

**Ford
Foundation**

Evaluation of the Ford Foundation's

Gender, Racial and Ethnic Justice - International Strategy 2020-2024

Summary Report

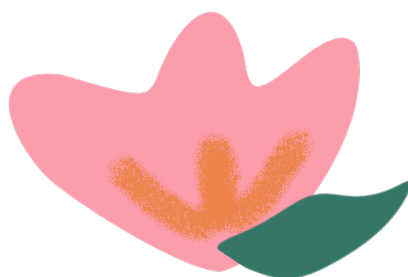
October 2025



Kore Global

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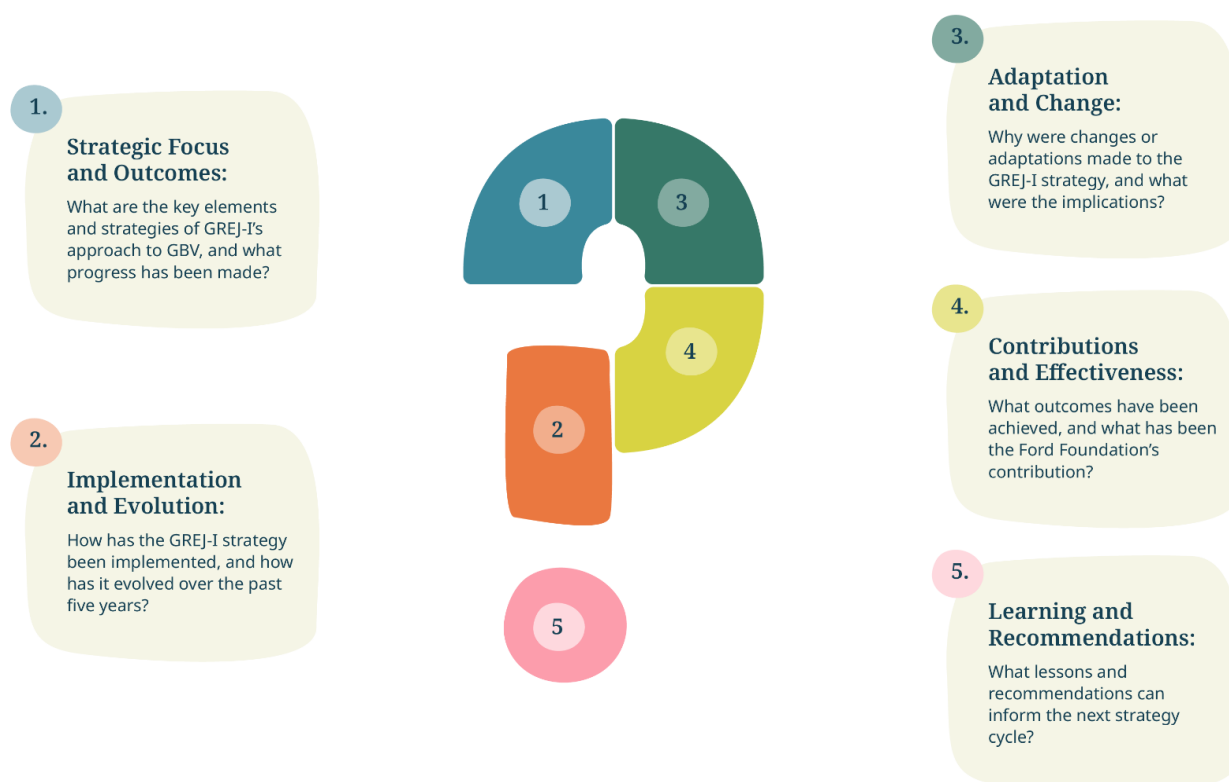
1. Introduction

Kore Global partnered with the Ford Foundation to conduct an external strategy evaluation of its Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Justice International (GREJ-I) program (2020–2024). The program focuses on prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) by supporting organizations, especially those led by and focused on women, girls, LGBTQI+, and gender-diverse people in the Global South, that are developing transformative, sustainable solutions to end GBV. The evaluation was designed to serve both accountability and learning purposes, assessing the effectiveness of the program’s work to date, while also identifying gaps, opportunities, and lessons learned to guide future strategic decisions.

The GREJ-I program operates across multiple levels through interrelated strategies. At the global level, it focuses on strengthening resourcing, programming, and accountability for GBV prevention. Complementing the global approach are regional strategies in West Africa, Southern Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, each adapted to the unique social, political, and cultural contexts of their respective regions.

The evaluation was designed to answer five overarching questions (see Figure 1).

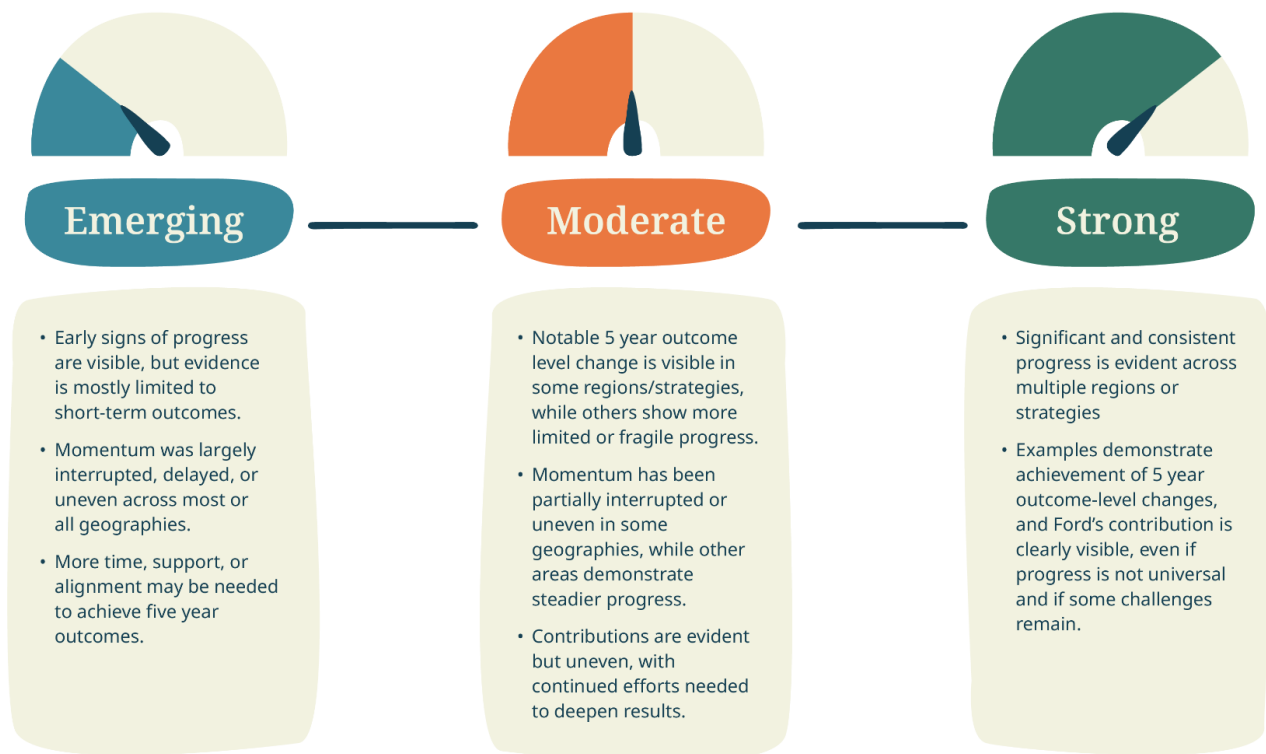
Figure 1: Overarching Evaluation Questions



