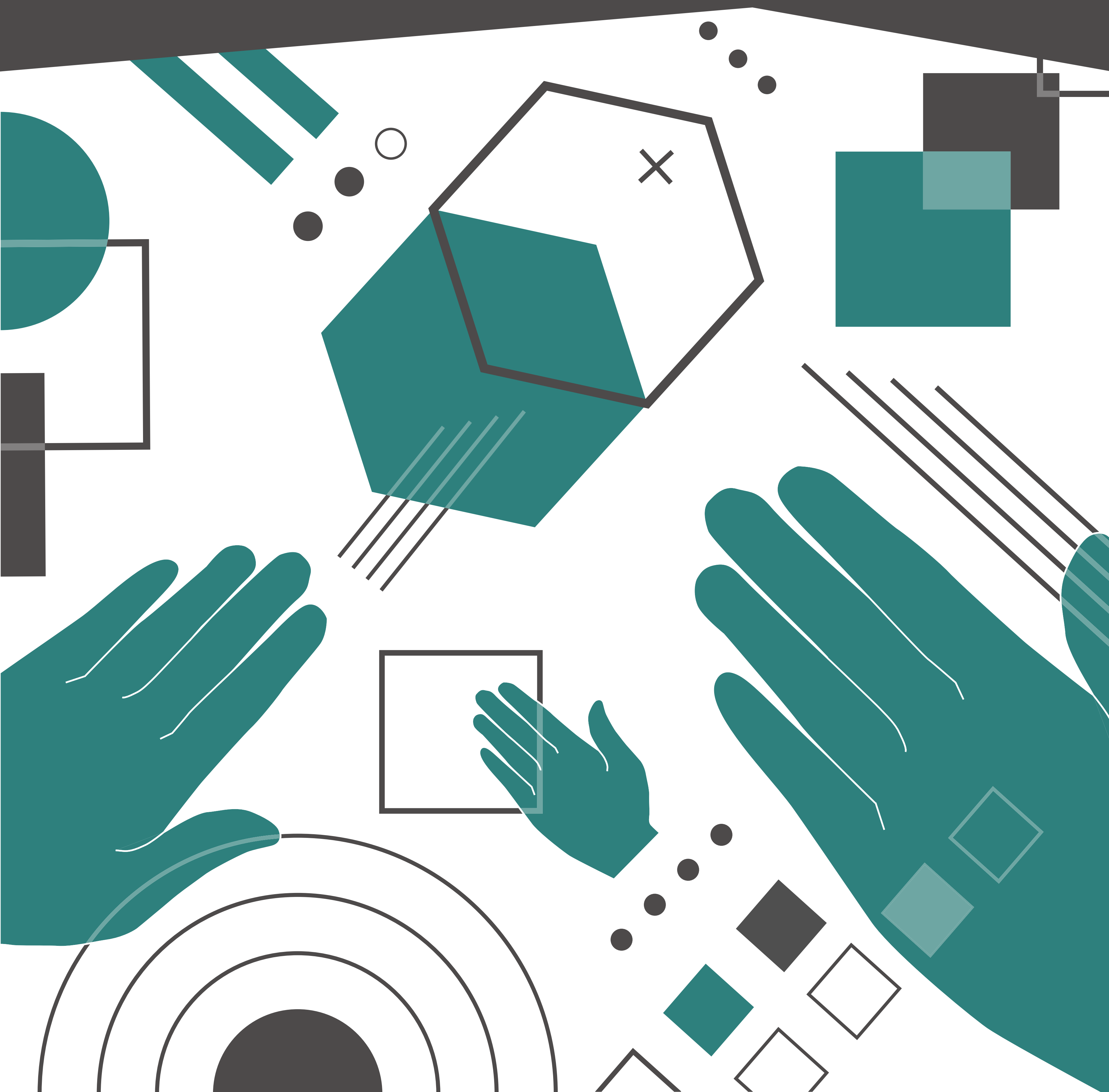
TIPPING THE SCALES

WHAT IT TAKES TO FUND AN EQUITABLE TECH & HUMAN RIGHTS ECOSYSTEM

THE ENGINE ROOM



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This report has been commissioned by Open Society Foundations' Information Program and Strategy Unit Lab.

The research for this report was conducted by The Engine Room from January 2020 thorough July 2020. The content of this report does not reflect the official opinion of Open Society Foundations, and responsibility for the information and views expressed in the report lies entirely with The Engine Room.

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SUMMARY

The Information Program and the Strategy Unit Lab at Open Society Foundations commissioned this research project in December 2019 in order to identify potential opportunities for strengthening equity through funding practices within the tech and human rights ecosystem.

Our findings are not unique to the tech and human rights ecosystem – however, we believe they are exacerbated in this space due to a combination of factors. These include the fast evolution of the sector; Silicon Valley setting the example of inequitable 'tech solutionist' approaches; and the blurry boundaries for what constitutes 'tech and human rights', meaning that civil society initiatives sometimes fall between the cracks of grantmaker portfolios.

The relationship between funding institutions and potential grantees reflects, from the start, an unequal distribution of power, where many activists and civil society organisations typically rely on resources from few funders to carry out their work. In this report, we look at the struggles of newer or smaller organisations in the field, to better understand and make explicit the barriers they face. We also look at innovative funding practices that are occurring in different sectors.

Our research identified that the main challenges and barriers for smaller and less visible actors in the tech and human rights ecosystem fall in the following categories:

- **Structural barriers:** stemming from existing power dynamics, inequality, scarcity of resources, unequal access and exclusion. Manifest mainly as restricted access to funders networks, scarcity of targeted resources, extractive practices, structural racism and privilege.

- **Bureaucratic barriers:** related to funding application processes, reporting obligations, and legal entity requirements. Issues of one-way accountability, transparency and trust were raised as being crucial.

- **Additional challenges:** include, but are not limited to - lack of core and multi-year funding, rigid frameworks for impact and evaluation, closing civic space, and the role performed by intermediary organisations (both facilitators and obstacles).

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for flexibility and for thinking about long-term sustainability and resilience of CSOs on the part of grantmakers.

In terms of funding and support practices for equity, our research identified two main areas where funders (both from the tech and human rights ecosystem and from other spaces) are attempting to mitigate potential asymmetries:

- **Fostering relationships rooted in equity:** Practices that include addressing biases in their networks, adjusting their communication to include more audiences, actively seeking to be more open and improving their outreach.

- **Building funding structures rooted in equity:** Initiatives that tackle the imbalanced structure of how funding is conceived, by adopting practices designed to shift decision making power from funders to movements, communities and organisations themselves. Includes practices such as participatory grantmaking, rethinking impact and adopting flexibility as both a principle and a practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Information Program and the Strategy Unit Lab at Open Society Foundations have commissioned this research project in order to identify potential opportunities for strengthening equity through funding practices within the tech and human rights ecosystem.

The relationship between funding institutions and potential grantees reflects, from the start, an unequal distribution of power, where many activists and civil society organisations typically rely on resources from few funders to carry out their work. The asymmetries between funders and organisations receiving funds–and between organisations competing for limited funding opportunities–often dictate how resources are distributed across the sector.

In addition, the way in which funding and philanthropic organisations and philanthropy are set up often means that individual grantmakers are distanced from the realities of the organisations they seek to support, constrained by their own positions and biases, and tasked with the almost impossible job of having an overview of an ever-changing and evolving landscape, no matter what sector they fund.

One of the ongoing tensions within philanthropy is the fact that, as a practice, it tries to address challenges caused by inequality or injustice through a mechanism born out of inequality–that is, the gathering and investing of resources by wealthy and affluent individuals, communities and countries and their distribution to causes and organisations without direct access to these resources.[1]

In recent years, trends such as #ShiftThePower[2] and feminist funding models[3] are pushing the sector to rethink its own practices through a reparation lens. Within the social justice and technology space, initiatives to start decolonising digital rights[4] also posit important questions for those in the field.

While these discussions around equity in this space are not new, they remain unresolved and urgent. In a year when we saw a global pandemic trigger socio-economic instability and worsen existing inequalities, and when major anti-racism protests sparked by ongoing systemic violence against Black people took place around the world, it is important that the philanthropic field reckons with its own reproduction of inequities and power imbalances.

This research hopes to add to this discussion, and beyond that, to provide tangible pathways for funders, intermediary actors and civil society organisations to think about their roles and practices. Alongside this, we aim to help individuals within these organisations to use whatever power they have access to in order to build a more equitable and just technology and human rights ecosystem.

2. OUR STARTING POINT

In this report, we rely on a number of 'shortcuts' and terms that can be understood in vastly different ways. Below, we cover some of the terms we will be using throughout the report whose definition and conceptual outlining are important to establish.

Tech and human rights ecosystem

The current ecosystem of actors who are supporting, protecting and advocating for human rights with their use of technology or within the technology space. It includes digital rights activists and organisations, actors who are developing technical solutions and/or providing digital security support for human rights defenders (HRDs), and actors protecting human rights particularly affected by technology.

Equity

The presence of fairness and justice, considering each specific context and its current power set-up. Not to be mistaken with equality (i.e. everyone having the same things), equity factors in existing needs and assets, and takes into account structural issues such as power, previous access, exclusion, opportunity, etc. Inequity, by extension, means a lack of fairness or justice.

Power

The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events,[5] or, more plainly, the ability to exercise one's will over others.[6] It is the capacity of different individuals or groups to determine who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda.[7] Expressed in many forms, power shapes all of the social interactions and overarching dynamics of a society, placing different individuals, social groups and institutions in different positions within a hierarchy. Power can manifest itself differently according to context, and can be itself contextual – e.g. an individual/group which has a certain amount of power in one specific context, might have more, less, or none of this power in another context.

Structural Racism

As put by Mimi Onuoha and Diana Nucera: "A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in mutually reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. A structural analysis of racism identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with 'whiteness' and disadvantages associated with 'color' to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it is a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist".[8]

Global South

A broad term to refer to low- and middle-income countries, commonly referred to as 'developing countries', located in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Oceania. We use it in part to acknowledge political economy matters and realities, which are related–but not limited–to histories of colonisation, domination, exploitation, inequity, etc. Global North, then, refers to countries mainly located in North America and Europe, often referred to as 'developed countries', themselves carrying with histories as colonisers and dominant powers. Some researchers acknowledge that there is an 'in between' group of countries that do not necessarily have colonial histories, and fail to achieve the same power status as developed countries that would be left out from this conceptualisation, such as Eurasian countries. One name proposed to this group would be 'Global East'.[9] However, for the purposes of this research project, Global South is meant to encompass all lower and middle-income countries.

