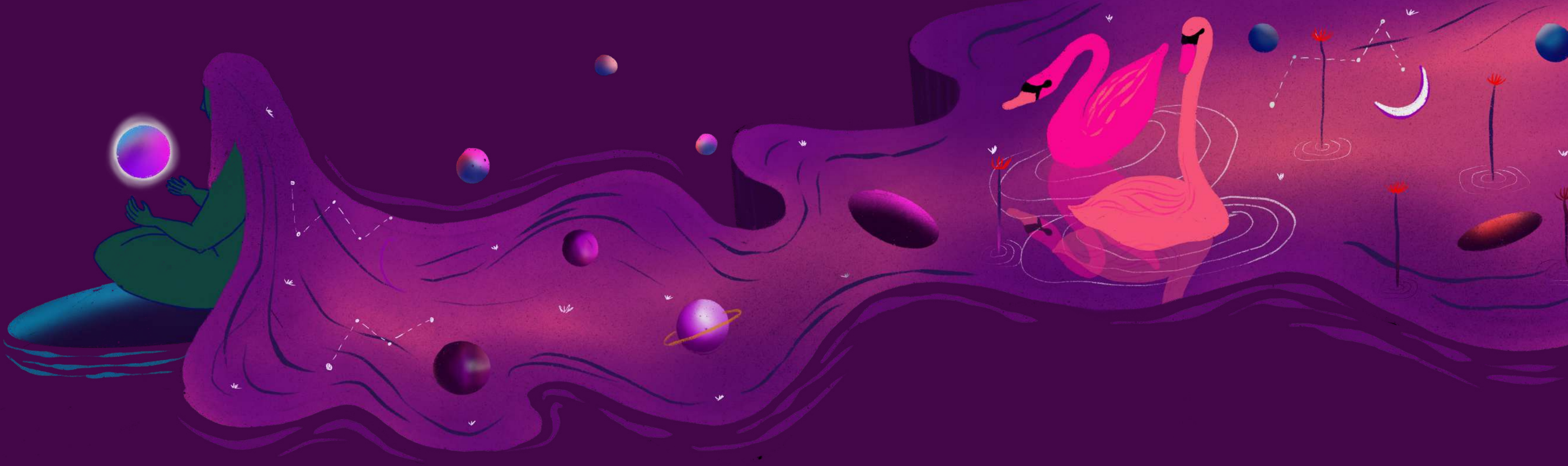
Funding to the Caucasus is limited, especially for feminist work. With scarce funding, it is difficult to retain members of their team. Many of their former volunteer coordinators have left in search of more financially stable work. Helping Hand therefore relies on their large network of volunteers with only a small core staff.

Experiences with FRIDA

- FRIDA being their only continuous donor over several years, they consider the funding as having been critical for their success and growth. Long-term funding is crucial for the sustainability of YFOs.
- Securing funding for their work in conflict/volatile areas of Georgia has been challenging, yet access to core funding has meant that they can direct funding to areas they see fit.

- They have used the Resource Mobilisation grant specifically to strengthen their fundraising and networking capacity. The grant was awarded as part of preparing the group to transition out of a funding relationship with FRIDA.





REFLEXIÓN ACCIÓN FEMINISTA (RAF) (MÉRIDA, MEXICO)

Reflexión Acción Feminista, also known as RAF, is an unregistered young feminist collective based out of Mérida, the capital of the state of Yucatán, México. They organise activities to ground feminism in their everyday lives. Taking a radical stand on issues such as abortion, safe bike mobility for women, and street harassment. They create women-only safe spaces.

Challenges:

Struggle with time availability to contribute to critical work of the collective while maintaining their day to day work outside RAF. This often leaves the team feeling overstretched. They are however, actively prioritising self and collective care.

Experiences and benefits

- Funds from FRIDA and another funder (Fondo Semillas - a women's fund in Mexico) have supported their financial education and experience. A trust based relationship alongside core funding nurtures and supports emerging groups.
- They are making the most of FRIDA networks and convenings to connect regionally and internationally. Travel and Solidarity/Exchange grants contribute to strengthening connections and collaboration between young feminists.
- As part of FRIDA's accompaniment program, they have received support from FRIDA advisors to further develop their lines of work, for example their work on feminist self-defense.

WHER, NIGERIA

The Women's Health and Equality Rights Initiative (WHER), is an organisation that promotes the wellbeing and protection of the rights of lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority women in Nigeria through advocacy, education, empowerment, psychosocial support, and research. They create a safe and caring community for the Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) women. They also conduct workshops on financial management, mental health and security.

Challenges:

Concerns about personal safety and security of their team and the members of LBQ women they serve. This is particularly because of Nigeria's Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act but also because of societal stigma against LGBTQI persons.

