

Funding Precarity and Women’s Peace Work in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland

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Civil society supports peace work in many ways, including through education, advocacy, health outreach, data gathering, expertise- and experience-sharing, event-running, community mobilization, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. However, there are limited funds available to support this work, even though key development, peace, and security actors, including the United Nations Secretary-General, have acknowledged that developing the capacity of civil society to support peacebuilding efforts required increased investment. Scarcity of funding has created important political dynamics that affect the work that civil society can do. This study uses a qualitative semi-structured interview design to elicit information about donor funding dynamics and imperatives from expert research informants across three conflict-affected countries: Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland. We explore funding dynamics, various organizational features that influence mobilization strategies, and the impact of COVID-19 on women’s civil society groups working on peacebuilding. We argue that, while it is an ongoing concern, scarcity of funding is not the only inhibitor to effective peace work. Donor priorities, and embedded assumptions about the value of peace work—largely undertaken by women and women-led organizations—also challenge the viability of continued efforts toward sustainable peace.

La société civile soutient le travail pour la paix de nombreuses manières, notamment par l’éducation, les plaidoyers, la sensibilisation à la santé, le recueil de données, le partage d’expertise et d’expérience, l’organisation d’événements, la mobilisation communautaire, la prévention des conflits et la consolidation de la paix. Cependant, les fonds disponibles pour soutenir ce travail sont limités bien que des acteurs clés du développement, de la paix et de la sécurité, y compris le Secrétaire général de l’ONU, aient reconnu que le développement de la capacité de la société civile à soutenir les efforts de consolidation de la paix exigeait un investissement accru. Le manque de financement a créé d’importantes dynamiques politiques qui affectent le travail que la société civile peut faire. Cette étude s’appuie sur un modèle d’entretien qualitatif semi-structuré pour obtenir des informations sur les dynamiques et les impératifs de financement des donateurs auprès d’informateurs experts en recherche dans trois pays affectés par des conflits: la Colombie, le Népal et l’Irlande du Nord. Nous explorons les dynamiques de financement, les diverses caractéristiques organisationnelles qui influencent les stratégies de mobilisation, et l’impact de la COVID-19 sur les groupes de femmes de la société civile travaillant sur la consolidation de la paix. Nous soutenons que, bien qu’il s’agisse d’une préoccupation constante, le manque de financement n’est pas le seul obstacle à l’efficacité du travail pour la paix. Les priorités des donateurs et les hypothèses ancrées sur la valeur du travail pour la paix - largement entrepris par des femmes et des organisations dirigées par des femmes - remettent également en question la viabilité des efforts continus vers une paix durable.

La sociedad civil apoya las acciones por la paz de muchas maneras; por ejemplo, mediante la educación, la promoción, el alcance comunitario de la salud, la recolección de datos, el intercambio de conocimientos y experiencias, la organización de eventos, la movilización de la comunidad, la prevención de conflictos y la construcción de la paz. Sin embargo, los fondos disponibles para apoyar este trabajo son limitados, a pesar de que los principales actores del desarrollo, la paz y la seguridad, incluido el secretario general de la ONU, han reconocido que el desarrollo de la capacidad de la sociedad civil para apoyar los esfuerzos de consolidación de la paz requiere una mayor inversión. La escasez de fondos ha creado dinámicas políticas importantes que afectan las acciones que la sociedad civil puede llevar a cabo. Este estudio utiliza un diseño de entrevista semiestructurada cualitativa para obtener información sobre la dinámica y los imperativos de la financiación de los contribuyentes, a partir de informantes expertos en la investigación en tres países afectados por conflictos: Colombia, Nepal e Irlanda del Norte. Exploramos la dinámica de la financiación, las diversas características organizativas que influyen en las estrategias de movilización y el impacto de la COVID-19 en los grupos de mujeres de la sociedad civil que trabajan en la construcción de la paz. Sostenemos que, aunque es una preocupación constante, la escasez de financiación no es el único impedimento para una acción de paz eficaz. Las prioridades de los contribuyentes y las creencias implícitas sobre el valor de las acciones de paz (llevadas a cabo principalmente por mujeres y por organizaciones lideradas por mujeres) también ponen en tela de juicio la viabilidad de los esfuerzos continuos hacia una paz sostenible.

Introduction

According to preliminary data collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), global foreign aid flows reached an all-time high of US\$161.2 billion in 2020, as official development assistance (ODA) was mobilized to support countries in the Global South through the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD 2021a). Although these encouraging data fit with a pattern of increased global aid over the last decade (OECD n.d.), exploring the proportion of this funding that

flows to and through civil society organizations (CSOs)¹ tells a slightly different story. A recent report charted contributions to and through CSOs from the thirty members of the

¹We define CSOs as “third sector” nongovernmental organizations or groups that “engage in forms of public participation and action around shared interests, purposes or values” (OHCHR 2014, 3) at various governance levels. We further specify women’s CSOs as those organizations led by women and/or focused on advocating for women’s rights and equal participation across society, as well as supporting women in response to specific needs such as sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, and women’s health.

OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD 2021b), revealing that, while ODA has risen considerably since 2010, allocations to and through CSOs have remained relatively constant, rising from US\$18.46 billion in 2010 to US\$20.73 billion in 2015 and remaining at that level since (OECD 2021b, 6).

The funding of peace, security, and development work through CSOs has a long history. Donors of all kinds have nurtured relationships with CSOs in developing and conflict-affected countries, with CSOs taking on service delivery as well as capacity-sharing and advocacy roles. This is because CSOs are “often able to reach marginalized populations better than government actors and may be perceived as more efficient or less corrupt” (Pallas and Sidel 2020, 1), often creating donor preference for channeling funds through CSOs rather than governments (AbouAssi 2012, 583). Some scholars have raised concerns, however, about both the possibility of reduced autonomy in situations where CSOs rely on funding from donors with specific political objectives and priorities (Parks 2008; Chahim and Prakash 2014; Duckworth 2016; Suárez and Gugerty 2016) and the sustainability of activities if donor funding priorities shift (Heideman 2016, 2018; Pallas 2016; Pallas and Sidel 2020), as we have seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, women and women-led organizations receive a relatively small proportion of available funding, with a prominent 2015 review of funding for women, peace, and security (WPS) initiatives suggesting that only 1 percent of funds provided was targeted toward women-led organizations, including women human rights defenders (Coomaraswamy 2015, 90). In 2018, the United Nations Secretary-General emphasized the need for funding to support CSOs in furthering peace work, noting that he was “concerned about signs of the shrinking space and funding for women-led civil society organizations, many of which operate on the front lines of conflict” (United Nations Secretary-General 2018, para 97). Attention to funding dynamics is an integral part of understanding the conditions of women's peace work and the extent to which women's CSOs are able to engage in sustainable endeavors toward lasting peace.