Less visible actors

Meant to encompass local, newer and smaller organisations, informal collectives and activists doing important work at the margins who are not visible to funders and, therefore, have limited access to funding. It also comprises organisations and actors who are visible in some ways, such as those who have been recognised through international awards and receive invitations for talks and conferences, but remain unacknowledged by significant funding opportunities.

Intermediary organisations

A broad concept that encompasses international nonprofit organisations (INGOs) and regional organisations that act as re-granters, e.g. a middle entity between local organisations and bigger funders (such as foundations).

Funding practices

The different forms of funding available for civil society organisations, such as grants, fee-for-service and contract work, investment and individual fellowships.

3. BACKGROUND AND ECOSYSTEM OVERVIEW

Drawing borders around 'Tech and Human Rights'

The 'Tech and Human Rights' ecosystem is a hard one to define. For some, thinking about technology and human rights leads directly to considering how technology (negatively or positively) impacts our ability to claim our human rights online – that is, our digital rights. For others, technology and human rights is focused more on how technology affects our 'offline' human rights. Related offline situations could include things like algorithmic bias affecting one's ability to claim social welfare, or, on the other hand, smartphones enabling us to document human rights violations at a much broader scale than previously possible.

For the context of this report, we considered both perspectives as falling within the broad 'tech and human rights' space, taking into account the increasing overlap between the work of organisations who focus on 'digital rights' with more traditional human rights actors using technology to investigate rights abuses, or the abusive potential of technology. Broadly speaking, the sector has undergone a lot of transition over the past decade or so as digital technologies have become more widespread.

The new possibilities and challenges offered by technology in support of (or directly counter to) human rights – combined with relatively slow uptake of these opportunities by existing organisations – has led to a host of new organisations springing up over the past few years. These new organisations are often focused on specific issues, or they take advantage of new approaches to gathering data or using technology in pursuit of human rights. Older and more traditional human rights organisations have been slower to take advantage of new technological possibilities, sticking primarily to the same methods and approaches they have always used, with some organisations in the last few years establishing standalone teams or experimental 'lab' structures in order to pursue work in the digital realm.

In this research project, we look at the struggles of organisations who have had less access to funding , specifically those with less structural privilege, to better understand and make explicit the barriers they face. Many of these newer organisations have struggled to establish themselves in a financially or operationally sustainable way. They're often founded to address a particular social need, by people who may lack experience in navigating philanthropy, whose primary focus is (understandably) meeting the needs they see in their communities, rather the accompanying work required to establish and sustain a nonprofit organisation.

Some current barriers to equity

This 'soft work' around building and establishing nonprofits is opaque, without specific guidelines or concrete processes to follow. For example, relationship-building with funders, understanding who to approach and when, and developing strategies that both meet observed needs and fit within funder portfolios, are not skills that are routinely 'taught', nor easily clarified.

Much of this knowledge remains implicit, hidden behind barriers that are hard to overcome. In the case of relationship building, much of this happens between potential grantees and funders in informal settings – over coffee at a conference, or on the sides of workshops. Just getting into those spaces is a challenge for people whose passports require prohibitively difficult or expensive visas to enter much of the world. Getting the required introductions to set those kinds of meetings up can be similarly hard. These explicit barriers are compounded by implicit biases, such white saviorism[10] or colonial practices, whereby organisations led by (more often than not) white Europeans or North Americans are funded to address problems in the Global South.

In recent years, some funders have been moving towards increased transparency–publishing strategies online, or making their application processes explicit. There's been a distinct rise in 'rapid response' funds and general competitive grant proposal processes, where the same process is followed for all applications. But the majority of funds still come from institutions where the norm largely remains that they are not open to speculative funding proposals, or that they might only consider grantees who come via introductions from mutually known actors. Both of these practices make it incredibly hard for newcomers (especially for those without existing connections or privileged information) to know where to go or how to enter the space.

In this environment, both funders and larger organisations take advantage of the work of others–often through inequitable (and unfunded) 'partnerships' whereby work is 'shared' even if the lion's share is done by one (smaller) organisation. Larger, more powerful organisations request pro bono advice from smaller or newer organisations who might be closer to the communities or audiences they're trying to reach. In other settings, such advice would be considered a high-value consultation, but because of the power dynamic at play–and because these smaller or newer organisations are eager to be in contact with larger ones–the advice is freely given. Amid untransparent application processes, expectations are left unclarified, almost always to the benefit of the more powerful player, be that funders or larger, more established nonprofit organisations.

Challenges to tackling barriers and exploitative practices

Exposing these exploitative practices is difficult and will require concerted action from those holding power, not from those who are negatively affected by them. Amid limited resources, those less established actors are unlikely to burn any potential bridges in order to call out exploitative behaviours, especially because such a risky action might not result in meaningful change.

At the same time, individual funders and grantmakers find themselves in an almost impossible position–tasked with strengthening or building equitable ecosystems for the use of tech and data in human rights, while often operating as a single individual within a specific context, far from the realities of the grantees they work with. As individuals, they are often (though not always, in the case of newer funders or institutions) working within large, slow-moving institutions, where their own realm of control is limited and capped by higher-level strategy; upper management; and entrenched processes, approaches and culture(s).

Grantmakers have their own standards or goals that they are held accountable to for the grantmaking choices they make, which are often hard for grantees (or potential grantees) to come to grips with, assuming that these goals are shared in the first place. They need to be able to defend their choices to their teams or managers and demonstrate impact in highly specific and measurable ways, all while trying to meet the different needs of their grantees. As individuals, getting a 'lay of the land' of fast-changing ecosystems or communities can understandably be tricky given their positionality, and the information they receive is often twisted by the power that they hold – grantees or potential grantees may say what they think the grantmaker wants to hear in order to increase potential funding chances, whereas the grantmaker might just need to hear the truth.

Same same, but different

The challenges raised here are not, for the most part, unique to the tech and human rights ecosystem. However, there are some particular conditions of this ecosystem that we believe exacerbate many of these challenges.

Firstly: the fact that the ecosystem has many new organisations emerging from new technological possibilities. This ecosystem has evolved rapidly to reflect fast changing tech and data possibilities. As larger organisations have been slower to adapt to these possibilities internally, new actors have been created focusing on particular affordances of tech with relation to human rights – meaning that there are many smaller and/or less visible actors.

Secondly: the space for innovation afforded by sustainability has been enjoyed by the more privileged actors in the ecosystem. As described below, this also contributes to somewhat of an inequity cycle – groups who have stability and privilege also have the luxury of experimenting and innovating with new methods and new technologies, which then increases the chances that they come up with innovative (and fundable) new work. Groups who are focused on survival do not have that space to try out new approaches, and as a consequence, are far less likely to get funding for new ideas.

Finally: the fact that funding technology is new to most, if not all, grantmakers. Best practices on how to fund[11], what to fund and what not to fund are emergent at best, rather than being much more well established as they might be in other sectors. This means funders are less likely to know how to fund development of new tools in an equitable way, and often more likely to fund technology that (unintentionally) exacerbates these power dynamics, for example by being built by those in a position of power and implemented in very different contexts.

4. THE TECH AND HUMAN RIGHTS ECOSYSTEM: CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TOWARDS EQUITY

As stated earlier, the challenges and barriers faced by actors within the technology and human rights ecosystem with regard to both providing and accessing funding are in many ways the same as those faced and reproduced by philanthropy and the nonprofit sector at large.

One way perhaps that this ecosystem differs from others with longer or more established histories is that technology and data practices have evolved and changed rapidly over the past 5-10 years. This means that for the space to take advantage of new opportunities, either more established organisations have had to set up new teams or change their working practices; or, as we've seen is more common, newer actors have entered the ecosystem.

Our research identified some of the principal forms in which such challenges and barriers express themselves within this particular ecosystem.

4.1 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Structural barriers stem from the overarching frameworks that make up the environment that philanthropic and civil society organisations emerged from and operate within, i.e. issues that are related to and stem from existing power dynamics, inequality, scarcity of resources, unequal access and exclusion.

Power dynamics and their asymmetries manifest in many ways within a funder-fundee (or prospective fundee) relationship, given that one side holds a tremendous amount of power in the form of resources. These dynamics are most commonly conveyed through practices such as the ability to decide areas of interest, focus and priorities of work as according to funders' own strategies; the ability to make demands and complaints and have them addressed, and often one-way pressures over accountability and transparency.

Beyond that, our research surfaced that the main ways in which power dynamics unfold for technology and human rights organisations are:

Restricted access to funder networks

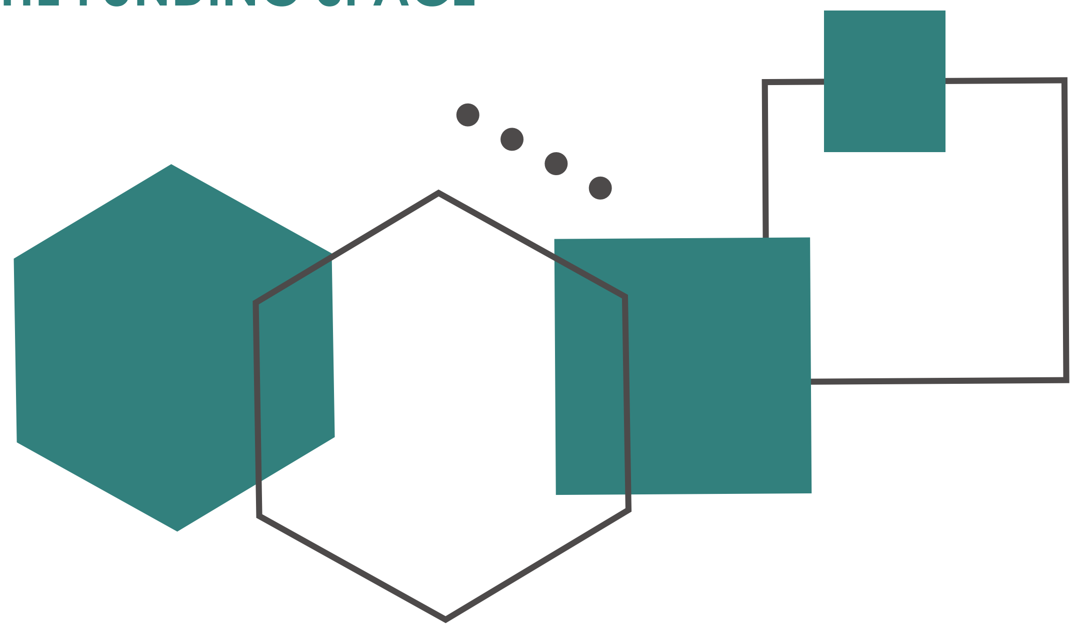
Though this has improved over past years with the emergence of more open calls for funding, most funding opportunities for civil society organisations doing tech and human rights work occur through connections to, and the fostering of relationships with, funders. It is through these connections that organisations get selected for invitation-only application processes, hear about funding opportunities, meet other potential supporters and funders and become visible to this set of actors.