The evaluation team applied a theory-based, mixed-methods approach to assess progress toward program outcomes. This included a portfolio analysis of 409 grants made between July 2020 and November 2024, along with a review of internal and external documents. The team conducted interviews with 55 grantee partners and 23 external stakeholders, including peer funders and sector experts. The evaluation team included four regional leads based in GREJ-I's regional offices, whose deep contextual expertise and on-the-ground knowledge ensured the process was grounded in regional perspectives.

The evaluators assigned each outcome area a progress rating (see Figure 2) ranging from *Emerging* to *Strong*. These ratings reflect evidence generated on the performance across the full program, complemented with a detailed analysis of where progress has been greatest/least, insights, and lessons learned. The evaluators applied an appreciative enquiry approach, emphasizing areas of progress while also acknowledging areas where progress has been more nascent.¹ The evaluation process was informed by consultations with Ford Foundation staff and guided by principles of utility, participation, ethics, intersectionality, and strategic alignment to ensure the findings reflect the realities of those engaged in the work.

Figure 2: Outcome Progress Ratings



¹ No outcome areas were identified with a complete absence of progress; however, there are areas where progress remains modest. At this stage, it is too early to determine whether this reflects the inherent complexity of the area of work, the approaches employed, or other contextual factors.

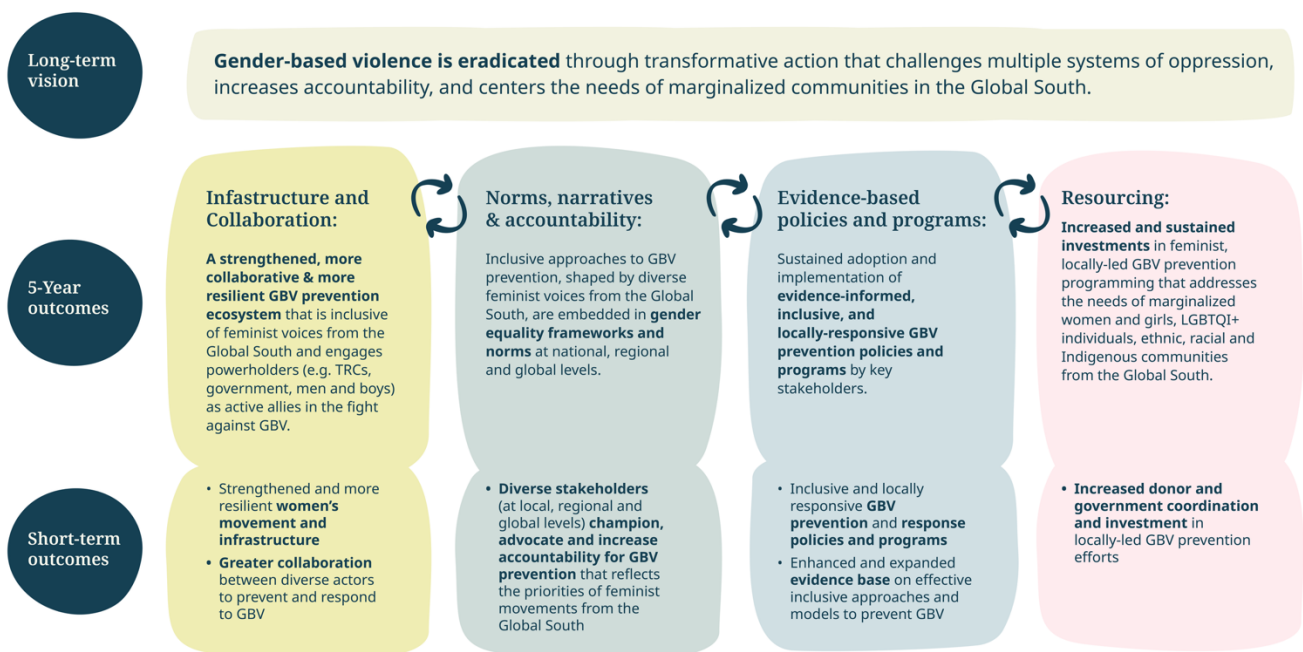
2. Theory of Change and What Ford Did

GREJ-I Theory of Change

The evaluation team, in close consultation with the GREJ-I team, articulated an overarching Theory of Change (ToC) for the GREJ-I program to provide a unifying framework for assessing progress and strategic coherence across the portfolio (see Figure 3). The program's long-term vision is the eradication of GBV, with a strategy that centers the historically excluded and underfunded needs of communities from the Global South. The ToC outlines four interconnected pathways and outcomes that contribute to this vision. These four outcome areas are mutually reinforcing; Outcome 1 serves as the foundational pillar upon which the others are built, recognizing the critical role of feminist movements and organizations at the forefront of GBV prevention in driving social change.

Underpinning the ToC are three key assumptions: (i) that GBV prevention must be led by historically excluded voices to ensure relevance; (ii) that global and local efforts are mutually reinforcing; and (iii) that diverse partners, guided by feminist and survivor-centered principles, are equipped to sustain locally driven prevention efforts. The evaluation team examined progress against the four outcome areas, as well as these assumptions, with findings presented in the sections that follow.