In this article, we explore how women's CSOs that are engaged in peace work in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland experience the funding relationships in which they are embedded and argue that women's peace work² in these contexts is inhibited by the dynamics of political and economic support in diverse ways. Specifically, based on data collected through interviews with women's CSOs involved in peace work in three case study countries, we argue that funding precarity affects peace work in three ways: first, the reduction in available funds tends to lead to short project cycles with a preference for concrete deliverables, which is often at odds with the transformative ethos of women's peace work; second, the inconsistency of funding can encourage organizations to bid for funds for activities that may be outside of their direct sphere of expertise and to invest energy in horizontal network- and solidarity-building with other organizations, to avoid competition, rather than service deliv-

ery; and, third, the gradual erosion of funds over time has affected the flexibility and resilience of organizations in the face of further funding shocks, which is illustrated in our study by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the organizations involved.

Our research contributes to a growing body of work on the gendered experiences and dynamics of peace and conflict and on women's contributions to, and theorizations of, peace. Scholarship and debates in feminist peace research focus on four main aspects: peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and peace education (Adjei 2019; Wibben et al. 2019; Wibben and Donahoe 2020). Our contribution here is to peacebuilding literature within feminist peace research, although we acknowledge that these categories are overlapping. Scholarship in this area examines, for example, women's multiple, often unacknowledged, and yet critical roles in peacebuilding (Aharoni 2017); the extent and effect of women's participation in peace processes (Krause, Krause and Bränfors 2018); and the way the WPS agenda functions as a proscriptive norm of women's participation in peacebuilding (Tamang 2020).

Specifically, the findings from our research speak to the growing research on women's peace work (see Haynes, Cahn, and Ní Aoláin 2012; O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz 2015; Phelan and True 2022). In particular, our research shows that the engagement of women-led CSOs in peace work faces many challenges. Their advocacy and campaigns for radical transformative peace are frequently marginalized in favor of instrumental and depoliticized liberal versions of peace (Gómez and Montealegre 2021). Very often, they navigate a complex political terrain characterized by ongoing geopolitical struggles (Upadhyaya and Miklian 2017), masculinist national political environments (Céspedes-Báez and Ruiz 2018), and shrinking funding, as noted above. This research contributes to greater understanding of how women-led CSOs navigate increasing funding constraints, dominant frameworks of conflict and peace, and complex multilevel political power dynamics, while contributing to valuable peace work in conflict-afflicted societies.

We develop this argument in four sections. First, we explore the existing research on the topic of funding for peace work, to derive the theoretical proposition that informs our research: that the lack of sufficient stable funding available for women's peace work has an impact on both how the organizations involved set priorities and how they realize their goals. We outline our methodology and ethical commitments in the second section. In the third section, we present and discuss our findings, before summarizing the implications of those findings in a brief conclusion.

Funding Peace Work

The funding landscape for peace work, within broader development, security, and statebuilding endeavors, has grown increasingly complex over the past few decades. In the early 1990s, the United Nations Development Program described ODA “as ‘largely ad hoc and unpredictable’ and determined by the ‘fluctuating goodwill of the people and their parliaments in the rich countries’” (UNDP quoted in Parks 2008, 215). Extensive networks of connections now exist between donors and those engaged directly in development programs and service delivery, and these networks nourish both the donor organizations and the CSOs they fund; “foreign donors, including multilateral and bilateral donors, foundations, and some international nongovernmental

²Women's peace work encompasses a broad range of activities (see, e.g., Gómez and Montealegre 2021). Here, we define it as advocating and/or participating in keeping, making, and building peace, as well as peace education. Importantly, what makes this work feminist is its *ability or aim* to challenge and transform the gendered structures of power embedded in the machinations of peace and conflict. This can include a focus on women's rights and equal participation across society, as well as assisting and supporting women in response to specific needs. Women's peace work may or may not operate within or under the auspices of governance frameworks related to women's rights in peace and conflict such as the WPS agenda.

organizations (NGOs), are credited with building the capacity of CSOs and enhancing their growth, often through the use of local CSOs as partners in service delivery or democracy promotion” (Appe and Pallas 2018, 245).

The funding that is available to CSOs is derived from three primary first- and third-sector sources,³ which we discuss briefly in turn. One source of funding is states: funding may be provided by the state in which the organization operates, or another state or grouping of states, in the form of bilateral or multilateral funding. The former tends to be predominant in organizations based in the global north; in a 2015 survey, 41 percent of organizations from Europe, the United States, and Canada reported receiving funding from their national government or ministries, with 27 percent indicating that this was their top donor (Goldberg et al. 2015, 64). For African, Asian, and Latin American-based organizations, on the other hand, international NGOs were the top donors, while in the Middle East, other international organizations (IOs) provided the majority of financial support to CSOs for WPS work (Goldberg et al. 2015, 64). Countries such as Turkey, Brazil, Russia, and China have also emerged as a new source of funding for gender equality in developing or conflict-affected states (Eyben and Savage 2013; Esplen and O’Neill 2017).

Funding for women’s CSOs is also provided by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Even though CSOs and INGOs are somewhat alike in that they are not governmental organizations, and that they broadly work in similar spaces, they are often very different kinds of entities, with vastly different resources, access, capacities, and contexts. Available data suggest that “second-level funding”—funding channeled through INGOs—is perhaps ten times larger in volume for community-based or grassroots organizations than “first-level funding,” which comes directly from donors or United Nations (UN) programs (Els and Carstensen 2015, 3; see also Ismail 2019). This is not unproblematic, as the interests and time frames of INGOs may not align well with the needs and priorities of the CSOs they fund (Power, Maury, and Maury 2002; Bender and Makongo 2019). Moreover, shifts in the funding landscape have also seen INGOs competing with community CSOs for resources (Arutyunova 2018, 258). The former tend to have the advantage of being better “rehearsed in speaking ‘donor language’ and meeting bureaucratic funding requirements” (Esplen 2013, 8; see also Hunt, Bond, and Ochieng 2015, 357). This then creates a cycle where INGOs have more resources, greater institutional capacity, and established relationships with donors (, Bond, and Ochieng, 256), which begets more funding, and so on (these specific debates about funding intersect with broader concerns about “professionalization” in the sector and the “NGO-ization” of civil society; Chahim and Prakash 2014, 493; see also Roy 2011; Miller 2019).