Entering such networks, however, is not straightforward. “If you have access it is because you have connections, you speak the language, etc. Community-based organisations do not have the connections nor the capacity to communicate in the same way”, said one interviewee.

This access is often grounded in a set of exclusionary criteria such as prior knowledge of the philanthropic field (e.g. knowing its ways, its jargon and its accepted cultural behaviours), English fluency, nationality (e.g. passports and access to travel), access to resources needed to attend events, etc. Being in this space also demands people frame their work in legible ways for funders, which requires time and field-specific knowledge. It demands an exercise of fitting the organisations’ work within the funders’ goals. Particularly for smaller and newer organisations that work with few people (often volunteers until funding has been obtained) and have limited resources, this places an additional burden on even beginning to start the search for funding.

And once a connection is made, this is only the starting point. A number of civil society organisations interviewees expressed frustration over the hurdles they felt they needed to overcome to get an introduction, and then the amount of time and resources required to foster that relationship (e.g. by going to events and conferences, attending talks or even informal coffee meetings, taking lengthy calls), just for the *possibility* of support in the longer term. “Oftentimes that creates a pool of certain groups who get funding over and over again because of their networks”, says an interviewee, effectively highlighting the fact that entry in these funding networks can also have associated reciprocal benefits for those civil society organisations with access. These more privileged actors are more likely to get the latest information from grantmakers, understanding how they can adjust their strategies or work to align with grantmakers, and adapt to changing funder strategies, too.

BREACHING INTO THE FUNDING SPACE



• Step 1

Identify a funder who might be interested.

• Step 2

Find a way to get connected – ask peers, friends, existing funders.

Prerequisites: speaking the same language, being present in the same spaces, having enough online work for the connection to seem worthwhile to the funder.

> If no connection exists, find a way to get connected and understand what the funder priorities are.

• Step 3

Ideally, have a call or a meeting.

• Step 4

Likely share a strategy or some follow up concept note document.

• Step 5

If successful, be considered for future opportunities. If not, go back to step 1.

That brings the issue of exclusion to the forefront. That is, who are those left out, not visible, not participating in this space for lack of resources, time and the baseline conditions outlined above?

This is especially harmful given that many funding opportunities do not come through open calls but through invitation. While funders understand this to be a capacity issue on their side (meaning, they are not able to do open calls given their own limitations when it comes to staff), it puts a lot of pressure on grassroots and smaller organisations, who may feel a need to increase their visibility via activities that are not core to their programmatic work.

All of these set conditions and practices feed into an inequity cycle: organisations do not get funding because they do not have access to funder networks in the first place. Their work is not visible to individual grantmakers (though it might be extremely visible to the communities they seek to serve) and is therefore not funded. It is difficult to know what actually increases visibility to different grantmakers, as it depends on their specific ways of keeping an eye on their landscape, but this could include anything from:

- getting work funded by others;
- being included in research efforts;
- getting recommended by trusted actors (often established grantees or peer funders);
- presence on social media;
- visibility at major sector events; etc.

None of these options, however, are guaranteed to increase one's visibility to a particular funder or network. Funded work itself is also often what makes organisations visible to other support opportunities. So, they continue not to have access because they have not secured funding. "That means they disqualify people by default. So people who can access funding already have access. It does not leave room for people in the growth stage," says one interviewee.

These conditions and practices can also create a double workload for an organisation's leadership (particularly in smaller organisations): on top of being in charge of the organisation's programmatic work, they also need to invest a tremendous amount of time in trying to access such networks, increasing their organisation's visibility, building and maintaining relationships and learning the lingo. In cases where the organisation has a small staff and limited resources in the first place, this creates significant added pressure. This, again, is particularly difficult for people newer to the nonprofit world who might have set up an organisation in order to meet a specific community or programmatic need, and might not realise how much of their work leading an organisation needs to be focused on these kinds of activities in order to get funding and become sustainable.

Scarcity of targeted resources

The issue of scarcity of resources and opportunities for funding was also flagged as a major problem in the tech and human rights space. While this is a trait shared by most nonprofit work, it expresses itself in an exaggerated manner for tech and human rights organisations given the unclear outlining of the field and, consequently, limited funding opportunities that understand and support the work being done.

The issue-based breakdown of funding in the 2019 report “Advancing Human Rights - Annual Review of Global Foundation Grantmaking”, published by the Human Rights Funders Network, does not include a ‘tech and human rights’ category, nor its most known proxy, ‘digital rights’. The closest marker available to assess the resources provided for tech and human rights organisations would be through the categories ‘Human Rights General’ and ‘Expression and Information Rights’, which together made only 12% of the total grants given in the year analysed.[12] While the report showcases data from 2016, and there is reason to suspect there has since been an increase on portfolios dedicated to technology and human rights, it still provides us with an important marker to understand how (under) prioritised this type of work is.

A number of interviewees reported feeling disadvantaged as compared to other types of social sector work, given that the utility of their activities was not necessarily legible to funders, particularly those with lower levels of tech or data literacy. Interviewees shared, for example, that organisations doing anti-harassment work and gender-based violence prevention and survivor support online got overlooked both by traditional women’s rights funders, which do not necessarily understand the importance of action online, and by traditional human rights funders, who prioritise support for human rights defenders on the ground (who of course also very much need it).

At the same time, these organisations compete in the ‘tech funding’ space with actors doing widely different types of work–from digital rights and civic empowerment to social impact private enterprises. In this sense, tech and human rights organisations, operating in this somewhat grey zone of thematic areas, are left at a disadvantage when competing for funds. This also points to a known issue with philanthropic funding, which is the tendency for thematic programmes and organisations to operate in silos. Effectively, the lack of explicit acknowledgement of the sector of ‘tech and human rights’–or rather, of the potential need for technology-focused work as it relates to a human rights agenda–means that actors in this space need to either establish ties with relatively few funders whose portfolios do focus on this space, or come up with ways of making their work legible to more traditional human rights funders.

One strategy some interviewees pursued to find their way around this was by using personal fellowships to fund their organisation’s activities.

A problem with this approach, however, is that fellowships are usually tied to the work of an individual rather than an organisation, which can mean that work needs to be fit within the narrative of a single individual instead of acknowledging the collective effort that might have gone on to create it.

Another issue is that often most funding opportunities do not cover the resources needed for a newer organisation to actually establish itself– typically what would be hoped for is project funding that includes enough to fund the work on the project as well as some surplus to allow for other start-up activities (such as fundraising itself). “A lot of the time, what is available is not very big, which is a common problem for the continent. For example, hackathons are very sexy and in, but prizes are so small and not enough to build something. So you try to build and you fail because you are underfunded. Then the perception of ‘tech in Africa doesn’t work’ keeps on,” says one interviewee.

Funding is even more scarce with regard to maintenance of technology tools. The under-prioritisation of maintenance work - not by any means unique to this sector,[13] can make it even more difficult to create a sustainable tech tool. “We have found it’s very difficult to get funding for the tech work itself. When we do, it is usually project-specific, not maintenance. A lot of the work we do is maintenance and [adaptation of] the tech tool and workflows to meet changing circumstances. And there is very little funding for that,” says one interviewee.

However, it is important to note that, among the many impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic (discussed further below), one was highlighting the importance of work done through the internet, which in its turn is making organisations working on and with tech more visible.

The scarcity of funds in general also intersects with and is aggravated by an imbalance in the distribution of resources by region. A number of organisations from Latin America, for example, reported feeling left out of most resource opportunities, saying that the region is not viewed as a priority by funders supporting tech and human rights work who, in their view, tend to prioritise Africa and Asia. Understanding whether or not this is the case in reality can be difficult, as it would require a level of transparency of priorities and associated resources from grantmakers that is not typically granted.

Earlier this year, news that the Open Technology Fund was being dismantled hit the tech and human rights field hard. OTF has been an important funder in the tech and human rights ecosystem, being responsible for open source tools such as Signal, Tor, and Tails. A group of nearly five hundred organizations reacted by signing a letter[14] demanding that the United States Congress continues to support OTF. The concern generated by the potential dismantling of OTF is understandable, as the possibility of the field being severely harmed is imminent, especially for actors and organisations based in the Global South and/or belonging to traditionally oppressed and excluded groups, such as LGBTQI.[15] As a sector with limited funding dedicated to internet freedom and to digital infrastructure, threats made to one funder have the potential to destabilize the ecosystem as a whole. This speaks to the status of scarcity that the ecosystem still faces.

Attempting to achieve equity in the tech and human rights space is also about shaping an ecosystem where there is enough funding available for a variety of work, including anti-censorship and privacy tools, and this process might require funders to allocate more resources to tech and human rights work and actively thinking about the how to allocate this resources equitably.

From the funders side, scarcity of resources was flagged as an issue mainly by public foundations and re-granter organisations, given that they have to fundraise to ensure their activities. In a resource-scarce environment and especially in times of crises, these actors tend to prioritize current grantees and their support, instead of doing new open calls. That, once again, tends to put newer and emerging organisations in a more precarious position when seeking funding.

Extractive practices

Another challenge faced by under-resourced and less visible actors is navigating an environment permeated by extractive practices in many forms, from funders, potential funders, intermediary organisations and even peer organisations. Knowledge and resource sharing requests without any type of compensation, and especially without financial recognition of work done, seem to be quite common in the tech and human rights ecosystem. Again, this is not specific to the tech/human rights scenario, but rather, a relatively widespread practice across many spaces.

This type of practice can occur on different scales.

While asks can sometimes be relatively light and presumably well-intentioned, they can also place an undue burden on smaller organisations. One interviewee reported feeling like they were an unpaid political consultant to their grant manager, as every time a political event happened in their country or region they would get an email or a call asking for a full explanation, regardless of whether it was related to their area of action. The power imbalance at play means that they were unwilling to refuse to do this work for fear of upsetting the relationship, but also then found themselves in a situation of having to divert time from actually doing their work. Often, these asks would be a consultancy in any other context (e.g. asking for work and insights on a specific topic), but in this space of unequal power dynamics, they are frequently done without any payment. “You are the first one to pay for my time,” one interviewee said to us when recounting their experience of being asked by a big foundation for a mapping of organisations doing women’s rights work in a neighbouring country.[16] The work was done without any sort of payment, support for the activist’s organisation or acknowledgement. “I did it because I wanted the organisations to get the resources”.