Figure 3: Summary of GREJ-I ToC



Summary of GREJ-I Grantmaking and Activities

During the evaluation period of July 2020 to November 2024, the Ford Foundation, through GREJ-I and other aligned programs, awarded 409 grants to 290 grantee partners. The total committed funding across these grants was over \$266.5 million. The Ford Foundation's focus on building organizational capacity was reflected in the type of grants distributed. For example, the majority of grants (54%) provided flexible general/operational support, 38% were project-based, and 8% provided both project and general/operational support. Complementing this broad approach were select grants made under the Foundation's Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) initiative, which provides long-term, flexible funding and capacity-strengthening support to partner organizations. While BUILD accounted for 12% of all GREJ-I grants (47), it represented a significant 22% of total committed funds (about \$58.5 million).

In addition to grantmaking, the GREJ-I teams engaged in a range of non-financial approaches to advance the program's goals. This support, received by a majority of grantees, included providing strategic guidance, fostering collaboration through grantee convenings, and offering assistance to strengthen organizational and field-level capacity, such as making introductions to field leaders and other donors and facilitating grantee peer learning opportunities.



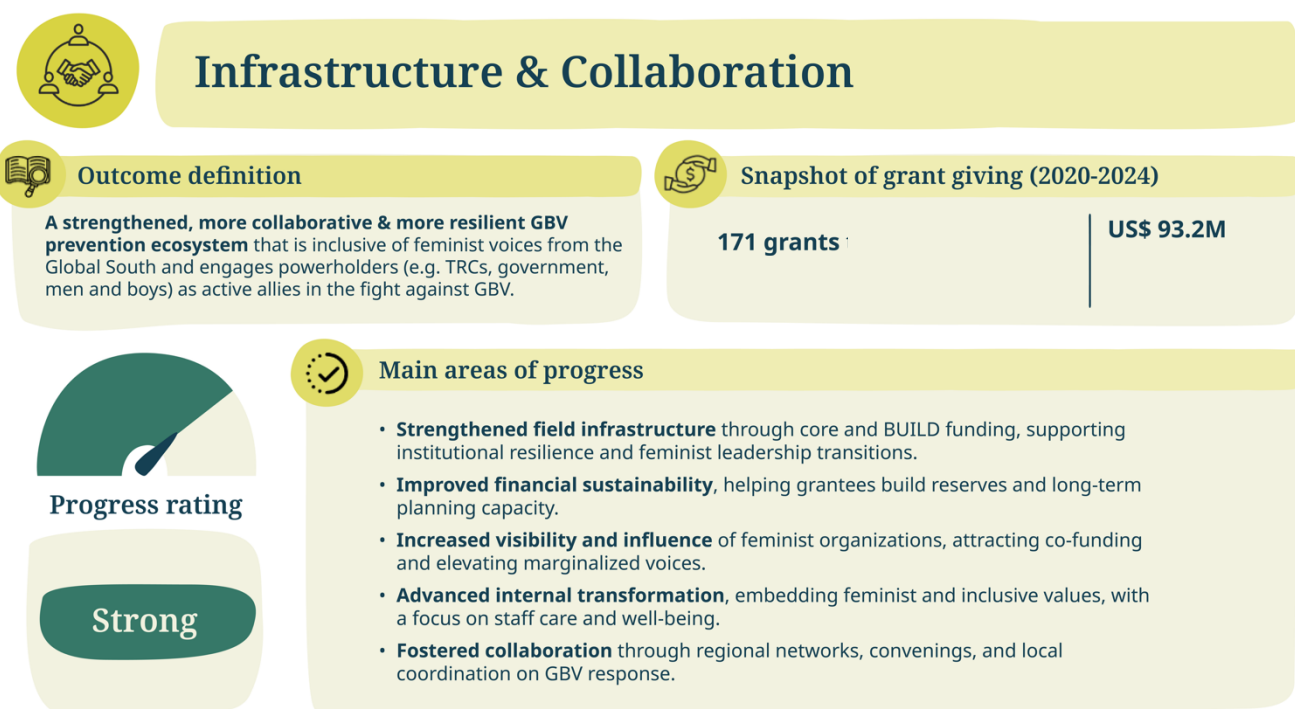
3. Progress Achieved

Outcome 1: Infrastructure & Collaboration²

Ford has made strong progress towards building a more resilient, collaborative, and inclusive GBV prevention ecosystem by strengthening the capacity, sustainability, and connectedness of feminist organizations, particularly those led by and for communities in the Global South. In this context, the GREJ-I program's emphasis on providing flexible, long-term operational support, including through catalytic BUILD grants, has been a vital stabilizing force for the field.

Strengthening GBV Prevention Infrastructure

Across regions, GREJ-I's flexible, multi-year funding has enabled partners to expand their contributions to GBV prevention. For example, in South Africa, Ford grantees played a leadership role in implementing South Africa's 2020 National Strategic Plan on GBV and Femicide, training nearly 200 facilitators and supporting local government teams through the 100-Day Challenge methodology.³



Similarly, in India, a Ford grantee's work on public space safety led to the inclusion of a gender chapter in a major city's development plan, with the potential to impact urban planning, infrastructure, and amenities for women for the next two decades. These examples, among many others documented through the evaluation, demonstrate how investment in the GBV prevention ecosystem's core infrastructure has underpinned and reinforced progress across the other three outcome areas. Flexible, core support allowed organizations to invest in leadership, financial systems, and knowledge

² As many grants support more than one outcome area, the percentages in the "Snapshot of grant giving" will not add up to 100%, nor will the funds allocated add up to the total GREJ-I amount disbursed.

³ End GBVF Movement. (2025). [Application for Convening partner officials to organise an End GBVF 100-Day Challenge](#).

management, positioning them to align operations with evolving priorities and adapt to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and funding cuts following recent donor withdrawals. Partners consistently emphasized that this type of support was critical to scaling their work and maintaining resilience in volatile contexts.

A key contribution of the GREJ-I program has been the strengthening of "field-building organizations" that provide critical infrastructure, coordination, and thought leadership within the GBV prevention ecosystem. With the program's support, these key actors have become more resilient, expanded their leadership, and deepened their ability to inform global policy and public discourse. This important subgroup of grantees is shaping global guidance on how to scale proven interventions without compromising on quality, equity, or local ownership. These contributions would not have been possible without the strengthening of these organizations' internal systems and infrastructure. BUILD grants and associated organizational capacity strengthening support, for example, allowed some grantees to build financial reserves capable of covering six months of operations, an important step toward long-term sustainability that ensures continued leadership in a rapidly shifting funding landscape.