A third source of funding comes from membership fees or other fundraising activities carried out by the CSOs themselves. Angelika Arutyunova and Cindy Clark (2013, 17) note the “increasing reliance among many women’s organizations on self-generated resources, from income-generating activities, membership fees, or other sources.” The availability of this funding differs extensively from context to context; umbrella organizations that bring together CSOs may have more scope to charge membership fees, say,

or conduct fundraising campaigns than do grassroots organizations. Scholarship on fundraising has drawn attention to the problems inherent in relying on individual citizen donors, of course, citing “compassion fatigue” and other inhibitors to donor commitments (Moeller 2002; Vestergaard 2008); although the idea of “compassion fatigue” has been problematized (Chouliaraki 2012; Campbell 2014) and its impact on funding may not be universally acknowledged, there is no doubt that the funding that is available to CSOs is often unpredictable, insufficient, and drawn from multiple sources.

The question of funding is further complicated by different perspectives on what should be funded and under what circumstances. The projects that funders envisage, the decisions they make, and the actors that they opt to work with are all influenced by strategic and political factors, including what is seen to matter. After all, “[f]inancing is an inherently political process, shaped by the values and visions of those in power” (Raaber 2014, 9). The areas of peace work that donors may be most enthusiastic to fund are not necessarily the same areas that CSOs see as offering the most transformative potential nor, indeed, on-the-ground impact. This can also create geographical and topic-related “pockets” of earmarked funding for “hot” issues (see, e.g., Benessaieh 2011, 77–79; Coomaraswamy 2015, 372–74; OECD 2018, 8–10) that fail to address some of the more slow-burning (but nonetheless vitally important) concerns. This makes for a delicate “balance between donor objectives and ownership by the recipient country” (Cabrera-Balleza and Popovic 2011, 31).

To secure funding then, CSOs must often make strategic concessions by pursuing projects that they might not have otherwise pursued (see Benessaieh 2011, 78–80; Moosa, Rahmani, and Webster 2013). This is increasingly the case as multilateral organizations and INGOs enter into project-based contractual arrangements with local organizations, who then deliver the work—“treating them as contractors rather than changemakers and innovators” (Esplen 2013, 8; see also Irvine 2018, 733), while simultaneously undermining local ownership (Cabrera-Balleza and Popovic 2011, 52). CSOs must then bid for project grants that need to fall within the remit stipulated by the funder—and must do so in a way that is in line with donors’ worldviews; as Afef Benessaieh (2011, 73) explains, “in order to secure much-needed support Southern NGOs often use a standardizing language that allows them to match their donors’ concerns.” Proposals that do not sufficiently align with the funder’s goals and frames of reference may simply not be funded, so instead “NGOs are generally more willing to accommodate their needs to their donors’ priorities or to acquiesce in their donors’ guidelines strategically while continuing to pursue their own priorities with a lower profile” (Benessaieh 2011, 81).

In addition, donors often expect reporting on a generic set of indicators that may not be feasible, appropriate, or relevant in many environments, given the invariably complex political, economic, and cultural settings (Cabrera-Balleza and Popovic 2011, 41) of conflict-affected societies. Given the on-the-ground difficulties of obtaining the data requested by funders, the final reports produced by the CSOs frequently reflect acquiescence on their part, rather than any on-the-ground reality (Basini and Ryan 2016, 391; Koester et al. 2016, 366); as Benessaieh (2011, 81) observes:

[L]ocal NGOs do not always do exactly what they tell their donors they will do and that they may find some space for agency through such measures as partially

³We focus in our review on first-sector (state) and third-sector (civil society) organizations. Second-sector (market) actors are increasingly involved in community development, but we do not have space here to fully map the complexities of private investment, corporate funding partnerships, and philanthropic activity.

reporting their activities and stressing facts that best fit most donors' expectations.

Centrally designed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks may, therefore, not reflect either the priorities or activities of CSOs in all contexts, and the requirement for stringent adherence to the frameworks provided may deplete already scarce resources in small and volunteer-led organizations. Future funding, however, is frequently contingent on successful completion of M&E reports in line with donor expectations.

The overarching theoretical proposition that guides our research is that the lack of sufficient stable funding available for women's peace work has an impact on both how the organizations involved set priorities and how they realize their goals. Our investigation explores this proposition in relation to peace work by CSOs in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland. In the section that follows, we outline our research design and explain our methodological and ethical commitments.

Methodology: Researching Peace in a Pandemic

This study used a qualitative semi-structured interview design aimed at eliciting information about donor funding dynamics and imperatives from expert research informants (see, e.g., Kunz 2017; Kunz, Prügl, and Thompson 2019). Research interlocutors were selected for inclusion in the study based on their experience working for CSOs in the peace, security, and women's rights sectors in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland. We leveraged the existing networks and contacts, and reached out independently to organizations identified through desk-based research, aiming to represent a diversity of organizations where possible (including women-led grassroots NGOs, nationally recognized women-led NGOs, INGOs, IOs, centrally funded/volunteer-led, urban/rural, and so on). We contacted forty-five organizations and individuals across the three countries based on our preliminary research and networks (fifteen in Colombia, nineteen in Nepal, and eleven in Northern Ireland) and had an average success rate of 38 percent overall, completing seventeen interviews in total (six in Colombia, six in Nepal, and five in Northern Ireland). In Nepal, interlocutors represented a diversity of classes, castes, ethnicities, and geographical locations. Similarly, the Colombian interlocutors and CSOs represented various ethnicities and classes, as well as different urban-rural settings and geographical locations. In Northern Ireland, the interviewees represented various age groups and religious communities. We sought to engage a diverse range of organizations to understand a broad range of experiences and perspectives.

While the work done by women-led CSOs in Nepal aligned with broader feminist goals and objectives (only some of which related to the WPS agenda), none of the organizations we spoke to characterized their work as feminist, nor did they report seeking funders whose objectives or motivations were explicitly feminist. In Colombia, however, there was a more distinct division between CSOs. Indeed, while the largest organization characterized itself in neutral terms, there was a clear difference between the other three regional-national organizations and two local CSOs. While those in the former grouping identified themselves as feminist CSOs conducting feminist peace work and explicitly sought funders who aligned with their feminist values, the other group positioned themselves as women-led and women-focused, seeking and accepting funding from any

donors that would broadly support their work. The latter was the case for the Northern Irish organizations as well.

We undertook remote fieldwork and all our research informants except one agreed to participate in the research on the basis of being afforded total anonymity in the published output. This research was undertaken over a six-month period in late 2020 and early 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, using WhatsApp, Skype, and Zoom (see table 1 for more details on the individual informants). The impact of the pandemic on the humanitarian sector in general, and on women in particular, has already been well documented (see, e.g., [Yayboke and Hareem 2020](#)). As a team, we sought accommodate and support the priorities and availability of our research informants to the maximum extent possible, recognizing that they were all affected by further funding squeezes, increased demands on time and existing resources, and the relations of care in their communities.