Moreover, many so-called ‘partnerships’ among civil society organisations are actually reproducing and fostering extractive practices. This is particularly true with regard to the attitudes of established organisations towards smaller and newer grassroots actors (see more in the intermediary organisations’ role section below).

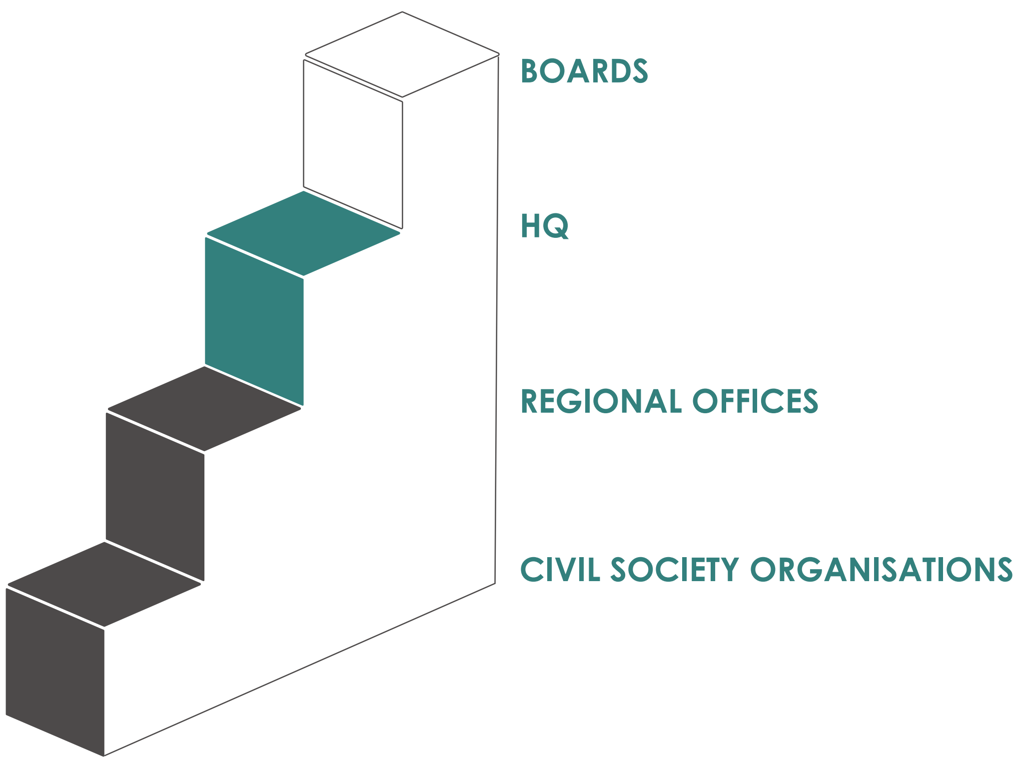
Structural racism and privilege

As in any other aspect of our lives, structural racism also plays an important role in the way interactions and decision-making occur in the tech and human rights space. Taking into account that tech work in general, and tech infrastructure specifically, is predominantly white and Global North-based, the issue is even more prominent. This is compounded by the increased visibility and power held by certain demographics–specifically, white men based in Global North countries, who benefit from colonial dynamics through which their knowledge and expertise are prioritised over, for example, more traditional forms of knowledge held by indigenous communities.

Amongst interviewees, there was the overall perception that funders just do not trust Global South organisations, and/or black and POC-led organisations, to manage resources in an effective and reliable manner. “There is a problem with the way that people view Africa. As a monolith of people, no perspective of individual needs and realities. Agendas always come fixed from somewhere and implementers have to make it work with their context,” said one interviewee. The lack of transparency on where these agendas are coming from makes it even harder for potential grantees to understand why certain decisions are being made, or to engage in informed discussions if different opinions are held.

Interviewees reported that they see funding choices in both the Global North and the Global South prioritising white and/or dominant group-led organisations to the detriment of Black-, POC-, LGBTQI-, minoritized groups-led actors. It is also worth highlighting a common experience of organisations led by Black women, which is pitching projects to funders in boardrooms filled solely with white men. "You see people of colour having to beg to a non-diverse team. The funder text is all about inclusion, but the actual practice is different," says one interviewee.

This alludes to an important aspect of the equation: the composition of philanthropic foundation staff and boards. It is true that more recent attempts coming from a 'diversity' starting point for philanthropic staff have been carried out and publicized widely, including increasing trainings on 'diversity and inclusion' sensitivity, appointing specific directors to lead efforts on the issue and public commitments to a ddress it.[17] Though teams might have become less white and Global North-centric, the leadership of these teams is still very much white and from the Global North. In this sense, those who actually hold most power within these spaces, such as board members and financial advisors, are all from the same, roughly homogenous, background.[18]This means that even if foundation staff are based in the countries they are funding (often referred to as 'regional staff'), they are ultimately accountable to people who are far from the realities they are working within.



A further structural problem here is that staff based 'in region' are often tasked solely with working on their region – whereas staff based in Global North countries are tasked with 'global' issues. This pigeonholing of regional staff (as their knowledge is seen as being centred solely around their region), and assignment of extra power to North American or European staff (whose knowledge is considered to be applicable to regions far beyond the one they are from), further exacerbates unfair power imbalances and is in effect one way in which structural racism is exhibited.

Two important issues that directly affect the work of funders emerge from that. One is what data-feminism scholars Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein refer to as 'privilege hazard': "the phenomenon that makes those who occupy the most privileged positions among us–those with good educations, respected credentials and professional accolades–so poorly equipped to recognize instances of oppression in the world".[19] In homogenous, privileged environments, what will be deemed as a priority and solution will most likely not be compatible with what is happening in distinct communities. This then affects the impact and actual efficacy of the type of funding and support designed and given.

The second issue is that bringing people in from 'diverse' (i.e. non-white) backgrounds without addressing the overarching leadership and power structures of an organisation can often mean then you are bringing a person in to fend for themselves in what is most likely a violent space.[20]

All of these issues can be at least partially addressed on the funder-side through more intentional practices to at the minimum mitigate the effects of structural racism, such as directed effort for diversifying networks, prioritising organisations led by marginalised groups, etc (read more on section 5). But fundamental change can only happen if institutions collectively commit to reevaluating their own structures and practices in an honest and accountable manner.

4.2 BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS

The second set of challenges faced by organisations in the tech and human rights space comes from the bureaucratic practices and requirements for accessing support from funders at large. This encompasses grant and general funding application processes, reporting obligations after the funding is secured and legal requirements to be considered for funding in the first place.

Funding application processes

Organisations interviewed in this research reported spending a minimum of 40 hours (spread over one to two weeks) per grant application, a task often involving at least two people. While established actors may have a dedicated person working on fundraising, if not a whole team, for smaller and less visible actors this is a significant investment in a process which has uncertain results.

Each funder also has its own grant application process and requirements, making it difficult for organisations to use work done for one application in another, something that would decrease the amount of labour demanded from the overall process.

Another common issue raised was the lack of transparency and foresight in the application process. For example, one could go months without hearing back from funders after submitting applications or proposals and then have additional asks requested at short notice. This interferes with long-term planning for organisations, who find themselves having to drop work to tend to these requests, which might, again, not materialise in resources. On the funders side, it is worth noting that most final funding decisions need to be vetted by either executive-directors or boards, according to grantmakers interviewed. This highlights the issues around hierarchy within funder organisations and how the relationships within those spaces occur.

Reporting obligations

Once funding is secured, the reporting obligations that organisations need to comply with are often labour-intensive and burdensome. While many requirements are a reflection of what donors need to report themselves for government authorities and their own constituencies, the ways in which reporting is demanded and the lack of clear reasoning and transparency by funders towards their grantees was relayed as a relevant problem.

Organisations interviewed reported having trouble complying with strict demands for accountability that do not acknowledge the particularities of their work or the context in which they operate, including for very small sums of money. “ We do a lot of field research and researchers take motorcycle taxis or public transportations. Donors want receipts of those [which do not exist]. We started printing sheets and asking the taxi driver to sign their name and phone number. Feels like a fight over 5 USD. Why don’t funders just trust that they took the taxi?” said one interviewee.

This is a significant hurdle, especially considering that most initial grants for smaller and newer organisations are for programmatic work and do not cover structural and administrative overhead. That means that on top of doing the programmatic work, staff find themselves stretched to comply with requirements. “Reporting and accountability to funders [as it is] is just unfit to smaller organisations’ realities,” says one interviewee.

The theme was framed mostly as an issue of trust–funders trusting their grantees and their work, and organisations not trusting funders will not leave them hanging if they do not fulfil every single bureaucratic demand.

Bureaucratic violence

As anthropologist David Graeber argues, bureaucratic procedures that are founded on situations of structural violence inevitably create more pervasive social inequality and “wilful blindness” leading to people being required to do tasks that are unhelpful, because they are “invariably ways of managing social situations that are already stupid.” [21] By structural violence, we mean “the systematic ways in which social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals”.[22] It “is subtle, often invisible, and often has no one specific person who can (or will) be held responsible.[23] This approach can be observed in the role that bureaucracy plays between funders and grantees.

Given that reporting obligations are currently a standard part of contractual agreements between funders and grantees, as things currently stand there is little space to negotiate, particularly if/when situations change. As put by one interviewee working at a funder organisation: “Paperwork and metrics are practices brought to nonprofits from the business world, under the assumption people can’t be trusted. But that [excessive paperwork/reporting] is just a security blanket, to work around the fact that there needs to be more trust and not more paperwork or burdensome processes necessarily.”

There is also a lack of clarity around the reasoning behind these requirements. “What is the logic to compile all of this information? How will this translate into benefits for grantees and the populations they work with? Donors and intermediary organisations operate under a logic of ‘it is what it is, we have always asked that’,” said one interviewee.

“[Funders] usually use excuses like: ‘this is the framework we use, these practices come from higher authorities’. It is just a lot of ‘faceless decision making’. Everything has to be accountable to them, but no one holds these funders accountable,” reflects another. Though individual grantmakers – and indeed, likely their managers or team leads – are held accountable for how they spend their funds, how these accountability processes work are largely untransparent for individual grantees. For example: what exactly are grantmakers held accountable for, and how does this accountability work further up the chain? Are there ways in which these processes could be made more transparent to provide much-needed context for grantees struggling with the 'downstream' consequences? This also highlights the problem of siloed processes and approaches within foundations – while individual grantmakers might deeply trust their grantees, they have zero control over the operational constraints or processes that those grantees are subject to as a condition of receiving their grant.