Ford's consistent, values-driven support has also been critical in helping organizations navigate complex internal leadership transitions without losing momentum. For global and regional grantees, Ford's funding and accompaniment supported the adoption of co-leadership and collective governance models rooted in feminist values. This support has been particularly catalytic for newer leaders from historically underrepresented backgrounds, helping them further and solidify their legitimacy and find space for their voices within the global ecosystem. Ford has also helped connect grantees navigating similar transitions, fostering shared learning and exchange.

"The way that the foundation accompanies women leaders' transformation - and the support I have received beyond the grant - really makes us think that the Ford Foundation is invested in us as leaders..."

Grantee partner, Latin America

Various types of feminist organizations across regions have benefited from enhanced credibility and visibility, enabling them to attract new donors and forge meaningful partnerships. Grantees reported that Ford's support enhanced their credibility within the philanthropic space, attracting co-funding and unlocking new opportunities. In Latin America, for example, Ford helped amplify the leadership of feminist organizations often overlooked by mainstream funders, such as those led by Black and Indigenous women, creating new opportunities for cross-regional knowledge exchange and strategic alignment.

Fostering Enhanced Collaboration

Feminist actors across regions are increasingly collaborating to build a more coordinated and strategically aligned GBV prevention field, with recent convenings helping to identify critical gaps and lay the foundation for stronger collective action. A Wilton Park convening in 2013, for instance, highlighted the need for a shared understanding of what "scale" means, the pathways most effective for scaling, and the infrastructure required to sustain prevention efforts. More recently, a 2024 convening in

The Hague, coordinated by a subgroup of GREJ-I grantees, revisited these issues and developed a shared view of the most pressing gaps in the prevention ecosystem. Together, these efforts have laid important groundwork for greater collaboration, though persistent challenges remain, particularly the limited inclusion of diverse Global South voices and the disruptions caused by shifting geopolitical contexts.

Collaborative platforms have informed policy agendas, secured ambitious commitments, and created ongoing structures for peer learning and coordination. For example, regional networks in Latin America have established regular convenings to strengthen collaboration among Indigenous and Afro-descendant women, while in Sri Lanka, grantees have spearheaded efforts to integrate gender norms and masculinities into the national action plan on SGBV. However, translating these advances into sustained funding, systemic reforms, and scaled prevention approaches has been uneven, and the long-term impact of such efforts remains difficult to assess without stronger mechanisms to link them to prevention outcomes.

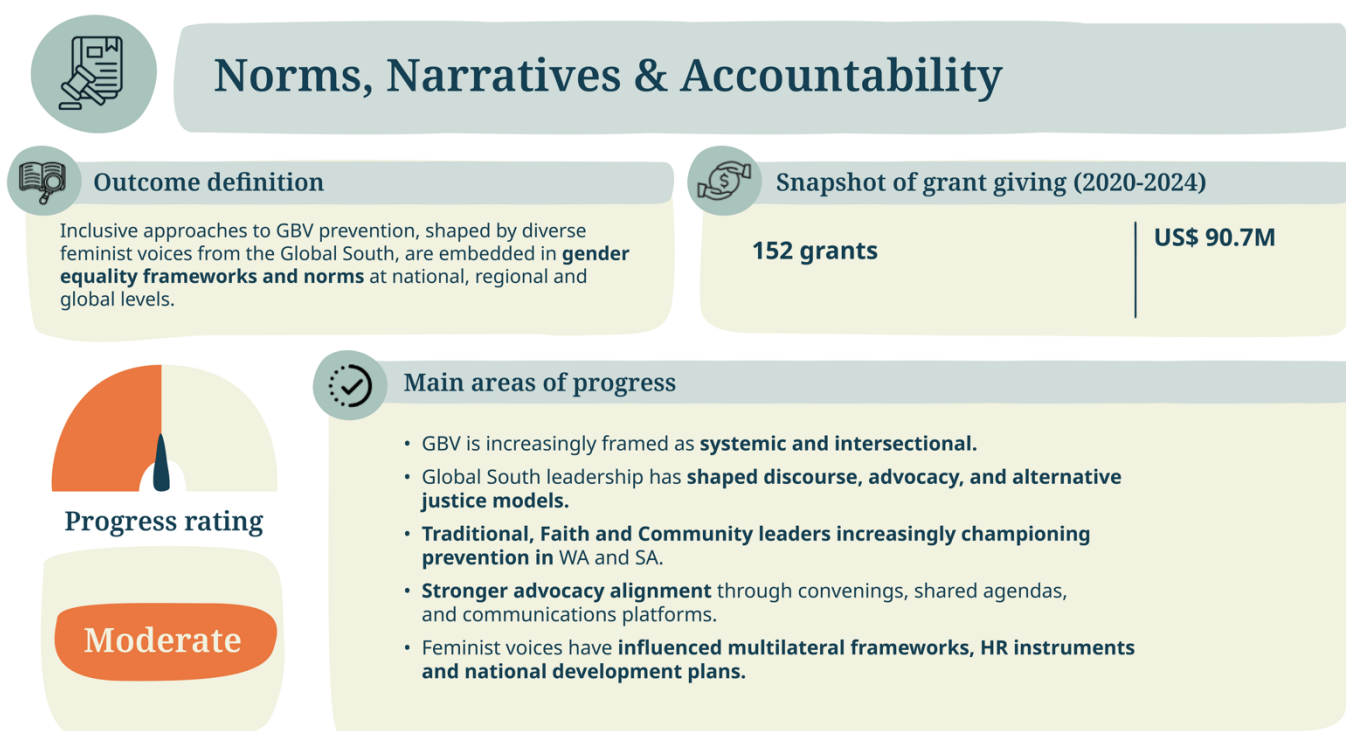
While these combined efforts of GREJ-I grantees have raised visibility and fostered solidarity, translating momentum into sustained funding for GBV prevention has proven difficult. The changing landscape globally continues to constrain progress: in 2025, the share of development aid with a gender objective directed to women's rights organizations dropped to just 0.7%, its lowest level since tracking began in 2010.⁴ This underscores the need to better connect advocacy platforms with concrete resourcing and accountability mechanisms.