The interviews were transcribed and, where necessary, translated by the members of the research team with appropriate language capability in Spanish and Nepali. The translated interview transcripts were initially coded by each member of the research team independently, in an open-coding process ([Hutchison, Johnston, and Breckon 2010](#), 289). The three researchers who had undertaken interviewing worked with the data to identify key themes (or "codes") related to the issues of donor funding, dynamics, and relations, in a reflexive, flexible, and iterative process ([Nowell et al. 2017](#), 5). Each of the three researchers generated their own list of preliminary codes, recognizing that there is no precise way to measure the presence or significance of a code or theme ([Braun and Clarke 2006](#), 82). The robustness of the initial coding phase was evaluated through discussion and comparison across the three case study contexts; we gauged inter-rater reliability by comparing the lists that each researcher had generated and finalized a list of seven preliminary codes, which we grouped into three dominant themes to structure the discussion we present below (table 2).

Like any study, there are limitations to our research design and its implementation. We had planned to do in-person fieldwork throughout 2020, but the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic meant a redesign of our data-gathering process and objectives. Remote fieldwork brought many challenges and limitations. It was harder to reach and talk to regional, local, and/or precariously funded organizations, especially in Colombia and Nepal, who were often unreachable due to a lack of internet, access to telephones or computers, and/or an online presence in the form of a website or social media account. We could, in some instances, make up for this exclusion through our individual connections in the various communities, but this was an imperfect solution. In either case, we ran the risk of reinforcing the existing power dynamics and favoring the voices of larger, visible, and financially stable organizations. Further, the informants' ability to engage and potentially challenge us and the research study was especially limited in cases where we could not have a continuous conversation ([Lake, Majic, and Maxwell 2018](#)). This was the case, for example, with Beatriz Mosquera Hernández, whose interview was conducted over the course of a week in the form of recorded WhatsApp messages. This reduced level of interactive questioning presented potential limits to our self-reflexivity, a key ethical commitment of our research design.

Another challenge was that of maintaining digital security for both the informants and ourselves as researchers. While journalists have been grappling with this issue for years ([CPJ 2020](#), 16–24; [GIJN, n.d.](#); [Reporters Without Borders 2017](#),

Table 1. Description of the research participants.⁵

<i>Informant code/name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Type of organization</i>	<i>Scale of organization</i>	<i>Organization's focus issues</i>	<i>Interview medium</i>	<i>Interview length</i>
COL1	Cudinaramarca, Colombia	Research and advocacy NGO	National	Law and justice across a number of issues, including gender and race, transitional justice, drugs, environment and climate change, and economic, social, and cultural rights	Zoom	Thirty-five minutes
COL2	Valle del Cauca, Colombia	Network of women's rights groups	Regional	Support for forcibly displaced and local women, especially those affected by the conflict. Focusing on the Afro-Colombian population	Skype	Fifty minutes
Beatriz Mosquera Hernández ⁶	Arauca, Colombia	Nonregistered advocacy NGO	Local	The <i>Federación Humanitaria de Mujeres Negras, Afrocolombianas Raizales y Palenqueras de Arauca</i> focuses on women's rights and their social, political, entrepreneurial, and cultural empowerment	WhatsApp	Forty-seven minutes over multiple days
COL4	Cudinaramarca, Colombia	Advocacy NGO	National	Focus is on feminist peacebuilding, the WPS agenda, as well as women's socioeconomic agency	Zoom	One hour, ten minutes
COL5	Cudinaramarca, Colombia	Nonregistered advocacy NGO	National	Right to peace and women's rights in relation to the armed conflict.	Zoom	Fifty-four minutes
COL6	Tolima, Colombia	Advocacy NGO	Local	Support for women's participation and empowerment in peacebuilding and development initiatives. Focus on rural women, particularly indigenous women	Zoom	One hour, six minutes
NI1	Belfast, Northern Ireland	NGO	National	Support for Northern Ireland women and girls' interests at national and international levels	Zoom	Thirty-nine minutes
NI2	Belfast, Northern Ireland	NGO	National	Focus is on human rights, peacebuilding, and migration issues	Zoom	Thirty minutes
NI3	Belfast, Northern Ireland	NGO	National	Support for Northern Ireland youth with focus on peacebuilding, men and masculinity, LGBTQIA+, mental health, and socioeconomic issues	Zoom	Forty-four minutes
NI4	Belfast, Northern Ireland	NGO	Local	Focus is on providing resources, support and development opportunities to women, including through childcare, healthcare, education and training programs, etc.	Zoom	One hour, four minutes
NI5	Belfast, Northern Ireland	NGO	National	Support for women's equality and participation across all levels of society. Focus is on policy development and education and training programs for other women's organizations	Zoom	Thirty-six minutes
NP1	Kathmandu, Nepal	Advocacy NGO	National	Gender justice, peace, and human rights; women and girls' empowerment; education and awareness around dignified menstruation	Zoom	Forty-nine minutes
NP2	Kathmandu with branches in the Western Provinces, Nepal	Research and advocacy NGO	National/regional	Addressing various forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls; creating a safe, violence-free society where women can enjoy their rights with dignity and respect	Zoom	Twenty-seven minutes over multiple times
NP3	Madhesh Province, Nepal	NGO	Local/regional	Women's empowerment, conflict mitigation and peace reconciliation, human rights, economic development and livelihood improvement	Phone/Zoom	Thirty-two minutes over multiple times
NP4	Kathmandu, Nepal	INGO	International	Gender and peacebuilding, preventing gender-based violence, preventing violent extremism, reconciliation and transitional justice, security and governance	Zoom	Fifty-seven minutes
NP5	Kathmandu, Nepal	IO	International	Women's empowerment and gender equality, crisis prevention and increased resilience, governance for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies	Zoom	Thirty-four minutes
NP6	Kathmandu, Nepal	INGO	International	Gender justice and health and education rights, women's economic empowerment and climate justice, disaster risk reduction and gender in emergencies	Zoom	Fifty-three minutes

⁵ Some details are omitted to preserve anonymity. We have not been able to provide precise locations for many organizations, for example, because some are in small towns or cities with few CSOs operating, which might make our interlocutors identifiable.

⁶ Following the interviews, Beatriz requested for her name and organization to be included and the information she provided to us attributed accordingly.

Table 2. Codes grouped into dominant themes.