An additional issue, brought up by a number of organisations, were the frequent delays from funders in sending contracts, renewal proposals and, more gravely, the payments themselves. Interviewees reported common experiences of payments arriving six months after the previously set date. This is harmful in many ways: it affects the organisations' cash flow, long term planning and overall financial health and standing. Looking at this through a reciprocal lens – for example, if a grantee were six months delayed in submitting a report – the consequences would almost certainly be more severe than if a funder were six months delayed in paying out funds to a grantee.

Legal entity requirements

Another obstacle for small and less visible organisations to access funding is their formal legal status. Often, a lot of them start informally, through volunteer networks, action collectives, etc. Some, even after they grow and are organised, do not necessarily want to formalise their status, for multiple reasons – such as government crackdowns on formalised NGOs, unclear tax burdens or status requirements. Nevertheless, their work continues to be important and impactful, and therefore, should have access to support. Given that most funders themselves are under regulatory constraints that prevent them from giving money to non-registered entities, that puts these informal setups in a precarious situation to get resources.

The practice of fiscal sponsorship by established actors for such organisations seems to be not only a useful pathway for informal collectives and newer organisations to access resources, but also a way for smaller organisations to tap into funder networks (which as we pointed out earlier, is essential). "After we did a grant partnership with this intermediary organisation, we were able to diversify a lot of our sources of funding. The idea of the partner organisation was for us to grow and establish ourselves. We started as three people without a salary and now are six people working full time," said one interviewee.

An additional barrier is the absence of quicker, smaller grants that tend to smaller organisations' more immediate needs. "There are groups who want funding to print a 1000 page petition and they don't want anything to do with you after that. Funding requirements are different for different organisations and different groups. There is no one to reach out to if you need 500 USD," points one interviewee.

Generally speaking, the main need from smaller and less visible actors in terms of the bureaucracy related to access to funding is flexibility (read more in section 5.2)–flexibility with deadlines, with reporting requirements, with their legal status. That would mean an understanding approach of partnership by funders, grounded on the knowledge that different organisations have different capacity, needs and abilities to respond. It also implies trust and two-way accountability. The current lack of transparency on how accountability functions within grantmaking organisations means grantees are operating without vital context, leaving them feeling mistrusted or like they are carrying out tasks with no real purpose.

4.3 ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Beyond structural and bureaucratic challenges, organisations in the tech and human rights space face a myriad of other barriers and practices which tend to feed inequity cycles. Here are some of them.

Lack of core and multi-year funding

A common theme across most interviews done in this research was the issue of availability of core, flexible funding. This does not come as a surprise, since in recent years this theme became widely discussed amongst philanthropic and nonprofit actors at large, as organisations pointed and advocated for more multiyear core funding as means to ensure autonomy, resilience and sustainability in the long term. Most grants available for organisations that are not established yet are programme-or service-based, which puts a lot of constraints on using such resources. From the grantmakers perspective, initially assigning grants with more constraints makes sense as a trusted relationship is established (particularly for newer actors where e.g. quality of work, or ability to deliver, might be harder to assess). However, the current lack of transparency on what is required to turn a relationship that begins with project-based grants into core or multi-year funding leaves grantees unsure what they need to do in order to make that transition possible.

While discussion on this is fairly mainstreamed at this point, and there have been important initiatives to tackle the issue[24], this does not mean that the availability of core funding has increased significantly, especially when talking about newer and smaller actors. This compromises their ability to build reserves, think long-term and collaborate with other organisations.

“Funders often focus on programme, only programme and not on accounting, structural issues, being registered, fiscal requirements, etc. This becomes also a challenge in movements, too. There is little funding out there for institutional building and strengthening”, said one interviewee.

It is also worth noting that the precariousness lived by organisations both in and out of the tech and human rights space affects the work in a collective manner. “Funders don’t understand context on the ground. When we talk to organisations on the ground about tech and data they respond: ‘how will we think about that if we don’t even know how we are going to fund ourselves next week?’”, says one interviewee.

Impact and evaluation

The issue of how impact is defined and measured and, more importantly, how organisations need to fit their work into ready-made metrics of success was also flagged as a relevant challenge for less visible actors. This issue feeds back into the one-way accountability discussion already mentioned, involving both legibility of work and activities to funders and bureaucracy. It is also very important, given that continuity of funding and support is often contingent on hitting these markers.

Usually, grantmakers request measurable success indices, which – by the very nature of being ‘measurable’ – skew towards being quantifiable pieces of data, such as number of people reached, number of workshops held, etc. However, these types of measurement might simply not fit local contexts, the nature and type of work done by organisations and, for that, be ineffective.

“Systems are so formalized that people feel discon- nected to them”, says one interviewee from a funder organisation. “We need to be moving away from quantitative metrics that miss the point of assessing grantee progress and organisational health”.

It also raises a more complex question of: how can you actually measure social change? Should that, measuring it, be the goal in the first place? A lot of important work being done in shifting conversations–influencingdiscussions and confronting harmful social norms may simply not fit in a one-year grant cycle definition of what 'success' is. I nstead, much of the work of organisations either takes much longer to see 'change', and much of the meaningful work of social movements can only be seen on a generational scale.

More recently, practices such as storytelling for impact have gained ground as alternative ways to assess impact without the imposition of ready-made indices and markers from funders. Allowing space for organisations themselves to define what impact and success are and looks like is also another strategy, which seems appropriate from a power-shifting point of view (read more in section 5).

Closing civic space

The crackdown on civil society seen from authoritarian states and right-wing governments around the globe is an additional and crucial challenge that organisations within the tech and human rights space are facing and will continue to face.

The main ways we see this unfolding as relates to this project, as relayed by our interviewees, are governments using bureaucracy and regulation to create additional hurdles for organisations to register, receive money both domestically and from abroad, and do their activities.

This presents fundamental challenges for funders in terms of how to get resources to organisations in contexts that face this crackdown – and likely, being willing and able to put extra effort into finding creative ways of working around this extra bureaucracy

The role of intermediary organisations

The role performed by intermediary organisations, i.e. international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and regional organisations that act as re-granters, was an issue cited in most of the civil society interviews done in this research. There was an acknowledgement from smaller and less visible organisations that were it not for the grants they had with these types of actors, they would not be able to fund their activities in the first place. At the same time, reports of extractive practices, one-way accountability, and general frustration with both the way partnerships are carried out and what is perceived to be a resource waste – such as high salaries – were expressed by most organisations we talked to.

A common narrative that emerged during our conversations goes as follows: INGOs are given funding and resources to then partner up with local organisations who receive a smaller portion of that funding to carry out their activities. These types of arrangements point to the fact that while INGOs may be useful facilitators, they also occupy a privileged position in the tech and human rights space. Local organisations, then, many times, feel their work is further invisibilised instead of amplified and elevated. "We are working on the ground, risking lives, and not even getting enough money to pay our passionate team members who do all the work. When you compare their salaries with those intermediate organisations, it just makes you angry at all the inequality in this field", says one interviewee.

That is already the case with formal grant partnerships with these actors. Some organisations also reported being approached with requests by larger, established organisations without providing any compensation or support offered. "There is a power imbalance with bigger NGOs. It's a small scene and it's hard to raise these issues, especially when some of these people used to work with you", says one interviewee.

There is also the distinct perception that intermediary actors are using their position to pursue projects in which they do not necessarily hold any particular expertise. Once they secure the funding, most of the work is outsourced to local organisations for a fraction of the money received.

"INGOs should give money to local organisations and redistribute functions within INGOs work. Right now, INGOs are vampiring away resources", says one interviewee working as an independent consultant. "Big INGOs often have all the resources to experiment and none of the responsibility to maintain. And local organisations end up with the responsibility to maintain programmes and work, despite lack of resources".

As intermediaries between funding institutions and actors with less access to funding, it is important that intermediary organisations acknowledge their position within these power dynamics. As power brokers, INGOs must ensure that they strengthen the work of local and community-based organisations rather than take away the resources and visibility these organizations deserve (see more on section 5). In some cases, this might mean actively stepping away from potential opportunities; or seeing their role not just as regranters, but as facilitators of relationships between grantmakers and their own local partners. In this sense, a 'success metric' might be seeing a 'local partner' of an intermediary become a direct grantee of their own funder–but as described above, these kinds of behaviours are rarely, if ever, formally incentivised.

4.4 IMPACT ON ORGANISATIONS AND PEOPLE

All of these challenges and barriers exert, of course, tremendous stress on organisations and the people doing work on the ground.

As a consequence of the factors highlighted above, staff at these smaller or less visible organisations are operating within a context of financial strain, and an overload of work. In addition to the more immediate concerns are ongoing struggles such as grappling with ethical dilemmas over appropriate partnerships, who to turn to for resources, and degrees of autonomy and sustainability within those partnerships for their organisations.

Reports of psychological pressure and burnout were fairly common amongst our interviewees.

This pressure and burnout result in high turnover of staff in some organisations, given the impossibility of appropriate compensation or manageable workloads. This hurts efforts towards work continuity and institutional memory building – as well as, ultimately, the mission at hand. We have also interviewed organisations doing frontline work relying almost solely on wide volunteers networks. While this itself is not an issue, it can also compromise the continuity of activities in the longer term.

The current funding setup also fosters an environment of competitiveness instead of collaboration amongst organisations doing similar or complementary work and who would benefit from partnering with each other.

This raises important issues funders should be aware of and work to address. Funding causes in equitable and sustainable ways also means funding people and support in a more holistic way, one that assumes an inclusive definition of care.

4.5 IMPACT OF COVID-19

This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and, as such, many of the reflections that emerged from our interviews were shaped by this context. A lot of our conversations revolved around how to adapt and continue doing work, the uncertainty of the future and the need to be thinking about resilience and sustainability of organisations in times of crisis. These issues were also discussed collectively in a community call held with civil society interviewees.

According to most accounts, the general response from funders since the start of the pandemic was one of understanding and flexibility–towards deadlines, restrictions on funds, reports, etc. This highlighted the fact that more flexibility from these actors is, in fact, possible, which is an important learning to carry forward even after the crisis is overcome. This dynamic–of actions previously described as impossible suddenly becoming possible during or after the pandemic–can be seen across many areas of public life.

While this was praised, organisations also reported that some funders were pushing for programming to be done online, even if contexts would not allow. “Funders have been very keen on replacing activities, but a lot of that just can’t be translated online, people are exhausted from being online. We give feedback showing it hasn’t been impactful, but they seem unwilling to address the elephant in the room, which is accessibility”, said one interviewee.