At the local and regional levels, Ford's support has helped build collaboration between civil society, government, and communities, resulting in faster case resolution, new response mechanisms, and cross-movement alliances. Examples from multiple regions illustrate the impact of this work. In Southern Africa, coordinated action has reduced significant backlogs in domestic violence cases. Grantee-supported partnerships in West Africa have led to innovations such as one-stop GBV response centers. In India, partners are creating safer work environments for women across various sectors including gig, home-based, and garment work, by engaging communities and employers. Finally, cross-movement collaborations in Latin America are linking feminist and environmental justice organizations. Convenings and peer learning spaces have further strengthened solidarity. However, there are opportunities to create more structured and frequent spaces for peer learning on GBV prevention that can foster more sustained collaboration and translate into tangible partnerships and outcomes.

⁴ Alliance for Feminist Movements. (2025, March 10). [*A Snapshot in Time: Data Highlights for the Feminist Funding Ecosystem*](#).

Outcome 2: Norms, Narratives, and Accountability

The GREJ-I program has made moderate progress in shifting the norms, narratives, and accountability structures that perpetuate GBV. Despite global geopolitical challenges, Ford's partners have advanced more inclusive, intersectional framings of GBV; informed global, regional, and national policy agendas; and mobilized new actors as champions for prevention. This work was supported by over a third of the GREJ-I portfolio, with strategic grantmaking focused on advocacy, communications, and engaging cultural and religious leaders. However, progress was often uneven, with hard-won gains facing significant resistance and the long-term nature of social norm change making impact difficult to measure within the evaluation period.



Shifting Norms and Narratives within the Feminist Movement

GREJ-I grantees are advancing a broader, more intersectional understanding of GBV—framing it as a **systemic issue requiring context-specific, culturally relevant responses**. Many partners have successfully positioned GBV as a societal issue rooted in systems of power. The program has opened space for critical dialogue on dominant Global North frameworks for GBV prevention and supported the advancement of alternative justice models. Drawing on the deep experience of feminist organizing from the Global South, partners have challenged the overreliance on punitive, legalistic approaches and are instead promoting survivor-led, culturally-grounded justice models rooted in community accountability. These efforts have explored transformative approaches that focus on community dialogue, restorative practices, and long-term healing. However, while these models are gaining momentum and offer promising alternatives, there is currently little robust evidence that they lead to a reduction in GBV *at scale*.

Strengthening Communications and Influencing Global Frameworks

Grantees have strengthened their strategic communications capacity, enabling them to inform public and policy discourse with greater coherence, visibility, and influence. Through new shared advocacy agendas and communications platforms, feminist actors now have stronger tools to unify messaging around GBV prevention. However, despite these advances, gender justice narratives remain fragmented and under-resourced. In some regions, traditional media has reverted to sensationalist and regressive coverage of GBV, which undermines efforts to shift harmful norms through nuanced and tailored, prevention-focused messaging. Furthermore, the evaluation team found that in general, the organizational capacity of many grantees to capture and document changes in public discourse, media representation, or shifts in cultural norms was often limited, further constraining efforts to assess and communicate progress.

Ford's support has helped amplify Global South feminist leadership in multilateral advocacy spaces, ensuring more inclusive representation and influence in global gender equality frameworks. A central part of this contribution has been supporting organizations from the Global South to access, participate in, and shape high-level platforms such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women. These efforts have contributed to the increased recognition of the differentiated impact of GBV on historically excluded populations in key human rights instruments. For example, in Latin America, movement-led advocacy has helped inform legal norms, contributing to advances such as expanded reproductive rights and strengthening the protections for women and gender-diverse people. Yet, a persistent challenge lies in the gap between legal reforms and their implementation. Rapidly changing contexts and weak institutional commitment often undermine the sustained enforcement of policy wins.

Engaging Traditional Power Holders to Shift Community Norms

In West and Southern Africa, engaging traditional and faith-based leaders has proven to be a powerful lever for shifting harmful norms and strengthening community accountability. These efforts have contributed to the revision of discriminatory by-laws, the abandonment of harmful practices, and increased engagement of men and traditional leaders in both prevention and survivor support. Religious and traditional leaders have begun integrating GBV prevention messaging into sermons and public discourse, and in some cases have appointed women to leadership roles, signaling a broader commitment to gender-inclusive leadership.

However, the evaluation found insufficient evidence that these shifts are contributing to sustained reductions in violence. This is partly because there is currently no clear or consistent strategy across the portfolio to track how these interventions affect norms, attitudes, or behaviors at the community level in the short term. Many grantees also lack the technical capacity, tools, or resourcing to design and implement norm-sensitive measurement approaches, constraining their ability to

"Ford deserves more credit than has been given for moving the needle on GBV prevention in Nigeria."

External partner, West Africa

"Working with traditional leaders or community leaders in general, including the faith-based leaders has been a game changer."

Grantee partner, Southern Africa

demonstrate progress and make the case for continued investment. Measurement is further constrained by the short (2-3 years) time horizon of most grants. Furthermore, normative shifts have been met with some resistance, where challenging patriarchal beliefs and reinterpreting religious texts has provoked hostility and even physical risk for grassroots actors in some communities, underscoring the continued need for Ford to invest in mental health support, and care-centered approaches for frontline staff and community activists, a point emphasized particularly in Southern Africa, where grantees have focused on community healing and alternative justice methodologies.



Outcome 3: Evidence-based Policies and Programs

Progress towards sustained adoption of evidence-based policies and programs is emerging. The program has increased locally-led, intersectional research and evidence, informed national reforms, and supported inclusive, community-based prevention models. However, this work has unfolded in a complex external context where translating evidence into practice has often been constrained, global data infrastructure has weakened, and new challenges like technology-facilitated GBV have rapidly evolved beyond current policy frameworks. While partners have made significant inroads, progress has been uneven, and the gap between policy development and sustained implementation remains a key challenge.

"Ford is a catalyst for creating multiple ways and spaces for working on GBV prevention."

External stakeholder, Southern Africa



Evidence-based Policies and Programs



Outcome definition

Sustained adoption and implementation of **evidence-informed, inclusive, and locally-responsive GBV prevention policies and programs** by key stakeholders.



Snapshot of grant giving (2020-2024)

222 grants

US\$ 119.3M



Progress rating

Emerging



Main areas of progress

- **Strengthened the GBV evidence base**, through locally led, intersectional research from the Global South.
- **Informed national policies and legal reforms.**
- **Advanced inclusive, community-based prevention models.**
- Enabled **meaningful Global South participation** in global evidence spaces.
- **Promoted collaboration** between researchers, practitioners and policymakers.

