

Advancing gender equality in health through trust-based decolonial feminist philanthropy

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Summer Institutes
in Global Health

Reimagining Global Health



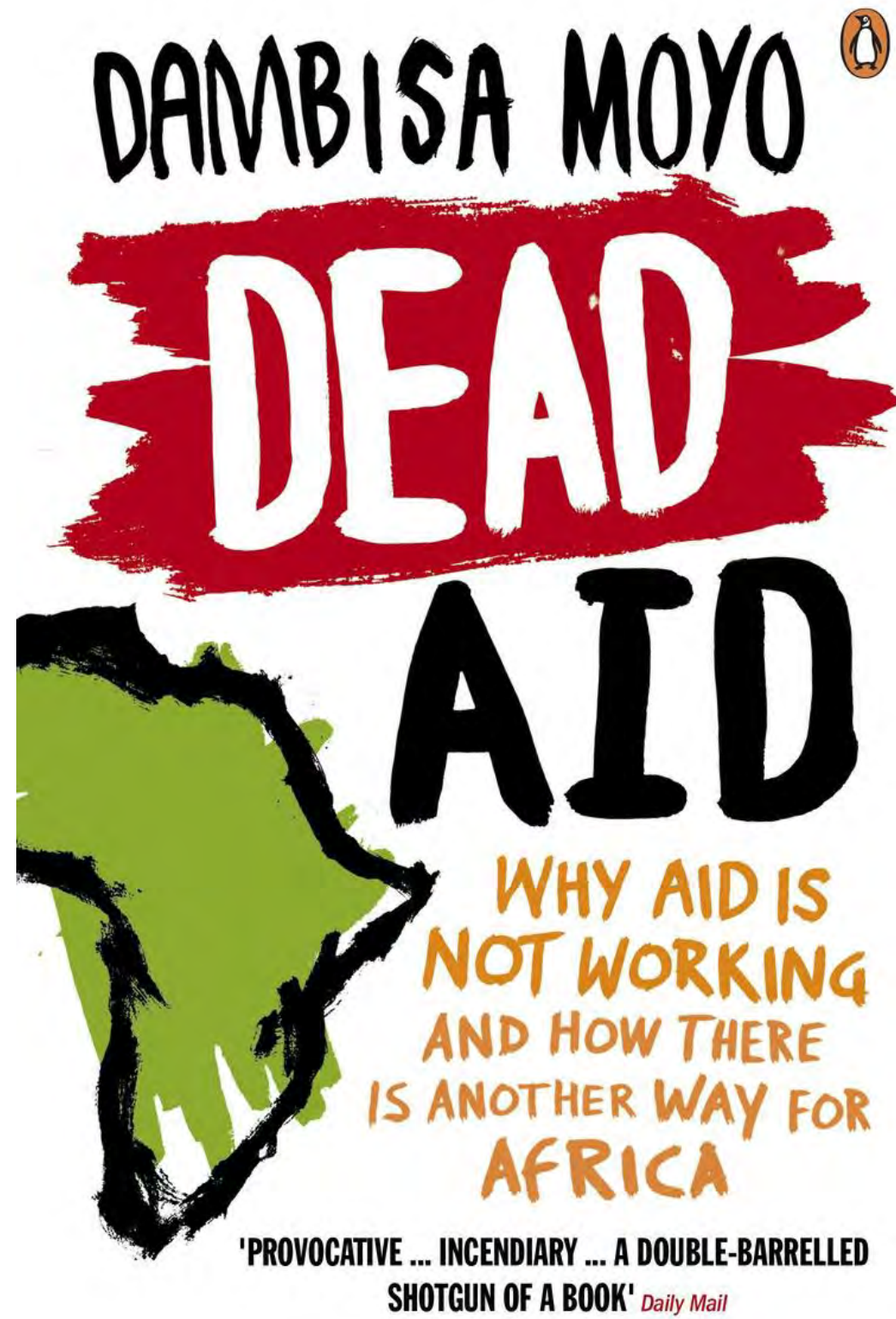
Reimagining Global Health

ONLINE ONLY | JUNE 9-13, 2025

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Competing interests & positionality

I am employed by Canada's International Development Research Centre, who had no role in the conception, writing, or decision to publish or present this work.