“They still want to quantify stuff, still have to be in that frame, we are still working with the language of deliverables”, said another interviewee.

This highlighted somewhat of a clash of expectations and needs. On one side, dropping activities is presumably not ideal for a grantmaker who needs to justify their investment, but, on the other, having the flexibility to recognise that certain activities are no longer feasible nor useful in the changed context is an important recognition.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of robust digital work practices – considering, for example, digital workflows as well as digital security practices, and resilient technical infrastructure. For many organisations, getting investment or support for their infrastructure was, until recently, not seen as a priority by funders (nor, indeed, by many of the organisations themselves).

There is also the overall impression that the current scenario invites us to a reflection over budgets for established and more powerful actors. For example, the issue of resources spent on travel by INGOs and other established organisations seems to be something that will come under the scrutiny as we move forward, i.e. is it worth it to spend resources on HQ staff travelling – or is this better spent directing resources to partners or regional staff? These conversations would benefit greatly from being held under the perspective of getting more resources to local and less visible actors.

5. FUNDING AND SUPPORT PRACTICES FOR EQUITY

We have identified two main areas where funders attempt to mitigate potential asymmetries. One area concerns how funders relate to actors in the space. This set of practices include addressing biases in their networks, adjusting their communication to include more audiences, actively seeking to be more open, and improving their outreach. The second area tackles the imbalanced structure of how funding is conceived, by adopting practices designed to shift decision making power from funders to movements, communities and organisations themselves.

5.1. RELATIONSHIPS ROOTED IN EQUITY

A prevailing trend throughout this research was the notion that securing funding is overly dependent on having prior access to specific networks, organisations or people. When describing their challenges as a program officer in a funding institution, one interviewee said: “funding looks impenetrable from the outside, but it shouldn’t.” A big part of realising a more equitable ecosystem requires dismantling the barriers that contribute to this closedness – an obstacle unanimously shared by the civil society/grantee interviewees we spoke to. In this section, we share learnings from feminist funds, participatory grantmakers and other funding institutions, who are restructuring their funding practices, a process which includes rethinking how they build relationships in this sector. It’s worth acknowledging that this work takes political will from within funding institutions to not only carry out the recommendations or best practices mentioned here, but also reflect these changes in related underlying structures as an ongoing practice.

Communication with actors in the tech and human rights space

Asymmetries of power between funders and organisations may come to life in how these different actors communicate to one another. Creating a more equitable ecosystem is a process that involves shifting how these actors communicate, behave and relate.

An important step is for funders to acknowledge these power dynamics and base their actions on the idea of ‘power with’ and not ‘power over.’[25] This means recognizing that while this field may be structured on power dynamics based on factors such as prior access to resources, geographical location, race, ethnicity and institutional affiliation, their actions as funders need to minimize those asymmetries. One program officer from a large foundation shared: “As a funder, as a grantmaker, [we] are a piece of an ecosystem that shares a set of goals we’re trying to achieve together. There shouldn’t be a hierarchy, we are just playing a role. We are not better equipped to make decisions just because we have resources”.

Feminist funds and participatory grantmakers shared that working to dismantle the notions of hierarchies within funding structures is an ongoing process, which involves acknowledging different positionalities, bringing members of the communities you are working with and creating dedicated spaces for open communication, feedback and accountability from all sides, not just–as identified in section 4–accountability from grantee to funder.

Mitigating network bias

A common challenge for many funders is mitigating biases in who is included within their networks. While funders may seek to have a holistic, unbiased bird’s eye view of the sector, our interviews showed that funders are also aware that their own perceptions create biases. A person working in a regranter organisation explained that bias towards established actors is something that they are constantly improving: “there is no answer to this yet, but I hope this is a question we continue to ask, especially if we want to have more diversity”.

A funding institution working with tech and human rights in Europe shared their intention of decolonizing their networks, which includes providing funding more broadly: “It’s always the same organisations [who get funding], we need to build more relationships”. For a feminist fund working primarily on LGBTQI issues, getting resources to smaller, informal actors, especially in the Global South is challenging.

In their experience, creating more open channels for potential grantees to access funders is an important step, which includes improving their outreach and developing relationships with advisors from the communities they serve.

“If you know 90% of the room, you’re in the wrong place”

In order to reach beyond the clusters of actors that they already feel acquainted with, one funder described a practice they call “ destabilizing their networks”. This means actively seeking to connect with actors with whom they haven’t before, including attending conferences and events they normally wouldn’t, diversifying the set of organisations and activists with whom they engage on social media, holding open office hours, and consuming content by organisations and activists with whom they are not familiar.

One interviewee working in strategic grantmaking shared that being overly reliant on existing connections is one of their biggest issues while dealing with power imbalances in the tech and human rights space. When trying to ensure their funding opportunities will reach beyond their existing networks, they develop strategies to engage with activists and organisations who may be less visible or well known, whose work may not attract funder attention or who may not have been acknowledged by other funding institutions. Among their strategies, working with intermediary organisations who function as regranters was described as useful.

Though these practices are innovative and do indeed begin to address problems mentioned in previous sections, it is worth noting that the decision to "destabilize one's network" was taken by an individual rather than being an institutionalised practice, or a best practice within the field of grantmaking. As long as addressing biases and developing better ways of working as grantmakers remains the task of individual grantmakers, instead of a generally incentivised or rewarded way of working, practices will be slow to change, with grantmakers from marginalised backgrounds themselves likely to be doing more work than their colleagues who do not choose to see acknowledging power imbalances as part of their roles.

Application processes

This section summarizes the practices of a variety of funding institutions whose application processes involve different steps to increase equity. These are practices that focus not only in narrowing the perceived distance between funding institutions and other actors in the ecosystem, but also in recognizing how different actors might access and experience application processes differently.

Outreach

Our research surfaced different outreach practices that can amplify equity, especially in the design of application processes. Successful outreach was frequently referred to as a process that ensures information about funding reaches communities who can benefit from this support, who are doing relevant work and who might not already be in a funder's network. Many funders shared that this is an area that they are constantly trying to improve.

Specifically, involving members from the ecosystem itself in the outreach process was highlighted as an effective strategy for broadening reach and addressing potential bias. A feminist fund shared that their annual outreach plan is built collectively with advisors from the communities they support, which amplifies their reach in those communities. Their current grantee partners play important roles in their outreach efforts as well. Funders have also shared strategies on how to expand outreach efforts beyond their existing networks. This included conducting outreach at events and spaces where they have not been frequently present at, reaching out to regional networks of practitioners and using social media.

Guidance and open communication

Interviewees highlighted the importance of providing guidance for applicants who may not have received funding from large funding institutions before, or who might not be familiar with a particular funding process. Practices for guidance vary: while some funders provide written guides and toolkits, others make room for conversations about the application process. One funder shared that they host “drop-in sessions”, where potential applicants are able to ask clarifying questions. This allows people to get a better understanding of funders’ strategies, their eligibility criteria and other relevant information in a more human or transparent way than simply emailing a faceless email address. Another example was a funder who set up a communications platform on Slack with all potential applicants, where people could ask questions, see public answers and exchange thoughts. The proactivity of funders in creating these spaces also makes it more likely that people will feel comfortable taking advantage of them and reduces the barriers to entry.

Language

The importance of communicating funding opportunities in different languages was highlighted by a variety of actors in tech and human rights space. Unsurprisingly, working knowledge of English is a specific ability that not all actors in this space possess, and English-only application processes prevent many organisations from learning of the existence of the funding opportunity, let alone applying. Notably, many feminist funders and participatory grantmakers publish information about their funding opportunities in multiple languages. In their experience, this has enabled them to reach wider audiences and attract relevant grantees/partners. Of course, funders’ ability to receive and review non-English applications is key to ensuring that the availability of multi-language information is actually meaningful.

The director of a tech and human rights organisation in Latin America, for instance, shared that since only part of her staff is able to communicate in English, grant writing becomes a tough process concentrated upon just a few people. “If these processes allowed for Portuguese applications, we would have more capacity to apply without it being burdensome on our staff.”

Beyond the languages in which applications are available, the jargon used in applications is also something many funders are working on improving. The entire realm of “proposal writing” was described by many interviewees as exclusionary. The deployment of specific jargon and terminology, which may be familiar to established organisations, end up ostracizing actors who have not had access to funding opportunities in the past. Other than the use of specific words or phrases, judgements around the ‘right’ or ‘appropriate’ style of writing can also be opaque and exclusionary.

As ever, a multiplicity of factors feed in here – access to knowledge (past successful applications); access to specific education experiences (which differentiate between ‘acceptable’, e.g. US or British English, versus English learned in other contexts); judgements on what makes ‘good’ writing often shaped by what’s considered ‘good’ in the Global North instead of in countries where applicants might be coming from; among others. One funder shared that to signal openness to these actors, they have a responsibility to demystify funding, which includes adapting their discourse by, for instance, creating application processes that include questions that relate to partners’ realities, and make expectations explicit rather than implicit.

Format of applications

A common thread across interviews related to the complexity of application processes. While actors widely recognize the importance of detailed applications and in-depth knowledge of the work grant seekers are doing, there were many instances where simplifying application processes was indicated as a way of democratising access to funding. Some funding institutions we interviewed described that the first step of their application process involves a simple concept note or a limited number of questions. If approved, the organisation is invited to submit a full proposal. This strategy prevents organisations, which are already under-resourced and overworked, from spending excessive time and resources in a proposal without confirmation of alignment with the funder.

The formats that funders request is another aspect of the process to keep in mind, as certain formats may lead to exclusion of certain actors. An expert from Latin America shared: “Funders need to do better context analysis of the organisations, who all have different capacities. The application process is going to be experienced differently by an indigenous community-based organisation than for a city-based, nonprofit with access to prior funding." As they increase their knowledge of local contexts, funders are accepting applications in a wide range of formats: online application forms, offline files sent via email, and audio and video applications.

Compensation

Many funders recognize that not all potential applicants have the resources or capabilities to spend time on lengthy application processes without compensation, especially considering that many actors seeking funding opportunities are under-resourced and understaffed. In order to acknowledge this, multiple actors described the need to be paid for the time and resources spent on detailed applications.

Feedback

Giving meaningful feedback to applicants was described by multiple actors as something that propels the ecosystem forward and strengthens future applications. One funder shared that it is common practice never to decline an application or an expression of interest without some form of feedback. "Indicating areas where applicants can improve is a way to move things forward." They also shared that this often prepares applicants for other funding opportunities: "getting an applicant to a 'constructive no' as soon as possible makes room for improving their proposal and even connecting them to other funders." An expert from a tech nonprofit in the Middle East shared that receiving constructive feedback from potential funders through meaningful communication channels is a helpful practice: "we don't want blanket responses. We want funders to take the time to give us feedback, to point us in the right direction."