Enhancing the Evidence Base

The GREJ-I program has supported work to enhance the global evidence base on GBV, grounding it in local realities and the leadership of researchers from the Global South. This work has contributed to a notable increase in evidence addressing the experiences of historically excluded groups and previously neglected forms of GBV. For example, in Southern Africa, intersectional prevalence research has provided vital evidence to inform policy and discourse on GBV. Moreover, grantees did so using research methodologies that challenged knowledge extraction and placed communities' knowledge at the centre. This includes global research documenting the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, girls, and gender-diverse persons with disabilities, which helped raise the visibility of this issue in global advocacy spaces.

The program has also helped legitimize “practice-based”⁵ learning and evidence generation and strengthen collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Ford has supported key global evidence hubs and learning networks that advance the concept of practice-based learning—an intentional process of reflection and adaptation rooted in the lived experiences of practitioners. Support for a major global forum on violence prevention research provides a critical space for connecting researchers, activists, and funders, elevating Global South leadership in the field. While these initiatives are helping to increase collaboration globally, a gap often remains between academia and practice at the national level, underscoring the need for continued investment in bridging these spaces.

Informing Evidence-Based Policy and Programming

Ford's support has been pivotal in enabling a wide range of partners to either enter the GBV prevention space for the first time or to significantly deepen and scale their efforts. In many cases, this support allowed organizations to move beyond response-oriented work and engage with the root causes of violence, resulting in more strategic, systems-level interventions. Flexible grants have enabled legal and support service organizations to add a prevention lens to their work, launching new initiatives such as those with boys in schools or through research on grievance mechanisms.

Evidence generated by partners has directly informed and shaped GBV laws, strategies, and accountability mechanisms across multiple countries. In West Africa, a gender index has supported stronger GBV legislation, budgeting, and services, alongside advocacy that expanded institutional mechanisms, such as gender desks in police stations. In Southern Africa, civil society shaped a national GBV strategy and developed tools for local implementation and accountability. In Latin America, grantee-supported advocacy advanced legal protections for gender-diverse people. In India, a grantee highlighted the concerns of gig workers and supported the dissemination of these concerns to decision-makers, resulting in proposed legislation to protect gig workers from sexual harassment.

⁵ Raising Voices. (2022). *Nurturing & Elevating Practice-Based Learning* (Learning from Practice Series No. 8: Organizational Perspectives). Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices.

Despite important policy gains, a persistent challenge lies in the gap between legal reforms and implementation. Across regions, changing contexts, shifting priorities, and weak institutional commitment often undermine enforcement. For example, even where landmark GBV laws have been adopted, such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act in Nigeria, limited public awareness and inconsistent enforcement restrict the ability to protect those at risk of GBV and hold perpetrators accountable.

The program has supported grantees to develop and deliver innovative, locally-grounded prevention models that reflect feminist, community-led approaches to tackling GBV. This includes the adaptation of globally recognized, evidence-based models that engage entire communities in dialogue and action. Across regions, partners are implementing programs that redefine masculinity by engaging boys and male community leaders to challenge harmful gender norms, while others are using digital campaigns to promote bystander intervention.

Despite these promising innovations, sustained uptake by key stakeholders remains limited, and most programming has yet to scale to broad, systemic impact. A lack of sustainable and scalable prevention funding and delivery models means that many women's rights organizations remain dependent on short-term, project-based funding. Lastly, while many organizations understand the structural drivers of violence, they still lack the tools and capacity to design and scale effective primary prevention.⁶



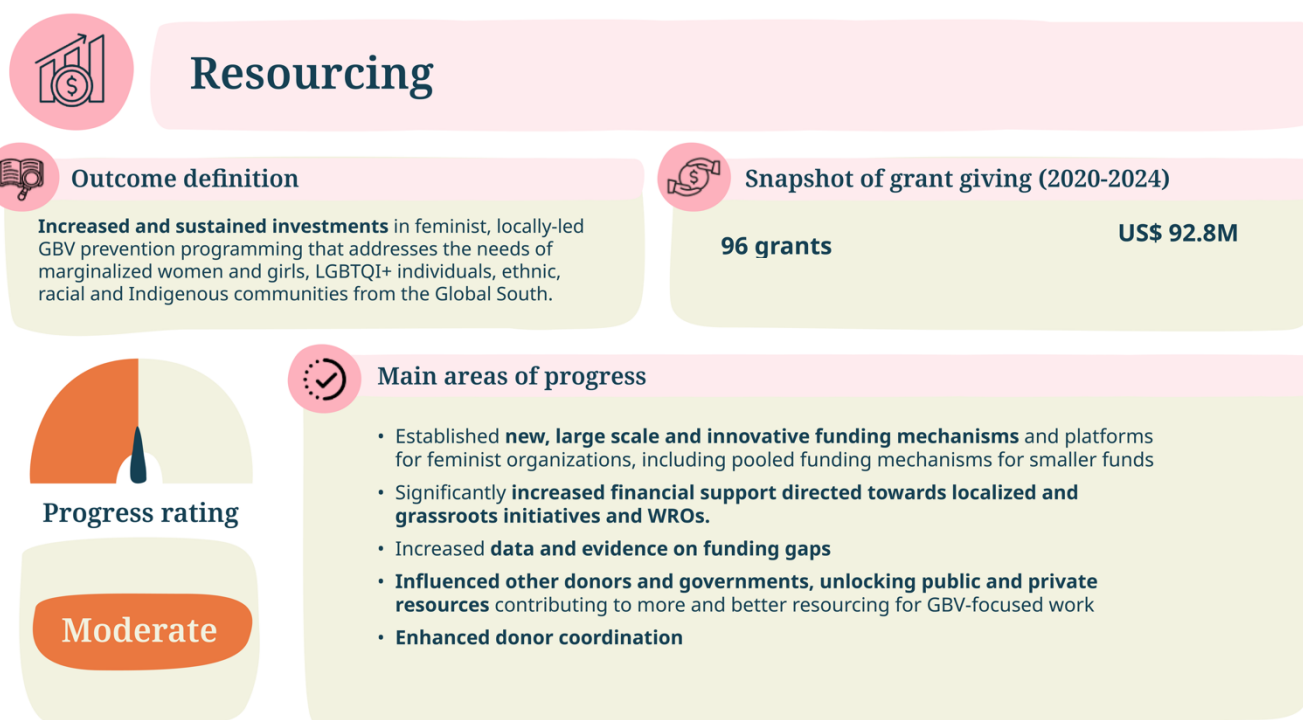
⁶ Prevention Collaborative and partners. (2024). *Strengthening the VAWG prevention ecosystem.*

Outcome 4: Resourcing

The GREJ-I program has made moderate progress toward increasing and sustaining investments in feminist, locally-led GBV prevention. Through strategic seed funding, collective advocacy, and direct support for feminist funds, the program has worked to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the GBV prevention field. However, this progress remains fragile, as recent shifts in the donor landscape have intensified concerns about the stability of the funding ecosystem for feminist movements.