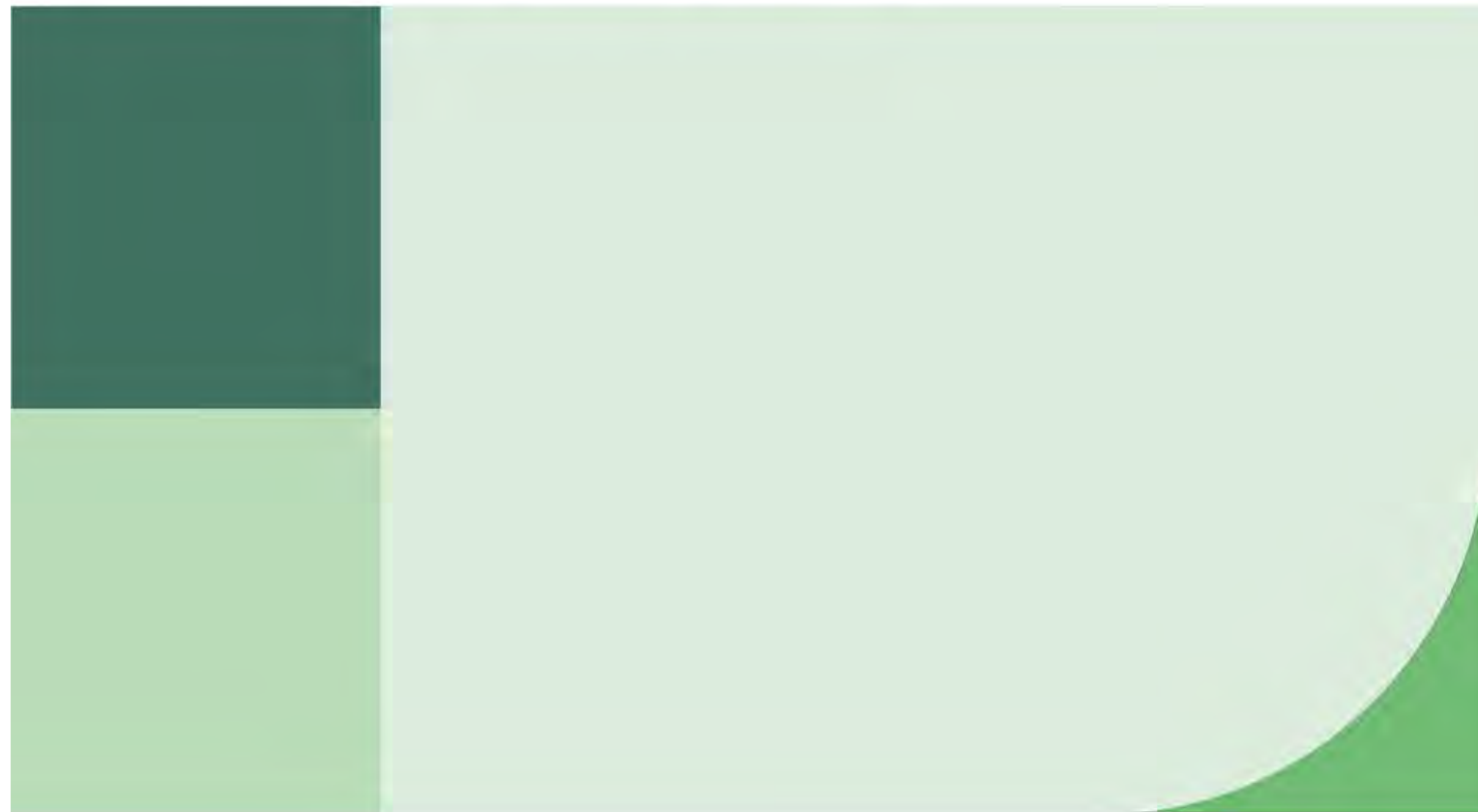


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OUR COLUMNISTS

Shifting Power: Trust-based decolonial feminist philanthropy for change

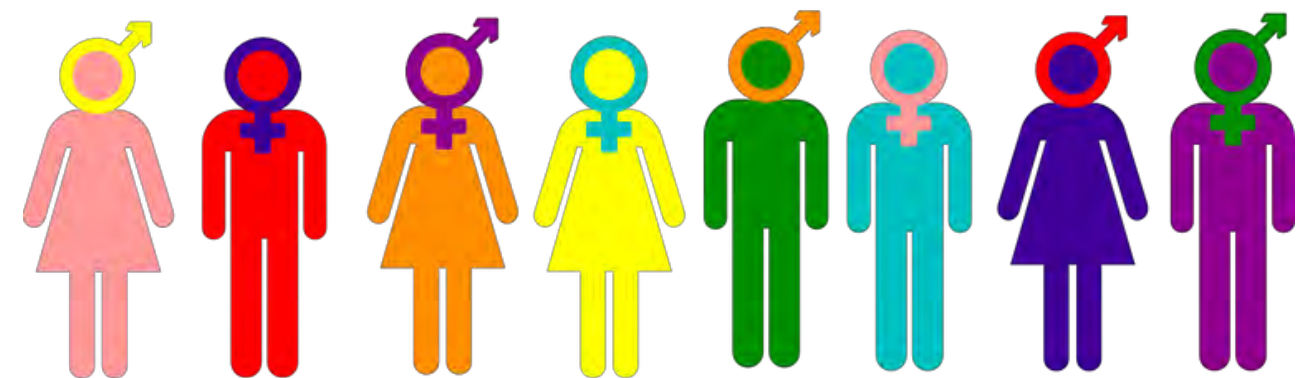
Advancing Gender Equality in Health Series
Section 3: Time horizons for change