Experiences and benefits

- Even as the organisation has grown and received larger grants, funds for general support from FRIDA remain critical for securing the stability and sustainability of the organisation.
- A separate grant specifically for capacity development encourages groups to allocate funding to their self-identified capacity strengthening needs. WHER has used the capacity development grants to strengthen its internal systems (for example, financial management).

- WHER has grown alongside FRIDA - from being one of FRIDA's first grantees to now a partner in a program to strengthen young LBQ groups across Sub Saharan Africa (SSA).





SAHR, GLOBAL

Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights (SAHR) works to improve access to formal justice for the most vulnerable and marginalised survivors of gender-based violence. Their mission is to end impunity for sexual and gender-based crimes and hold perpetrators accountable by practicing the law through a feminist lens.

Challenges:

Members of the group have faced security risks and concerns. They too face the challenge of balancing employment with their work through SAHR, which, in addition to being a virtual team has caused some strain on them. However, the group has prioritised re-structuring processes and re-organising the way they work.

Experiences and benefits

- Funding for legal cases is scarce, as well as funding for core expenses; SAHR has been able to use FRIDA funding to cover its core costs.
- They have used the Exchange/Solidarity grants to connect with other young feminists in the pluriverse; to learn from and share knowledge with each other.
- To untangle themselves from the politicised nature of women's rights work (particularly in Afghanistan), they framed their work as promoting 'community health'. YFOs often find themselves in the position of having to carefully frame their work and take difficult decisions, to safely continue to organise and secure funding. Having set thematic areas for funding may mean excluding groups doing critical work but having to define themselves in ways that are strategic for their context.

FE-MALE, LEBANON

Fe-male is an organisation that is committed to activating and building up Lebanon's young feminists. Fe-male's projects address women's rights from a feminist perspective through radio and social media platforms, and through sponsoring events and organising marches.

Challenges:

The economic crisis in Lebanon has limited their ability to draw funds to cover project expenses, compounded by the 2019/20 revolution, they have had to postpone running certain activities such as their feminist clubs, especially in rural areas. Furthermore, the individual members of the group, like most Lebanese, are feeling the pinch of the economic crisis and are thus less able to volunteer.

Experiences and benefits

- FRIDA has directly and indirectly supported the group to mobilise additional funding. As their first donor, FRIDA's funding helped make it so other donors could trust their ability to manage a grant. FRIDA has also directly supported through references to other donors.

- Core and Flexible funding supported Fe-Male to cover non-project costs (such as healthcare for a staff member) and address activities that directly relate to their feminist agenda and activism (such as organising marches).



INFINITE WAYS TO SPARK CHANGE

The second half of the full report, 'Infinite Ways to Spark Change', frames key lessons learned and reflections around FRIDA's Theory of Change, expressed through the Garden of Change. This section also allows us to appreciate the interlinked nature of the four areas of change:

Young feminist groups invite us to imagine and experience other possible worlds. Worlds where girls, young women, trans and intersex youth feel safe to express themselves, claim their rights, lead systemic change for a more just society and flourish.

Changing individual or community attitudes, practices or consciousness:

Most of FRIDA's grantee partners report this domain of change as their main area of impact. YFOs are embedded in the very communities they serve, and therefore design programs informed and inspired by their communities. Their initiatives are responsive to the needs and interests of their community. Furthermore, they nurture the self-awareness, confidence and leadership of young women, girls and trans youth, and use a range of strategies to change prevailing gender and heteronormative narratives and perspectives.



Increasing access to resources, services and opportunities:

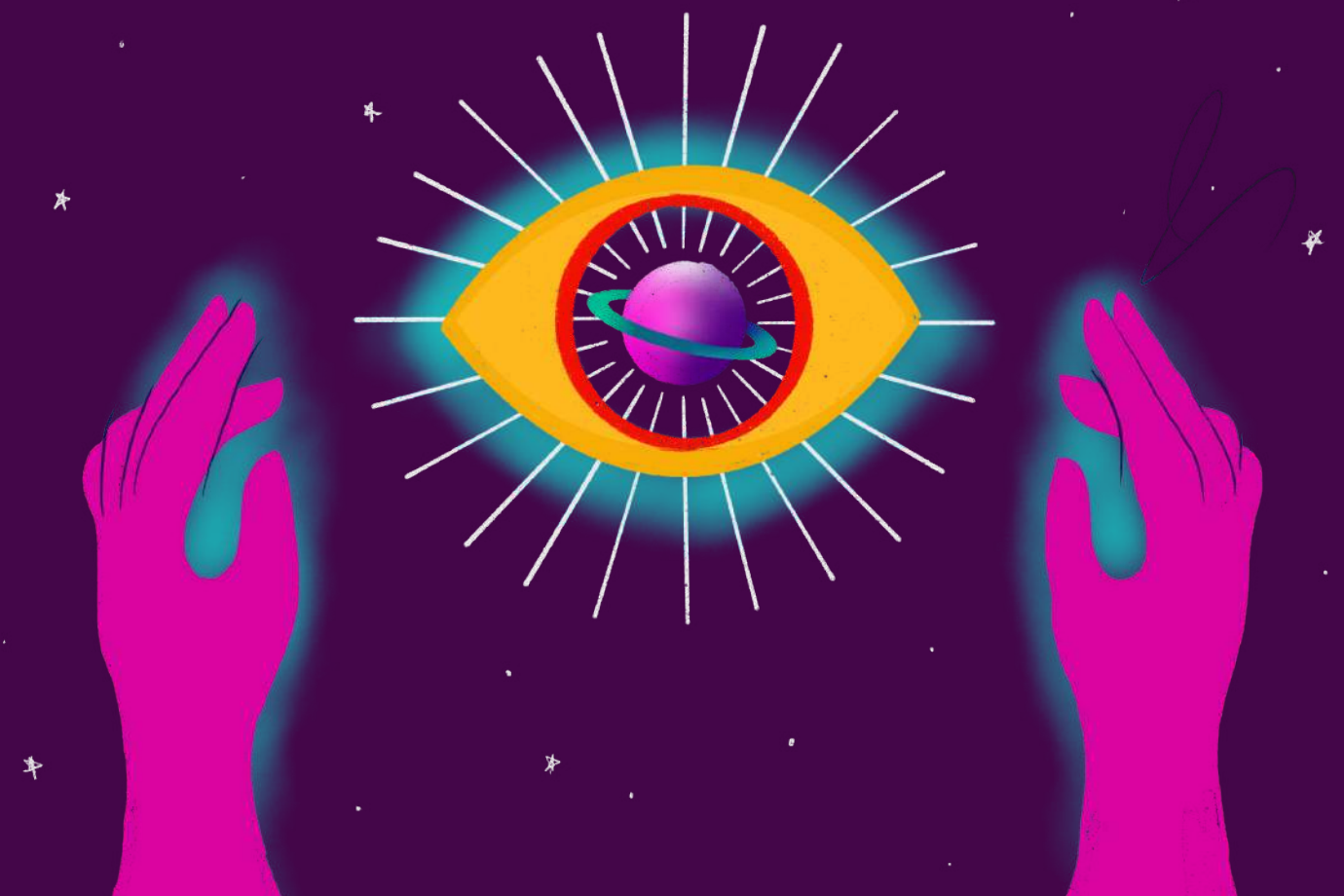
One of the most crucial areas of work under this area of change is that YFOs are creating support systems for young women and trans youth in their communities: either through provision of legal support (SAHR), or physical safe spaces such as a safe house or even virtual online safe spaces for LBQ women (WHER). YFOs are also supporting young women, girls and trans youth to access new opportunities particularly within civil society and the feminist ecosystem but beyond it as well. This is done through, for example, direct capacity development/training or sharing information about key opportunities.

Changing harmful norms, culture and exclusionary practices:

Young feminist activists and their groups or organisations very existence disrupts the status quo and reshapes norms. Their initiatives have challenged negative cultural and exclusionary norms and sparked the reimagining and changing of norms which affect their lives. One way of doing so is through working with key stakeholders in their local context to bring about more holistic change. Crested Crane Lighters (a grantee partner in Uganda), for example, has held consultations with law enforcement officials; challenging deeply held beliefs which translated into the mistreatment of sex workers. Their engagement lead to a considerable drop in police harassment towards sex workers. YFOs are making feminism visible and familiar as part of their effort to challenge patriarchy and the many ways in which it manifests. Finally, they are mobilising young women, expanding their imagination on political action and participation.

Changing laws or policies:

Of all the domains of change, this is the one that groups report the least under. Most YFOs' missions don't explicitly address this area of change, with the exception of SAHR. However, it's clear that many of them are in fact, building towards this change. Particularly for FRIDA's longer-term grantee partners, who show that they are gradually developing the capacity to work on changing laws or policies. YFOs are able to contribute to specific changes in legislation or the introduction of more progressive legislation. SAHR helped pass three laws (along with other actors) which have enabled them to better defend young women. Fe-male was a critical voice in the campaign to pass Law 293 in Lebanon: a piece of legislation that protects women victims of domestic violence. In addition, YFOs lobby policy makers at different levels in direct as well as indirect complementary ways to other actors within feminist movements. While this may not always result in a change in legislation it can contribute to improved political will and ensuring that any future changes take into account the specific ideas and requests from young feminists.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONORS

The report concludes with recommendations on how FRIDA and donors can continue to support young feminist organising. Although the following recommendations are derived from FRIDA's experience, they are offered here as a worthwhile reflection for all funders. For a more in-depth series of recommendations consult FRIDA's recent publication 'No Straight Lines' (Selica Zinna & Anderson, 2019).