<i>Preliminary code</i>	<i>Theme</i>
Funding duration Funding deliverables What counts as peace?	Funding dynamics
Aligning with donor priorities Impact (size matters) Solidarity with other organizations or competition for funding	Organizational dynamics
COVID-19	Flexibility and resilience

68–78; [Rory Peck Trust, n.d.](#)), it remains overlooked in academic research. As [van Baalen \(2018, 1\)](#) shows, however, multiple ethical challenges arise from conducting fieldwork digitally, “relat[ing] to (i) informed consent and confidentiality, (ii) collecting, transferring and storing sensitive data, and (iii) maintaining the personal security and integrity of the researcher.”

This brief discussion of some of the challenges and limitations of our research shows how our research design shifted in response to forces beyond our control. The disruptions of the pandemic were, unsurprisingly, a frequent topic of conversation with our interlocutors, and we tried to be particularly mindful of the additional pressures they faced at the time. Before we discuss our data, we provide some background for each of our case countries to contextualize our discussion.

Background: Conflict and Peace Work in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland

Colombia, a settler colonial state, has been marked by conflict for hundreds of years. The modern conflict, however, is generally described as having started in the early to mid-1960s with the emergence of the first generation of guerrilla groups, including: FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army), ELN (National Liberation Army), and EPL (Popular Liberation Army). As this conflict evolved, the guerrillas reconfigured, paramilitary groups emerged, and narco-traffickers expanded their trade, bringing unprecedented funds and violence to the country throughout the 1980s and into the new millennium. Currently, the Colombian National Victim’s Unit ([UARIV 2021](#)) has registered more than nine million victims of the armed conflict. While there have been various demobilization processes and attempts at peace with different armed groups ([Bouvier 2016](#); [Chaparro González and Martínez Osorio 2016](#)), it was not until 2012 that Colombians saw peace as a real possibility when negotiations started between the government and FARC-EP, the largest of the remaining guerrillas in the country. The decades-long mobilization by feminist and women’s groups for a peaceful resolution to the armed conflict, and their demand for inclusion as political actors in the settlement ([Wills Obregón 2007](#)), together with the impetus provided by the 30–40 percent of women in FARC-EP’s forces ([Boutron 2016](#)), and that of the international community, had world-first results: two women were selected as government plenipotentiaries; a Sub-Commission on Gender was created to implement a transversal gender approach within the peace agreement, which included consultation with representatives from sixteen Colombian women’s organizations and

two LGBTQIA+ organizations; and ultimately women comprised “one-third of delegates in Havana” ([UN Women 2015, n.p.](#); for further details on women’s roles in the peace-making process and/or the Sub-Commission on Gender, see, e.g., [Corporación Humanas and CIASE 2017](#)). Unfortunately, since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, violence has continued and, in many cases, has increased ([Zulver 2021](#)), with more than a thousand social leaders and human rights defenders murdered ([INDEPAZ 2020a, n.p.](#)), and many more threatened and victimized in other ways ([CEDAW 2019](#)).

The decade-long Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996–2006) brought radical change in gender relations, bringing women out of domesticity into the sphere of formal politics. Maoists claimed that women made up 40 or 50 percent of the total number of combatants ([Manchanda 2004](#)). Despite their significant contribution to the insurgency, women were largely excluded from the peace negotiation and peacebuilding processes in Nepal after the Maoist insurgency ended in peaceful settlement in 2006 ([Manchanda 2010](#); [Sthapit and Doneys 2017, 42](#)). They were also excluded from the postwar constitution-making process ([Shrestha, Upreti, and Kolas 2017, 106–107](#)).⁴ Multiple donors have provided substantial support for women’s rights and political participation in peacebuilding in Nepal. Countries such as Norway, the United Kingdom, and United States; multilateral and regional organizations such as the UN and the European Union; and INGOs have provided technical and financial support ([Kolås and Tryggestad 2017, 4–5](#)). Various women’s CSOs, networks, and alliances also played a significant role in advocating for a strong female representation in the peace process and writing a new inclusive constitution ([Cardona et al. 2012](#)). Many CSOs working on women’s rights and security, however, highlight unabated gender-based violence and discrimination in so-called peace-time.

In the case of Northern Ireland, the conflict between unionists and loyalists known as “the Troubles” lasted some thirty years, from the 1960s through to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, on April 10, 1998 ([Coulter and Murray 2008, 2](#)). The Northern Ireland Assembly was established in 1999 by way of a process of devolution, meaning that the United Kingdom transferred several powers that allowed local representatives to make decisions on the governing of Northern Ireland. Based at Stormont, the Assembly was suspended for three years, after collapsing in 2017 because of disagreements between the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, who were co-running a power-shared government ([Kelly 2019](#)). While the Assembly is now sitting again, the suspension has created a backlog of legislation. Compounding this are tensions and challenges caused by the simultaneous occurrence of Brexit and COVID-19 (see, e.g., [Castle 2021](#)). A complicating factor is that the United Kingdom refuses to classify the conflict in Northern Ireland as a conflict; this means that there is no reference to it in the United Kingdom’s national plan for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325, a document that guides government action on women’s rights in conflict-affected settings (notably, it does appear in the Irish National Action Plan). While there is some funding for peacebuilding work from the state, the European

⁴During the peace process, LGBTQIA+ organizations, including the Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal (FSGMN) and BDS (Blue Diamond Society), also advocated for greater inclusion and a stake in the political process ([UNDP/USAID 2014, 26](#)). There were notable gains in legal and constitutional recognition and public visibility because of this advocacy ([UNDP/USAID 2014, 26](#)).

Union and multilateral organizations, philanthropic organizations are key to sustaining the work of women's CSOs in Northern Ireland. There is a long tradition of women's peace work in Northern Ireland, dating back at least to the early 1980s when the Women's Information Group was established, which brought together Catholic and Protestant women in alternating meeting locations across Belfast (Cockburn 2013, 106). Women's peace work since the Good Friday Agreement has tended to be oriented toward service provision, but there is still significant cross-community peacebuilding activity, although many groups of women—including young women, ex-combatants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer women—are often marginalized from mainstream discussions of peace (Pierson 2019, 59; see also McEvoy 2009; Ashe 2018; Gilmartin 2018). As in Colombia and Nepal, gender-based violence has not diminished since the agreement; such issues “suffer from a lack of tangible commitment by government” (Pierson 2019, 60; see also Pierson 2017), remaining the focus of much advocacy and service by women's CSOs across the country.