Establishing New Funding Mechanisms and Directing Resources to Grassroots Organizations

Over the past five years, GREJ-I has played a pivotal role in the creation and growth of new funding mechanisms to mobilize resources for feminist movements, particularly in the Global South. Through strategic seed funding and sustained advocacy, the Ford Foundation has helped establish and scale pioneering global funds that combine gender-lens investing⁷ and philanthropy. While not exclusively focused on GBV prevention, these mechanisms support broader gender justice work with GBV prevention embedded as a core area of impact. Ford's early, visible support was instrumental in attracting other donors to support these funds, significantly expanding their reach.



New feminist funding mechanisms and pooled funds have expanded access to flexible, long-term resources for grassroots and locally-led initiatives. One global feminist movement hub, for example, launched a resilience fund during the COVID-19 pandemic that delivered over 200 flexible grants to groups in more than 60 countries, approximately half of whom were first-time recipients of funding. Other initiatives have established pooled funds to support women's rights organizations in accessing and

⁷ [Gender-lens investing](#) is an investment strategy that seeks to intentionally and measurably use capital to address gender disparities and inform investment decisions.

managing large bilateral grants and to direct resources to women environmental defenders who face gendered structural violence.

Ford supported its grantee partners, particularly feminist and women's funds, to channel resources to grassroots organizations. This financial support has helped build institutional capacity while deepening impact on the ground. For instance, one intermediary with \$1.2 million in unrestricted support from Ford in Southern Africa has disbursed over \$7 million to grassroots movements and community-based organizations. Regional women's funds have provided approximately \$11 million in grants to nearly 200 organizations in Africa, and about \$4 million to over 200 organizations in Central America, while leveraging collaborative platforms to further broaden their reach.

Influencing the Broader Funding Ecosystem

The GREJ-I team has played a catalytic role in advancing new initiatives that strengthen coordination and advocacy for GBV prevention and feminist resourcing. These efforts have elevated prevention within international policy spaces and created stronger dialogue between movements, donors, and governments. However, the evaluation found that movement-strengthening and feminist resourcing do not always translate into sustained investment in prevention. Despite ambitious global commitments, structural donor trends, such as the low percentage of aid reaching women's rights organizations directly and an overreliance on short-term, project-based funding, continue to constrain progress. Going forward, scaling prevention will require deeper donor coordination, integration across sectors such as health, education, and livelihoods, and recognition that preventing violence is inseparable from broader development and justice goals.

The Foundation's visible commitment and public pledges at global forums such as the Generation Equality Forum have sent a clear signal to other donors to prioritize and increase investment in gender justice and GBV prevention. As a founding member and core supporter of the Gender Funders CoLab, Ford has contributed to producing influential communications, pooled funding, and technical assistance and funding to over 400 women's rights organizations. Ford's support has helped to legitimize feminist funding sources and grantmaking practices and encouraged other

private sector actors to prioritize gender justice and GBV prevention. Ford's support has also helped to increase the availability of data on the scale and nature of the funding gap, helping to build momentum and push for more coordinated and sustained investment globally. Ford's support has helped grantees unlock significant new funding by enhancing their visibility, credibility, and influence within the broader donor ecosystem. For example, one global fund secured a \$43 million grant from the UK's FCDO, citing the visibility and legitimacy gained through Ford's support as a key factor.

"Their way of working does influence these larger partners and does make a difference. Major flagship GBV programmes have now shifted who is eligible for funding, placing greater emphasis on feminist movements in the Global South."

External stakeholder

Despite these efforts, siloed funding practices remain a major barrier to scaling GBV prevention. GBV prevention requires multi-sectoral action, yet interventions are often funded from limited, GBV-specific budgets, restricting their scale and sustainability. This highlights the need for donors to integrate GBV

prevention across portfolios, recognize prevention as a shared priority beyond gender-focused teams, and coordinate funding streams to support multi-sectoral strategies.

4. Learnings on How Change Happens

An analysis of the GREJ-I program's last five years offers critical lessons on the drivers of and impediments to systemic change in the global GBV prevention field. While the program has laid essential groundwork, its trajectory reveals important insights into what has enabled and hindered progress towards its long-term vision, and where persistent gaps remain.



Enablers

A key enabler of progress has been investment in feminist infrastructure and collaboration, which has allowed movements and organizations to sustain advocacy, inform policy, generate evidence, and deliver prevention-focused programming rooted in local realities. However, the evaluation found that while broader support to feminist movements is vital for advancing gender justice, its connection to GBV prevention outcomes is often less direct than the work of organizations that focus specifically on GBV. This underscores the importance of clarifying and evidencing how different forms of support contribute to the ultimate goal of reducing GBV.

The program's feminist grantmaking approach was a key enabler of this work. Grantees consistently identified that flexible funding, trust-based partnerships, and long-term support were essential enablers. Ford's movement-aligned approach, by centering Global South actors and resourcing feminist actors, was also instrumental in supporting grassroots solutions and intersectional approaches.

The evaluation findings highlight how GREJ-I's future strategy must continue to be adapted to fit local contexts—leveraging national frameworks and partnerships where environments are enabling, and adopting adaptive, entry-point approaches where they are more restrictive. Effectively managing internal factors such as staffing transitions and coverage gaps will also be critical for maintaining effective communication and continuity for grantees.

Persistent Gaps

Prevention programming is still largely fragmented, under-evaluated, and often confined to small-scale implementation. There remains a persistent lack of robust evidence on what works to shift social norms at the population level in different geographical and socio-political contexts. Despite being central to the program's framing, few interventions have been implemented or assessed at the scale required to drive measurable impact.

A critical gap remains in technical capacity on primary prevention. Field-builders in the space noted that, despite greater organizational stability and small-scale innovation, there has been less emphasis (by both grantees and Ford) on developing and applying evidence-based prevention strategies *at scale*. Many feminist organizations bring a strong analysis of the structural drivers of violence but lack the tools, training, and frameworks to design, implement, and measure primary prevention efforts at scale.⁸ The

⁸ Prevention Collaborative and partners. (2024). *Strengthening the VAWG prevention ecosystem*.

