



November 12 2020

Donors Must End Racist African Aid Culture And Fund Grassroots Women

In this open letter to donors, Nimco Ali, CEO of [The Five Foundation](#), Leigh-Anne Pinnock, Jameela Jamil, Kate Kamau, Isha Sesay, Janet Mbugua, Gina Din, Myriam Sidibe and Wandia Gichuru are demanding a step change in the way gender equality work is funded on the African continent.

Dear Donors,

When you invest in African women you help us to lift ourselves, our families and our communities out of poverty and into prosperity. When this happens at scale, entire countries can benefit from the increased value of women and girls, who can now fully contribute, with less fear of being held back by violence and discrimination.

However, despite empty promises to “do better” and to involve recipients in decision-making, the world’s largest foundations and bilaterals have often used an approach to international aid on the African continent that withholds power, excludes and disempowers women, and fails to increase the capacity of the committed gender equality activists who lead change at the grassroots level.

We have seen time and time again how they are happy to use African women on the covers of annual reports, or as the “faces” of fundraising drives, but almost never directly fund the women’s groups they represent. This amplifies inequalities and leaves women even further behind than before.

The data backs this up. Incredibly, AWID reported last year that [only 1% of gender equality funding reaches women’s organisations](#) - and while Africa is not segmented within this, our experience would suggest that the continent’s frontline women’s groups are some of the most excluded.

We have less than a decade to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, including the central Goal 5 (Gender Equality), alongside an urgent need to recover from COVID-19, which has caused devastation and exposed the enormous gaps in how international aid is distributed.

Against this dire backdrop ***we are requesting you, as trusted allies in the space who have pledged to support the rights of women and girls, to directly fund African women’s organisations***, so we can collectively shift the dial on ending female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage and other forms of gender based violence, while flipping the switch on economic injustice and women’s economic empowerment, and fueling girls’ education.

We hope you will join us in this once in a lifetime opportunity to build back better for Africans - and for all of us. We are tired of platitudes and demand tangible and transparent investments in [frontline women’s groups on the African continent](#).

At this moment of reckoning in the world, where *Black Lives Matter* has become a mantra and a mirror that can be held up to expose the inherent racism in our society, let's also hold a mirror up to the international aid sector, which claims to want to end inequality, racism and violence against women and girls, but which rarely puts its money where its mouth is when it comes to women's grassroots activism - the only way we will ever achieve a more equal, safe and prosperous African continent.

Yours sincerely,

Nimco Ali OBE, CEO of The Five Foundation

Leigh-Anne Pinnock, Artist, Little Mix

Jameela Jamil, Actor and Activist

Kate Kamau, Actor and Activist

Isha Sesay, Journalist and Founder of W.E. Can Lead

Janet Mbugua, Founder, Inua Dada Foundation, Author and Media Personality

Gina Din, Founder, GDCC

Professor Myriam Sidibe, Author and Founder, Brands On A Mission

Wandia Gichuru, Founder, Vivo

@TheFiveFound #AfricasFemaleFuture #FundAfricanWomen

"With Black Lives Matter we have had a rare opportunity to hold a mirror up to society to see how we can improve the way we deal with racism - including in the international aid sector. As an activist, I have seen how women of colour have to work ten times as hard to get heard and to be funded. This has to change. Whether it's ending FGM or child marriage or sexual violence the most credible agents of change are those who are based in the communities where the abuse happens. There are so many amazing organisations doing incredible work at the grassroots level. I am calling on donors to invest more wisely and to support them directly." - Jameela Jamil, Actor and Activist

"I've seen how important it is to trust activists at the grassroots who are doing such heroic work to make the world a more equal place for girls and women. We need to get funding to them directly so they can scale up their efforts." - Leigh-Anne Pinnock, Little Mix

"For decades the aid industry has been racist and colonial. The white saviour mentality has permeated at every level and has caused Africans and other women of colour to be sidelined - even when we are the individuals who have been leading efforts on the front lines of activism. It's time for donors to really think about who they are funding and why - and what biases and stereotypes are influencing them."

"African women are by far the most successful at ending violence committed against them but we receive almost no funding. Instead, big charities and corporations are given whatever tiny amount of money there is made available - but as we have seen with COVID-19 these organisations are not physically present to do the urgent and essential work that's needed to economically empower African women and break the cycle of violence and discrimination. If we are to build a prosperous African continent we need to trust and fund African women." - Nimco Ali OBE, CEO of The Five Foundation, The Global Partnership To End FGM