According to different grantmakers, asking for feedback from grantees about their application processes has led to improvements, including changes in questions asked, deadlines, and format of submissions. Whether or not grantees feel comfortable offering that kind of feedback (given the power dynamic at play) is another question–offering ways for providing anonymous feedback could begin to address this.

Fostering a collaborative ecosystem

Creating a more equitable ecosystem is also about ensuring that the environment is fit for collaboration between different actors. We heard different accounts on how competitive the process of securing funding may be. At the same time, we also heard about how there could be more room for collaboration between the multiple expertises and various areas of work that constitute this ecosystem.

Some practices funders have successfully adopted to create a more collaborative ecosystem include:

- Facilitating connections between grantees who might be working on similar topics, in the same region or who are conducting complementary work.
- Encouraging organizations who might be more established to share resources and knowledge with actors who do not benefit from the same opportunities (e.g. informal collectives or organisations who haven't had access to prior funding).

One interviewee shared that one of their funders–after noticing their organisation was being overlooked by peers–connected them to organisations with whom they could develop partnerships. "They realised we were being bullied, so they made intros and encouraged other organisations to collaborate with and learn from us. During a training event with other grantees, they mentioned our name multiple times when citing examples of best practice. That's a good way to encourage partnerships and to use the power funders have."

Another practice that generates collaboration between actors is incentivizing organisations who benefit from successful funder-relationships to connect with others who might not have access to funding space, especially the ones led by vulnerable groups, minoritized communities and LGBTQI individuals.[26] One former grantmaker in Latin America talked about the importance of creating incentives for grantees from the digital rights space, for instance, to work with community-based organisations and organisations led by LGBTQI people.

Shifting the role of intermediary organisations

A usual path for different funders seeking to both generate more collaboration and reach less-funded actors is through organisations which function as regranters. A common narrative that emerged during our conversations involves international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) receiving funding and resources to partner up with local organisations who are awarded a portion of that to conduct activities.

In these types of arrangements, INGOs may work as useful facilitators. However, as discussed in earlier sections, these intermediary INGOs also occupy a privileged position in the tech and human rights space. Power imbalances quickly surface when INGOs and local organisations are working together[27]. INGOs often benefit from the privilege of having more visibility in the sector, are likely to have previous relationships with funders, and are frequently identified as experts when local, less known actors are not. Discrepancies in how resources are allocated and how the work of different actors perform is perceived are some of the ways these power imbalances materialize. While these connections between INGOs and local organisations can be meaningful and useful, it is important to create mechanisms to address such power imbalances.

One representative from a Latin America organisation working on digital rights shared that they feel a responsibility to recognize their relative privilege in the ecosystem. To address imbalances in access, they make it a habit of applying to funding in partnership with local community-based organisations, as a way to ensure that those less-known groups, many of whom are led by traditionally excluded peoples, are able to enter the space.

Funders could, for example, develop ways of recognising and limiting extractive behaviours. They could put constraints on the funding to prevent a regranter from keeping above a certain percentage of the overall grant, which would encourage further spending to other organisations. Or, intermediary organisations could be required to directly introduce funder organizations to local partner organisations, or to encourage local partner organisations to develop proposals that go directly to funders.

5.2 FUNDING STRUCTURES ROOTED IN EQUITY

While the previous section focused on how funders can communicate openness as a strategy to address imbalanced power dynamics in the tech and human rights space, this section looks at how funders can address inequity within their funding structures. This section includes practices shared by funding institutions and INGOs who are striving to build a more equitable ecosystem by shifting decision making power from funders to movements, communities and organisations themselves.

Decision-making about ecosystem's priorities

Some of the most innovative practices were ones that focused on sharing funding decision-making power with the organisations and communities who will benefit from the funding. Experts interviewed during this research mentioned that thinking of funding through a reparation lens may be a helpful framework to support funders in understanding how to shift decision making power. " It's about shifting resources back to the communities from where they actually came", one interviewee from an INGO explains. While this might help individual grantmakers see their responsibilities, it is worth noting that the bulk of funds held by philanthropic institutions are not at all treated like reparations – i.e. they are not in fact redirected back towards the communities from whom they came, but instead held as endowments by grantmaker institutions.

"The fields' priorities should be the funders' priorities"

As we heard, there is frequently a disconnect between what funder institutions identify as priorities within their fields and what emerges as priorities from organisations and activists. A funder described diverging perspectives from what they hear in internal strategy meetings at their institution and the content of their conversations with grassroots organisations and movements. To avoid perpetuating divergences and moving towards a more equitable ecosystem, many funders actively adopt practices to better centre their agenda on the context of grantees.

Shifting decision making power to the hands of the communities is a process that can take many different forms, varying in accordance with the possibilities funders have within their internal structures. The following practices describe varying ranges of participation in decision making:

- **Defining funding strategy with communities:** One feminist fund adopting participatory approaches designs its strategy collectively with a community made up of advisors from the regions where they work, grantee partners and hired consultants who belong to their target groups. In addition, their staff is largely composed of people from the communities in which they work. Another example is a regional digital rights emergency fund in Latin America, which defines its strategy with a closed committee of paid experts and activists from the region.
- **Funding strategy informed by communities:** Another feminist fund shared that their strategy is informed by the movements they seek to support. While leaning on their advisors for a full picture of the ecosystem in which they operate, this funder creates strategies based on what movements dictate.
- **Shifting strategy according to community feedback:** A large foundation recounted changes in its strategy were made based on grantees and movements' feedback, which demanded more focus on disability rights.

- **Trusting communities with resources allocation:** A grantmaker in the UK shared that the entirety of its grantmaking process is participator. This means that all decision making is in the hands of communities. From setting the agenda to electing grantees to deciding how money should be spent, this process relies on the assumption that people know and want what's best for their community. Furthermore, this process is rooted in accountability. "People can't leave the community in the way that other organisations can. If you're embedded in the community you have to deal with the consequences of funding decisions." A less radical approach adopted by a feminist funder as well as other funding institu tions involves having advisors from the communities they work with review applications and proposals to verify its relevance.

Shifting power in application processes

Participatory grantmaking has attracted a lot of attention, under the promise of making philanthropy more transparent and accountable. The distinctive feature of participatory grantmaking is the ability to "move decision-making about money— which many see as the epitome of power—to the people most affected by the issues donors are trying to address."[28]

In a previous section, we covered how communication around application processes may contribute to equity. This section is about how application processes can be built in ways that place decision making power about funding at the hands of communities. More specifically, we will share practices of application processes that involve participation from grantees, movements and organisations in varying degrees. Below is a non-exhaustive list of mechanisms used by different funders to incorporate elements of participation within their existing funding architectures[29]:

- **Eligibility criteria defined through participatory processes**, by members from the communities a given grant seeks to serve.
    - A community-led participatory fund shared that among their eligibility criteria is the prioritization of members from underprivileged communities and persons affected by structural inequality and oppression.
    - A feminist fund explained that, based on the strategy they design with advisors and consultations, their eligibility criteria is rooted in the community's priorities. This led to prioritization of feminist organisations who are LGBTQI-led and who haven't had access to previous funding.

- **Participation within selection processes:** The selection of successful applicants in a given funding opportunity may include varying levels of participation from movements and organisations.
    - Advisors such as community members and experts may review applications to check for relevance to the field's priorities and alignment with grant strategy, and to inform funders, who make the ultimate decision.
    - Community members, non-granters and experts evaluate applications and agree with the funders on where funding should go.
    - A collective of advisors, staff and community members conduct a screening process to check for relevance to the field's priorities and alignment with grant strategy. After this screening, the community of applicants ultimately decide amongst themselves where funding will go.
- **Taking diversity into account in application processes:** While diversity is not a simple concept, nor does it necessarily result in a flattening of power dynamics, considering the background and relative positionality of potential grantees is something different funders interviewed for this research indicated as a priority.
- **Provision of funding to participatory grantmakers:** Large foundations that are willing to increase participation in philanthropy but who don't have internal capacity to fully implement a participatory approach in their grantmaking process have shared that funding other participatory grantmakers can be a useful strategy.

Being accountable to the field

Increasing accountability to movements and organisations is crucial for funders to contribute to a more robust, balanced ecosystem. [30] This research confirmed that accountability is very much connected to power, and it is typically an inverse relationship. A representative from a participatory grantmaking mechanism shared that taking active steps to be accountable to the communities with whom they work with is fundamental to mitigate power imbalances. "At the end of the day, who you feel accountable to is ultimately who has power over the work you're doing". Beyond the responsibility to be accountable to their institutions, their own boards and donors, funders must be willing to be accountable to the movements and communities they work with.

Prioritizing communication and transparency are critical for building accountability. Taking active steps in informing grantees and other actors of their work, decisions and future plans is something funders are doing through:

- **Annual reports, newsletters and bulletins:** A feminist fund explained that to increase their accountability to grantees, they produce annual reports that have grantee partners as the target audience. This means that format, language and content are built with these communities in mind.

- **Transparency practices:** Funders shared that they take active steps in sharing information about their own fundraising, the protection of their grantees' data and their strategy.

Another important practice is building structures for movements and organisations to inform funders' strategies and priorities. This can take many forms, such as:

- **Formal structures for feedback** about funding architecture, funding strategy and funders' relationships with grantees, including developing mechanisms to listen and respond to this feedback. These structures may differ according to grantees' contextes, varying from anonymous surveys, to phone conversations, to group meetings.

- **Creating spaces for grantees and other relevant actors to state their needs and priorities which will then inform funders' agenda.** A feminist fund working globally shared that their strategy is built in partnership with advisors and consultants, which ensures their agenda is aligned with the movements they work with.

Flexibility

The need for more flexibility emerged in several moments throughout this research. Rigid funding flows are an obstacle for actors in the tech and human rights space, especially the ones who don't currently have financial stability.[31] When it comes to what types of funding are seen as the most supportive for movements and organisations, it is no surprise that flexible, core support grants come to mind.[32] When providing direct funding to grantees, these are more effective in allowing people to decide where money should be spent, in accordance with their needs. This strengthens organisations by allowing them to invest in fundraising, react to contextual changes, cover operation costs and spend resources where they are most needed.[33] Grantmakers, however, might need to demonstrate to their team, institution or board that a grantee will use unrestricted funds in a way that matches with their grantmaking strategy. Often, project-based grants are used as a way of building up trust and developing that relationship prior to moving to core funding. Alternatives to this approach are further outlined below.