GREJ-I program has pushed back against awareness-raising as the default prevention strategy in many regions, supporting grantees to move beyond campaigns and events toward more innovative prevention programming, often for the first time. Yet the challenge of building capacity for effective, evidence-based prevention approaches remains. Several grantees also expressed a limited understanding of Ford's prevention-focused Theory of Change, suggesting a need for clearer strategic communication and stronger alignment around the program's ultimate goals.

This evidence gap is becoming more urgent as the infrastructure for global GBV data weakens. Recent cuts to key sources of population-level data, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Violence Against Children (VAC) studies, signal a looming crisis for the GBV field. Without credible longitudinal data, it will become increasingly difficult to measure impact or advocate for continued investment. While the program's support for feminist-aligned prevention practice is vital, it must be complemented by renewed investment in evaluation and evidence-building to sustain and scale what works. Ford's role is not necessarily to fill this funding gap directly, but it can play a role in helping to surface and promote more sustainable financing mechanisms that can support the field over the long term. This includes advocating for investment in the data and critical infrastructure that is essential for designing effective interventions, measuring progress, and sustaining the case for prevention.

Another persistent challenge is the disconnect between grassroots efforts and policy spaces, which limits the potential for systemic impact. This often stems from the inadequate voice, representation, and leadership of community-based groups in agenda-setting forums. This fragmentation makes it difficult to translate community-level insights into institutional reforms and to ensure that global and regional frameworks are grounded in local realities. The evaluation suggests that bridging this gap requires more intentional alignment across levels and dedicated platforms to facilitate cross-movement coordination.

Ford's Unique Role in a Fragile and Contested Ecosystem

The decision for GREJ-I to focus on GBV prevention was timely and strategically sound. It responded to long-standing feminist critiques of fragmented, reactive approaches and centered strategies that target the structural root causes of violence. The shift anticipated and aligned with growing momentum globally, building on new evidence from initiatives like FCDO's What Works program and UN Women's and WHO's RESPECT Framework,⁹ and responding to demands from Global South movements for more proactive, locally rooted solutions. In this context, Ford's leadership helped shape the trajectory of the GBV field at a pivotal moment.

However, the wider ecosystem looks very different today than when GREJ-I was first launched in 2020. The geopolitical context for GBV work over the last five years has shifted dramatically, with grantees reporting intensified backlash, increased regulation, and shrinking civic space. As one external partner noted, the goal has shifted "from impact to survival." In this environment—where progress is neither linear nor guaranteed—investing in movement and institutional resilience has become essential. Continuing to support anchor organizations, i.e., movement-rooted field builders that carry the institutional memory and innovation capacity of the GBV prevention field, may be critical to ensuring that the ecosystem can endure and evolve. At the same time, resilience requires adaptation and

⁹ UN Women and World Health Organization. (2023). *RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women*.

reimagination, particularly to engage younger and newer constituents whose leadership and perspectives are vital for sustaining and renewing the field

Ford occupies a unique and increasingly critical role in this landscape. As one of the few donors prioritizing GBV prevention through a feminist, movement-led lens and providing long-term, flexible funding, Ford serves as a catalytic field-builder. Grantees and stakeholders emphasized that Ford is not simply another donor, but a strategic actor with the legitimacy and relationships to shape collective vision and sustain momentum at a time when other major funders are exiting the field, and Ford is galvanizing new donors and partners to step in.

A central theme emerging from the evaluation is the extent to which GREJ-I has built connective tissue between global, regional, and local levels of the GBV prevention field. While there remains the aforementioned gap between the grassroots and high-level policy, GREJ-I has nonetheless elevated feminist voices and evidence from the Global South into global debates, created collaborative platforms that have expanded resources and legitimacy for grassroots actors, and supported practice-based evidence that informs both global frameworks and national policies. These linkages have been strongest and most catalytic in resourcing and evidence, where pooled funds, financing platforms, and feminist knowledge production have directly strengthened local capacity and informed policy. In other areas, such as norms, narratives, and policy implementation, the pathways between global visibility and local impact are more fragile — affected by under-documented prevention models, weak enforcement, and rapidly changing contexts. Collaborative spaces and multilateral advocacy have amplified Global South perspectives, but have not consistently secured dedicated, prevention-specific funding or ensured sustained community-level outcomes. This highlights the need for greater intentionality in how global strategies reinforce locally grounded change and ensure that prevention remains a clear priority.

The evaluation also highlighted an opportunity to examine how GBV intersects with other pillars of Ford's work, including economic justice, democracy, and climate. In this moment of strategic transition, internal cross-pollination could be a powerful lever for deepening systemic impact and amplifying Ford's broader influence.

5. Strategic Implications

The findings of this evaluation surface a series of critical strategic questions that can guide conversations about the future direction of the GREJ-I program. First is the need to clarify the program's ultimate aims: is the strategy primarily about reducing violence, shifting systems, strengthening feminist movements, or pursuing all three in an integrated way? While global and regional strategies both emphasize prevention, they define success differently, creating ambiguity for partners and staff. Addressing this tension will require a refreshed theory of change and clearer articulation of what "success" looks like, supported by stronger investment in data and evidence systems that can track both localized and systemic outcomes.

A second priority is how GREJ-I positions itself in a shifting and fragile GBV prevention ecosystem. Shrinking civic space and global ODA funding contractions have weakened critical components such as response services and data infrastructure. While GREJ-I is not expected to fill these gaps directly, their erosion raises questions about where the program should focus its efforts, how it should connect prevention to broader development priorities, and how it can leverage its convening power to sustain the field. This may also require making hard choices about which organizations and approaches to prioritize, including when links to prevention are less direct.

The evaluation also raises questions about the future role of global convenings and multilateral spaces. While Ford's engagement has shaped international frameworks and elevated Global South leadership, the influence of these platforms is waning, and their outcomes are not always clearly defined. GREJ-I will need to determine whether these spaces are still the most effective avenue for advancing prevention, or whether regional coalitions, cross-movement alliances, or alternative partnerships may yield greater impact.

Finally, GREJ-I faces opportunities to strengthen its internal ways of working. Grantees emphasized the value of Ford's long-term, flexible support and its convening power, while also calling for more transparent communication, participatory practices, accountability to the field, and consistent alignment of grantmaking with values of trust-based philanthropy and non-hierarchical community-led ways of working. At this moment, Ford's visibility and leadership are seen as critical to sustaining momentum for GBV prevention.

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