Findings and Discussion

Funding Dynamics

There was a clear perception conveyed by our interlocutors that funders like to fund tangible things that have easily quantifiable outcomes. This not only affects the kinds of activities that are more likely to attract funding but also influences the way these activities are managed. On the first point, CSOs reported funders being swayed more by impressive deliverables on paper than by what they saw as meaningful on-the-ground relationship-building:

[Donors] don't like to work on capacity-building. They only look at deliverables – how many people got this, got that... If one project registered 500 people at baseline, another project repeats that. (NP1)

This was described to us as a “value for money” approach (NP1) and “box ticking” (NI2). Another research informant told us: “We need to have a different kind of engagement, not like just hosting workshops, training, ticking boxes, and counting how many came” (NP6). This aligns with our discussion above on the shifts in the not-for-profit sector, which sees a greater business focus. “Now the donors are purely market-based. They say value for money. Tools, technologies, and terms are market-based. Programs are projectized” (NP1). Beyond the structure and processes of programs, the desired outputs are also increasingly ones that can be quantified: “[B]uild two drinking-water taps, completed; build two buildings, completed. [But] the social structure we are trying to change is not like building taps, temples or buildings” (NP6). However, as this research informant notes, these kinds of donor imperatives can mean that the actual work that CSOs see as vital to women's continued participation in peacebuilding goes unfunded.

In this regard, CSOs indicated that they wanted to begin with the needs of beneficiaries and let those dictate organizational priorities:

[T]he type of evaluation was around “how many people did you have in a training course?”. I was still managing some of the money... saying, ‘well, actually, victims don't necessarily need training!’ But it was like talking to a wall. (NI2)

We ask these women that we accompany in their healing process what they want us to do, and whatever they want, that's where we start. (COL2)

CSOs indicated a need for funding for things such as transport, room hire, and food: “[We] have to hire vehicles to go out to campaign, we have to make posters, we have to make refreshments” (Beatriz Mosquera Hernández). These are not expenditures that are necessarily attractive to donors, and yet they are vital for these organizations.

Further, we found that the way in which governments frame the conflict (and peace) has a direct impact on what gets funded (and what does not). This is particularly the case in Northern Ireland because, as noted, the United Kingdom does not identify the conflict in Northern Ireland as a conflict. Instead, it is framed as an “aggravated crime wave” (NI2), which then limits funding available for peacebuilding activities. After all, if there is no conflict, there is no need for peacebuilding. A respondent from Nepal made a similar point; they told us that the official narrative of the government is that the conflict/crisis is over (see also National Planning Commission 2015; Paudel and Le Billon 2020): “[t]he government was focused on growth and prosperity. How could they hear about peace and conflict?” (NP1). This poses a challenge for a CSO whose work focuses on peacebuilding activities, when public funding is instead directed toward infrastructure, say. Similarly, in Colombia, the government's emphasis is on the rise of the BACRIM (*bandas criminales*/criminal bands or gangs) rather than the continuation or transfiguration of the conflict (INDEPAZ 2020b). Therefore, the way that governments frame conflicts have very real consequences in terms of the kinds of civil society activities and foci that are attractive funding propositions. This means that the question of what peace “is” (and where and when it is, and who gets to decide the answers to these questions) is directly relevant to the funding of on-the-ground peace work.

Another key difference between funder and CSO priorities concerned the duration and terms of the grant. Our research informants were adamant about the need for multi-year projects:

I don't know anybody that's not asking for at least three-year funding packages. Ideally, five is better, but three is better than one. (NI4)

[O]ne year projects are really complicated, but when these projects have the possibility of being two, three years, of being renewed, that improves the quality and the impact of the project itself. (COL4)

Aside from the uncertainty and inability to make longer term plans, funding on an annual basis does not make financial sense. One interviewee reported receiving the same amount of funding annually from the same funder for several years. “If they would have told me ten years ago that we're going to fund this program for the foreseeable, I could have done a hell of a lot more” (NI4). Studies in Cambodia, Thailand, and Philippines also show that uncertainty, short-termism, and shift in funding priorities usually undermine the effectiveness of the important work done by CSOs in these contexts (Parks 2008).

The onerous reporting obligations that often accompany grants of any length make short-term grants even more time-consuming and burdensome, especially for smaller CSOs, which likely do not have extensive, if any, administrative support:

[I]n some cases it got down to a ridiculous stage... for example, organizations might have had funding from three or four different discrete sources, and the [donor] in particular... would say "Oh well, if we're only funding two workers there, then we'll only fund so much square footage of the office. Proportionally." The amount of time that that sort of thing took.... (NI2)

If we slightly deviate from the proposal... there is an approval process [which] is so cumbersome that it just kills the time; it just kills the time, energy, and passion that is required at that moment. (NP6)

In addition to the duration of grants, CSOs reported the best donors to work with are those that are flexible in terms of the running of the program and in terms of reporting. Rigidity in the way resources are targeted and the accompanying administrative requirements are significant concerns for grassroots CSOs (Morrow, Faulkner-Byrne, and Pettis 2018, 7). One interviewee praised a funder for being "very flexible in the sense that they trust their grantees to get on with it... You know, they don't ask for specific targets or indicators, or things like that... if something happens, you can adapt your work, you know, without having to justify why you've done that" (NI1), while other funders expect you to "account for every paperclip" (NI1). Flexibility is particularly important in a post-conflict context; as one research informant explained, "you can't guarantee there's going to be ten meetings of people from different communities over the next year, because you might have a shooting or a bomb, and people go back to their houses, basically" (NI2). The challenges of on-the-ground peacebuilding with the concomitant need for flexibility have only been compounded by COVID-19 (the impact of which we explore in greater detail below).

We also found that it is not only a case of needing more money; strategic long-term investment of smaller amounts can be as, if not more, effective. We were told:

I remember arguing with [funder] saying, "Look, we could actually do more with much less money, if you would put it into a time limited endowment". So that we could draw down over 15 years for argument's sake. But they're, you know, "the box should be ticked in three years' time". (NI2)

The same interviewee continued:

[T]hey plied a lot of money, frontloaded a lot of money. And actually, in terms of inclusion, and particularly in terms of women's inclusion, offering somebody a really big grant doesn't work. In fact, it can frighten them off. (NI2)

There are, therefore, compound benefits of longer term investment that extend beyond just the financial.