A guiding principle when striving for flexibility within funding structures is attention to context. Understanding the context in which grantees and partners organisations are working in allows funders to better comprehend which areas of their funding architecture need to have more flexibility.

Many funders also recognize that, due to internal structures in their institutions, flexibility can be difficult to achieve. A program officer from a feminist fund recounted that in order to be more flexible with their grantees, they have been willingly diversifying their own funding to decrease their internal constraints. However, beyond the types of funding an institution can provide, flexibility can materialise in different ways throughout funding processes.

As a response to the cascading crises related to Covid-19, some funders have already demonstrated that increasing flexibility and creating unrestricted funds is a doable, tangible way of supporting organisations.[34]

During our interviews, funders shared different practices to increase flexibility in their processes:

- **Deadlines:** A feminist fund shared that they established transparent deadlines with grantees and allow room for grantees to confirm whether or not they are capable of fulfilling them. Further, they make themselves available for establishing more convenient, realistic deadlines.

- **Resource allocation:** While many funders face limitations when it comes to increasing the flexibility of how grantees are able to spend funds, we found that increasing flexibility in resource allocation is something many funders are trying to accomplish.

- **Flexibility in how resources reach organisations:** Certain actors face difficulties when trying to receive funding, either due to the character of their work or to their political context. To counter these, funders are using practices such as using fiscal sponsors or adjusting the amounts sent to grantees.

Community-led funding models exemplify how funding mechanisms can maximize flexibility, prioritize contextual needs and place decision making power in the hands of communities. A participatory grantmaker explained that in such models, grantees have both the necessary flexibility to decide how money should be spent and are still under significant accountability to their communities.

Rethinking impact

Many funders also shared relevant insights on rethinking their conceptions of impact. Using fixed, uncontextualized metrics as a way to assess impact in the tech and human rights space is seen by most as outdated.

Adopting reporting practices based on trust

Funding structures that include excessive reporting requirements, which can be highly technical and burdensome for under-resourced organisations, may make it hard for certain actors to engage with funding institutions.[35] Simplifying reporting mechanisms is something many funders are doing to facilitate the incorporation of a more diverse set of actors in this ecosystem. By building more minimal reporting processes, funders are being mindful of organisations' time and resources as well as reaffirming trust in these actors to make their own decisions.

A participatory grantmaker shared that reporting needs to be conceived with the realities of communities in mind and rooted in trust. Adopting what many call "people-led reporting" may be a way forward.

In that sense, many funders are trying to adopt varying forms of flexible and straightforward reporting. This may take different shapes: from only soliciting narrative reports, to minimizing the number of required reports a grantee has to provide during a grant, to simplifying the structure of financial reports based on different grantee contexts.

One strategy, for instance, is receiving reports through sessions or meetings, where grantees are able to report verbally when other reporting formats are not an option.[36] Another practice, shared by a feminist fund is only requesting a simple financial report and having flexible deadlines.

A funder operating in the tech and human rights field explained that their reporting is focused on establishing connections within their grantee community and opening up space for collaboration between grantees. In this funding structure, reports are shared monthly by grantees with their grantee community via a mailing list. While reporting follows no specific format, it is often a narrative message on what grantees are working on and challenges they may be facing, inviting collaboration from fellow grantees.

Non-financial support/additional forms of support

Overall, this research has found innovative forms of support that focus on strengthening actors based on their own demands and needs.

Focus on sustainability

A focus on increasing the sustainability of grantee organisations seems to be at the heart of relevantsupport. Beyond securing organisations' programmatic needs,fundershavea responsibility to strengthen organisations in ways that support their stability in the long term. As previously mentioned throughout this report, grant-receiving organisations want to have autonomy and there are many practical actions funders can take to help them achieve it.

- **Opportunities for diversifying sources of funding:** Funders shared having supported grantees with fundraising activities, designing new sources of funding, finding fiscal sponsors to enhance their fundraising capacity, and developing fundraising strategies. One former grantmaker working in the tech and human rights ecosystem in Latin America explained that it is crucial to allow organisations to use part of a given grant towards fundraising activities.
- **Connections between different actors:** Acting as connectors and bridges in the ecosystem is another form of additional support many funders mentioned. This includes setting up exchanges of skills between organisations; creating special grants for grantees to meet and collaborate amongst each other, to travel and attend convenings, conferences and events; and arranging for grantees to meet relevant actors for their purposes.
- **Connections between actors and funders:** One of the privileges funding institutions have is access to different networks of funders and the ability to communicate with them. Different actors shared practices for introducing actors in the tech and human rights space to fellow funders. Some host "brown bag meetings," spaces where organisations can communicate and meet other potential funders. Others conduct straightforward, direct introductions, or use conferences and gatherings as spaces to forge those connections.

Other potential forms of non-financial support could be gifting assets to nonprofits–for example, purchasing the building a nonprofit rents out as their office space and gifting it to the nonprofit; or, in the case of organisations working on land rights issues, purchasing land and gifting it to the relevant communities. The latter is a less relevant example for the tech and human rights space, but contributing to longer-term costs via asset transfer might be an area to explore to contribute both to sustainability, and, ultimately, to a rebalancing of equity in the space.

Capacity building

Having opportunities for capacity building is important for organisations to achieve sustainability and effectiveness, but that type of support must be aligned with the context the organisation is based in and with its own demands. One interviewee shared that it is crucial for funding institutions to invest in deep context analysis of the communities they work with in order to identify what type of support would be helpful. “While many funders assume that one organisation working with technology needs capacity building in one area; the organisation may actually need something else.”

- **Bureaucracy:** As a way to acknowledge that many organisations and actors have no prior knowledge of the intricacies of grant systems, many funders shared that they provide training to support grantees with operations, finance, accounting and reporting. These areas of support are especially useful for the organisational strengthening of under-re sourced actors in the space. One specific example is a funder who, while not having a specific organisation as a grantee, still included them in their training and shared valuable resources.

- **Tending to contextual demands:** Based on communications with grantees or on context analysis, funders may share support that is tailored to local or regional needs. One feminist funder shared that after hearing from many partners in Latin America about the need for care support for staff who had been experiencing burnout, they created a mechanism to provide groups with additional financial resources for that purpose.

- **Resources for organisational development:** Different funders shared that they created support mechanisms in the form of “labs,” meaning specific training spaces where grantees had resources to develop certain areas of their work, such as communications, diversity and inclusion and grant writing.

- **Communication to uplift grantees:** Something many funders do is provide support in the form of communication efforts to their grantees and other organisations in the tech and human rights space.

- **Other forms of support mentioned include** supporting grantees with recommendation letters, visa applications, fellowship and scholarship applications.

6. ON THE ENGINE ROOM'S POSITIONALITY

The reflections raised in this research would be limited if we refrained to critically inquire over The Engine Room's own positionality. It is not lost to us that having the opportunity to even conduct this research is connected to our own privilege as an international organisation, allowing us to have the space to imagine together with funders what helpful research contributions could be. Additionally, as an organisation, we are privileged to have relative sustainability and trusted networks with funders and other international organisations, which has inevitably influenced who we've spoken to, whose perspectives we've privileged. Therefore, when talking about how to promote a more equitable tech and human rights ecosystem, we need to look at our own practices and evaluate in what ways they help or hinder such effort.

Our attempts to mitigate (or acknowledge) our own privilege and bias focused on asking our diverse team for suggestions of who to speak to; using a 'snowball methodology' to reach out to people based on suggestions from other interviewees; ensuring diversity in our interviewee cohort; and generally considering knowledge that came from different sources (ie. not just academic literature), in different languages. In our work, we intentionally prioritise activist groups who are protecting marginalised communities and organisations supporting social justice.[37] Given the project focus and advocacy for equity, we felt it was important for us to establish within our research an acknowledgement of people's time and expertise. Therefore, we offered civil society organisations, activists and independent consultants interviewed compensation for their participation (read more on Methodology).

At The Engine Room–a team made up of people from ten different coutries and partners all around the globe, including many in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa – our work is grounded in a commitment to deconstruct power and the way we think about knowledge. Decolonising is then a "process of freeing our minds from colonialism but also as a lens to reflect on our work, power and methodologies"[38]. In practice, this means actively challenging epistemicide[39] and epistemic injustice[40], certain that knowledge comes from multiple sources, formats and languages. It means sharing the knowledge we produce, acquire and reproduce as we go. It means actively carving space for voices often silenced or ignored, which in a space such as tech, still very much dominated by white and Global North voices, is crucial. Through our support work, it means helping civil society organisations (locally, regionally and internationally) collaboratively and in partnerships to build their own capacity to carry forward the work they are best positioned to do. It also means supporting our partners in becoming more visible within our own networks.

This, however, must also mean a commitment to acknowledge that we may not always get it right – and in fact, that there will always be more we could've done. But that we will be striving to be better every time and to keep on learning about ways. Perhaps what we can offer as a blueprint to other organisations seeking to be more accountable and do more equitable work is exactly there: a commitment to never settle, always keep learning and keep pushing to deconstruct their own practices.

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ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

Our research methodology was comprised of three main stages of work:

Desk research

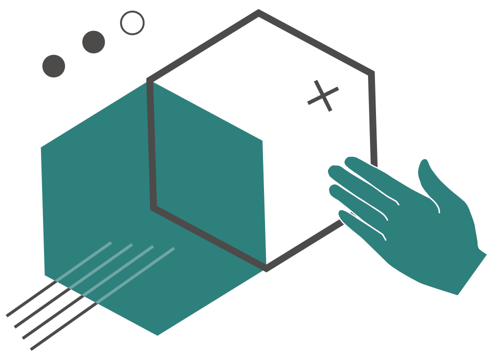
- A comprehensive, while not exhaustive, literature review was carried out in preparation for interviews and during the course of the project. Issues covered include, but are not limited to: feminist funding practices, human rights funding practices, participatory grantmaking, etc.

Interviews

- A total of 24 interviews were completed, 11 of them with civil society organisations and activists, 10 with funders/ grantmakers, and 3 with independent stakeholders working in the philanthropic space.
- The aim with all actors was to identify challenges and barriers for accessing funding and support, what are the interesting practices they saw in the tech and human rights space and outside of it, and how, in general, more equitable practices could be fostered.
- Payment policy: given the project focus and advocacy for equity, we felt it was important for us to establish within our research an acknowledgement of people's time and expertise. Therefore, we offered civil society organisations, activists and independent consultants interviewed USD 75 as compensation for their participation.

Community call

- After the first phase of interviews with civil society rganisations and activists was concluded, a community call was held with those interviewed to open a discussion on Covid-19's impact and to share experiences and knowledge from their particular contexts.



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