Permit more vulnerability as a fund:

Groups encounter conflicts and growing pains. It could be very powerful, and revolutionary, to see donors own their organisational vulnerability. To hold up a mirror to the donor triumphs, as well as growing pains, and talk about how they breathe through them, can help YFOs become more comfortable with their own.

Support leadership and autonomy of YFOs:

All the groups visited and interviewed are either still led or co-led by their founder(s). Most of them admit that the transfer of knowledge and leadership transition has not been at the forefront of their minds. Yet, most of these leaders say they want the group to continue to have young leadership. FRIDA gives groups the freedom to define their growth trajectory, including whether or not they want to remain a 'young' feminist group. However, it could be meaningful to create a space for young founders, at an early or intermediary stage of their leadership, to come together and think critically about their role.



Offer organisational accompaniment on conflict:

Knowing that conflict is a part of life, including the lives of organisations - how can donors accompany YFOs to transform and grow from their conflicts? FRIDA for example can think about making the accompaniment program also available for the purpose of groups to transform internal conflicts. By pairing groups with practitioners skilled in conflict resolution for groups of this nature, YFOs can feel supported through their moments of crisis rather than afraid to reach out.

Clarify and reassert your offer as a donor:

What is reassuring about the emerging feminist funding climate, is that different kinds of support, not just financial, are being offered to YFOs. Yet, FRIDA is also learning that with so much richness in the support, some of their offering might be overlooked. It was common that groups were not aware of other types of support.

Make a curated list of events:

Most groups do not get to know about, or have the resources to participate in feminist events. This is often because grassroots organisations don't have the additional energy or the network to become aware of international/regional/national opportunities.

Broaden team participation to national/regional/international gatherings:

FRIDA maintains a relationship with its grantee partners by working closely with a point person. In most cases, this happens to be the group's leader. It

might be valuable to distribute knowledge within different members of the organisation: participation in training events and conferences are invaluable learning grounds. Donors could consider encouraging grantee partners to have open and honest conversations about sharing self and professional development opportunities, so as to strengthen collective ownership within the team.

Continue to build the movement digitally:

YFOs often organise both physically and digitally. Around the world the resilience of YFOs is undoubtedly tested by the current COVID-19 crisis. This will at least in the medium term put a pause on their physical organising. It's a moment of vulnerability that donors will have to carefully attend to. Specifically, how can donors help YFOs make a transition to digital organising?

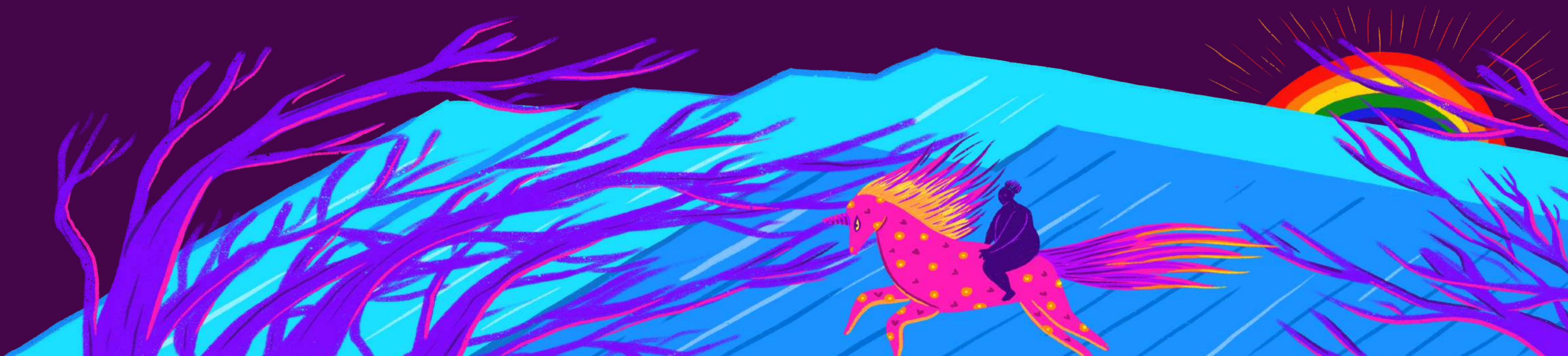
Continue developing a networked approach to supporting YFOs:

YFOs are independently cultivating close relationships with collectives and established CSOs in their communities. This localised network of support is something donors can encourage by funding peer support from feminist CSOs.



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Weaving constellations of feminist organising



FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund

Flexibility Resources Inclusivity Diversity Action