Finally, CSOs also spoke of the type of work they could not, or decided not to, pursue because of concessions they would have to make to donors. One Colombian CSO (COL1) identified three main areas they wanted to work on, but for which they struggled to get funding: background research for public policy proposals (as opposed to impact activities), gender-based violence (as opposed to sexual violence specifically), and the care economy. Larger organizations, however, often took on additional work to self-fund activities that were not attractive to donors. The issue is not always one of having to make concessions regarding the type of work that gets funding, however, but sometimes on the

extent to which the CSO is given autonomy to make operational decisions. One informant noted wryly that

the institutions or humanitarian entities say "no, it's just that we want to strengthen the, we want you to be autonomous", and when we become autonomous within the project ... [the response is:] "No, no, I mean autonomous up to where I say". (COL2)

Finally, another concession CSOs often make is regarding the partnerships they cultivate with smaller organizations or even individuals, which then affects the approach and work that they do, or determines who is compensated for their labor. COL4 gave a small example of her experience trying to include indigenous women in their internationally funded projects: "they don't accept the lady's receipt because she doesn't have a RUT [tax file number] ... [but] indigenous women don't pay taxes when they live in the reservations" (COL4). The way these CSOs are having to negotiate funding decisions and requirements is indicative of the embedded assumptions in donor funding priorities regarding what constitutes peace work, and the gendered and racialized hierarchies of power that still dominate funding practices.

Organizational Dynamics

Organizational dynamics are clearly related to, and overlap with, funding dynamics in many ways. We distinguish organizational dynamics as a separate theme through its focus on how the CSOs work as organizations to secure funding, while funding dynamics involves the CSOs' perceptions and evaluations of the funding landscape in which they are situated. Of the CSOs that we spoke to, many are spending time thinking carefully about how best to present themselves to diverse funders to maximize their chances of funding success. What this looks like in practice differs from organization to organization. In some cases, we found that the CSO will 'align the action that one does with the calls [for funding]' (COL4); at other times, a funder will approach a specific organization with a particular project or program in mind (COL1). We did find that CSOs often pursue funding strategically and frame their purview in a particular way to appeal to a funder:

[T]o be able to do the things we want to do sometimes we have to, well, do projects or work on issues in which we're not so strong but that allow us to keep working in those areas. (COL1)

[W]e have to frame... goals in a way that speaks to what [donors] are looking for. (NP2)

If you want to work on peace, this is the frame; if you want to work on security, this is the frame; on GBV [gender-based violence], this is the frame; on women's empowerment, this is the frame. (NP6)

Some CSOs reported feeling as though they must say the "right" things and use the "right" terms and frameworks to appeal to certain donors. However, many also reported the need to keep a strong sense of what the organization is doing and what it is good at, recognizing that there are costs to trying to be everything for everyone. As one of our research informants explained, if an organization's

main work is to make bread but in order to make bread, it has to make shoes... then you're going to have to spend a lot of time... learning [how to make] shoes, only to then have to make bread as well. (COL4)

This does not stop some organizations from pitching for “shoe” projects as well as “bread” projects; “the people who are winning these tender processes are sometimes not equipped to do the work. They’re changing what they do to get the money” (NI4). Some CSOs also see this as an opportunity to take on small-scale “shoe” projects:

we start the work taking it as a pilot project to see how it works... [W]e do compromise in a hope that [in] taking experience from this region and looking for more funds, we might eventually be able to extend the program to the Western region. (NP6)

Some CSOs, however, are intentionally maintaining a narrower focus to establish their expertise in a particular area: “instead of expanding and doing everything within our reach, we’re increasingly limiting ourselves, we’re specialising more” (COL4). Increasing specialization can, however, mean that aspects of community-based service provision that CSOs have taken on in the past become less likely or more logistically challenging, which can diminish the impact that the CSOs have.

Ideally, there is a sense of “alignment” between the interests of funders and the expertise of CSOs. We found that this alignment can come about through dialogue between the parties that allows for a “kind of mutual accommodation” (COL1). This provides CSOs the opportunity to “speak back” to the funder and explain the needs that they have, for which funding might be provided. Donors and organizations will each have their own respective “interests and priorities. And whenever it matches, they work together... that’s why there will be a lot of combination and permutations with who it matches with, where, and how – all that” (NP2). This sense of alignment also comes from CSOs having a strong sense of their strengths and the areas in which their strengths overlap with a particular funder’s priorities: “we know the areas of work that we do and what works well. And because we have so many different funders, we look exactly at what they’re willing to fund” (NI5).

Large, established CSOs clearly have an advantage in the pitching or tender process because they usually have a wider remit and the resources to absorb sunk costs in applications for funding that are unsuccessful. It can be very hard for grassroots CSOs to compete in tenders; the process “discriminates against the smaller, and in particular, women’s groups” (NI4), one of our informants told us; another reported that it is “very difficult for women’s organisations, in general, for grassroots organisations or for national advocacy organisations that work locally” (COL4). This resonates with experiences in countries such as Palestine, Bangladesh, Ghana, Uganda, Bolivia, and Central America (Chahim and Prakash 2014, 491–92). For example, grassroots organizations in Guatemala have familiarity with local needs but do not have enough resources to implement their agendas to fulfil those needs, whereas large CSOs get resources but they are detached from local needs (Howell and Pearce 2000).

Many CSOs operate on an entirely voluntary basis. This means that “if you ask them to put a tender in to get some money for that project, they just don’t have the resources to do that” (NI4). Interviewees reported fundraising through selling food such as tamales and empanadas (COL6), to charging membership fees (NP5) and working like a startup (NP1). In some cases, there are also structural barriers to establishing a CSO as a formal entity to become competitive; in Colombia, for example, it is expensive, time-consuming, and difficult to legally register with the Chamber of Commerce. It requires an extensive amount of paperwork, and it involves a cost that can be prohibitive for many groups.

This level of administration is simply not feasible for many organizations nor is it necessarily an effective way to spend precious resources.

Flexibility and Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing tensions in funding relationships. It has created additional stresses for many women, as the burden of care labor disproportionately fell to them, and increased the need for many of the services provided by the CSOs with whom we spoke. Violence also increased in some places; as one interviewee from Colombia told us, since the pandemic started, “violence increased like that. Not only in the homes, increased with the armed groups. So there was more rape, more threats. In other words, the violence increased... the extortions increased” (COL2) as did death threats and an increase in debtors exhibiting threatening behavior. One research informant specifically noted that violence against women “has risen tremendously in terms of the pandemic, so we also need emotional care and attention in the face of sexual violence or any type of violence – but also the emotional exhaustion due to confinement” (COL4).

The pandemic also coincided with incidents of violence unrelated to the pandemic. Northern Ireland experienced violent protests and riots in Belfast, Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus, Ballymena, and Londonderry, including the hijacking and burning of a bus, linked to Brexit-related tensions around the imposition of an Irish Sea border (see, e.g., Hirst 2021). Just a few weeks later, protests in Bogotá in Colombia that initially started in response to a proposed tax reform (which was ultimately withdrawn) intensified as riot police used tear gas and shot live ammunition at protesters. Poverty and ongoing violence and inequality—particularly in and of rural, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities—also drove the protests (BBC News 2021). Nepal, too, has faced challenges in addition to the pandemic, particularly around the significant levels of employment in the precarious informal economy and reports of increases in gender-based violence (The Asia Foundation 2021). Therefore, in addition to the original “conflict” in “post-conflict,” the CSOs working in these places must contend with an increase in violence against women, an increase in generalized violence in some contexts, and a global pandemic, with precarious—and sometimes no—funding.

We have been told that some funders have been excellent, others less so. The funders who considered to be excellent tended to be those who were particularly flexible, recognizing the need for activities and expenditure that had not been anticipated. Others were less flexible in their approach. One funder reportedly withdrew the promise of funding when the program of a planned conference had to be amended because of the pandemic:

They said that we didn’t provide them with the breakdown of the budget. When we had COVID-19, we couldn’t provide the breakdown of the budget. You know why? Because we changed the modality [of the conference]. We need flexible fund[ing]. There is COVID-19 now and we need money for the health and safety arrangements to prevent COVID-19 during the conference. We need money for the emergency as well... We said we need flexible money because we are at the last stage and because of this we cannot provide the detailed breakdown of the budget... Then the ... organizations withdrew and didn’t partner with us. (NP5)

Beyond rethinking access to and familiarization with new technology, moving online had implications for the connections that could be established. Practically speaking, it affected grassroots women's organizations based in remote and sometimes inaccessible areas, where internet was often poor (such as in the mountainous region of Nepal). The pandemic hampered travel, and the shift online affected their ability to connect with others. Moving online also created new concerns about the well-being of the CSOs' service users; one CSO reported delaying a program because they felt that "those discussions would be very difficult to do online ... because you can't guarantee women feel safe and comfortable" (NII).

However, these challenges also pushed some CSOs to reinvent their approach and find other ways to facilitate engagement and maintain those community relationships. It also allowed some to establish international connections:

I think it led us to reinvent ourselves, to look at other ways of coming together, other ways of listening to each other. (Beatriz Mosquera Hernández)

We have held meetings with women from across the seas, with grassroots women and, of course, with translation and everything, but this is also very beautiful, the potential that this has. (COL4)

We have not yet seen the full impact of the pandemic on funding for women's peace work. We conducted the interviews in late 2020 and early 2021; many of the organizations with which we spoke that had funding already had their funding secured before the pandemic hit. As new financial cycles start, the true extent and depth of funding cuts will be revealed. It may be that COVID-19 will shift funder priorities even more toward "emergency funding" projects. With the pandemic, there came:

a significant shift in resources... the financiers decided to mobilise everything they had available to deal with the direct and immediate impacts of the pandemic. We believe that in the future this will continue, there will be a shift towards humanitarian aid, there will be a shift towards other priorities closely related to the... health and economic crisis that will come. (COL1)

While funding for these priorities is vital in many cases, it will likely continue to make invisible the labor of women's grassroots CSOs, which is so important to maintaining peace. We should, however, remain vigilant to the use of COVID-19 as the sole or a primary reason for reducing or removing funding for peace work; as one interviewee told us, "[w]e think that it's quite likely that the rationale for why things haven't been done will be COVID and Brexit. And that's not the case. You know, there was no progress even before then" (NII).

Discussion and Conclusion

Our research with women's CSOs in Colombia, Nepal, and Northern Ireland has demonstrated a high degree of consistency in concerns about funding and the impact of funding dynamics on the possibilities of peace work. We set out to explore whether the lack of sufficient stable funding available for women's peace work has an impact on both how the organizations involved set priorities and how they realize their goals. We found that this is certainly the case: in all three countries, our research informants reported a lack of sufficient and stable funding for the work they are com-

mitted to doing in, and with, their communities. Increased demands for specialization, and overly burdensome application and reporting requirements, are preventing some CSOs from securing funding in the first instance. Further, the seeming inability of donors to recognize the degree of flexibility needed for effective peace work, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been a challenge for the CSOs that we spoke to. There remains a focus from funders on prominent activities that can easily be tracked and measured, while our research informants across all three contexts reported funding needs related to quotidian community-based peace work: vehicles for transporting people to meetings; venues in which to bring people together; software to support alternative employment opportunities; and people to train participants in how to use that software.

We argue, therefore, that while it is an ongoing concern, scarcity of funding is not the only inhibitor to effective peace work. It is vital that voices of women's CSOs count in discussions about peace work, where women's peace work means more than simply documenting the numbers of women and women's group involved in peace processes (Kolås and Tryggestad 2017, 3). Embedded assumptions about the value of peace work—in our study, peace work undertaken by women and women-led organizations—also challenge the viability of continued efforts toward sustainable peace. Donors—at least those funding the organizations we spoke to—are not perceived to be prioritizing the everyday necessities identified by our research informants, largely because it is not considered "peace work" to provide for these needs. As discussed, this results in CSOs having to make several concessions with regard to funding. Our research suggests an urgent need for donors to reflect on the kinds of activities that are deemed to constitute peace work, to progress efforts toward sustainable peace through this kind of targeted funding. This reflexive consideration of what counts as peace work also has implications for post-conflict reconstruction efforts. In the case of Colombia, for example, land rights are a particularly salient political issue: one indigenous women's organization spoke to us about peace work involving access to a piece of land to grow food and create jobs within their community; another rural woman talked about wanting to raise pigs. In this context, the colonial dynamics of conflict resurface in the determination of what constitutes peace for women and in the decision that peace does not involve the restitution of land.

Finally, it is important to note that the CSOs who generously contributed their time and expertise to this project are already finding creative ways to establish sustainable revenue streams to support the work that they do. One CSO in Nepal, for example, is manufacturing sanitary pads as a means of income generation. These activities, while representing a form of the "economic empowerment" so beloved by the institutions of liberal peacebuilding, also require the allocation of time and energy that is then not available for the other activities that the CSO would have otherwise undertaken (Chahim and Prakash 2014, 508). Manufacturing sanitary pads can—and perhaps should—be made visible as peace work, but ultimately economic production cannot substitute for the opportunity to rebuild connections within communities, heal, and reconcile. These are the dimensions of peace work that are hard to quantify, and challenging for donors to fund, but that ultimately form the foundation of feminist peace work.

The organizations with which we spoke in this research have the capacity to effect tremendous change in their communities, albeit in quotidian, intangible ways, and this is work that should be sought out and supported. It seems

fitting to give the last word to one of the women dedicated to doing this work; she told us that if funding dynamics were not so tricky, and funding itself not so precarious, the women doing peace work in Colombia “would flourish in an incredible way” (COL4).

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