- **Samuel Oti**, *Global Health Decolonisation Movement in Africa*
- **Emma Rhule**, *United Nations University International Institute for Global Health*
- **Tiffany Nassiri-Ansari**, *United Nations University International Institute for Global Health*
- **Shaady Salehi**, *The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project*

Gender 101

- **Sex** refers to a set of biological attributes in people and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed.
- **Gender** refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time.



Gender inequality

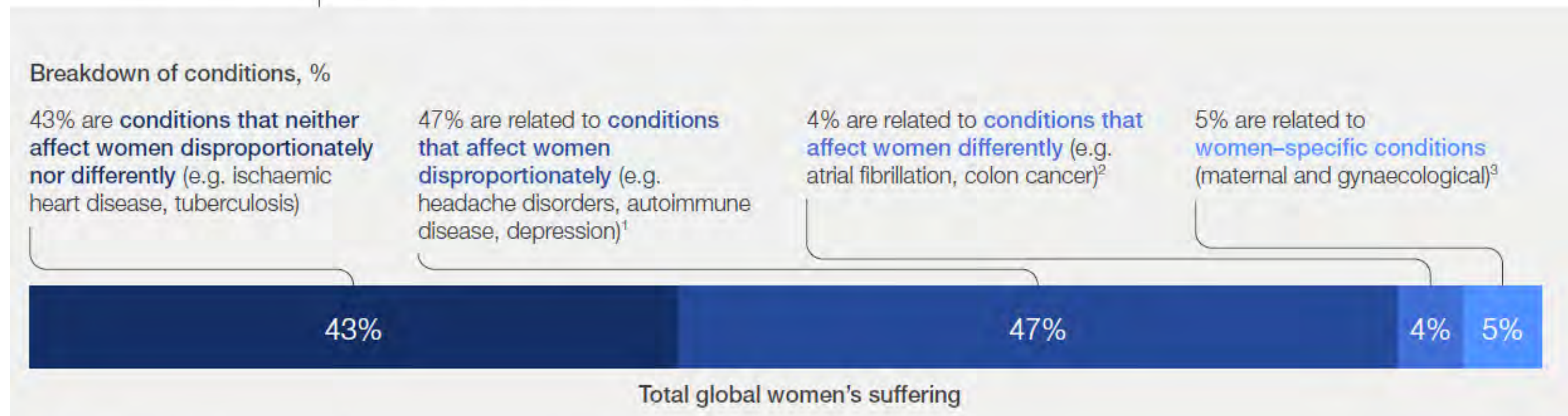
- Progress towards gender equality, as envisioned in SDG5 has stalled or reversed in many countries
- Only seven countries have met the targets set out for SDG5
- As of 2023, only 15% of SDG5 indicators were found to be “on track”
- SDG5 targets and indicators have been repeatedly critiqued for conflating gender with women and assessing progress towards a very narrow and reductionist conceptualisation of gender equality



Manifestations of gender inequality in health

- Health disparities exist across gender spectrum
- Unequal disease burdens and health outcomes
- Limited healthcare access for women & gender-diverse people
- Underrepresentation of women and gender-diverse people, particularly those from low-income countries in leadership roles

FIGURE 3: Total global women's health burden



Manifestations of gender inequality in health



Source: Anita Hegge, Women in Life Science Norway (WiLD Norway). Based on McKinsey report

Manifestations of gender inequality in health

- Gender-diverse individuals experience a higher prevalence of mental health disorders than that of the general population
- They are also exposed to high levels of hate crimes and GBV
- cis-Men are more prone to 'deaths of despair' (mortality due to drugs, alcohol and suicide) than women.



MEN FROM HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES HOLD 44% OF BOARD SEATS, WHILE WOMEN FROM LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES HOLD JUST 1%



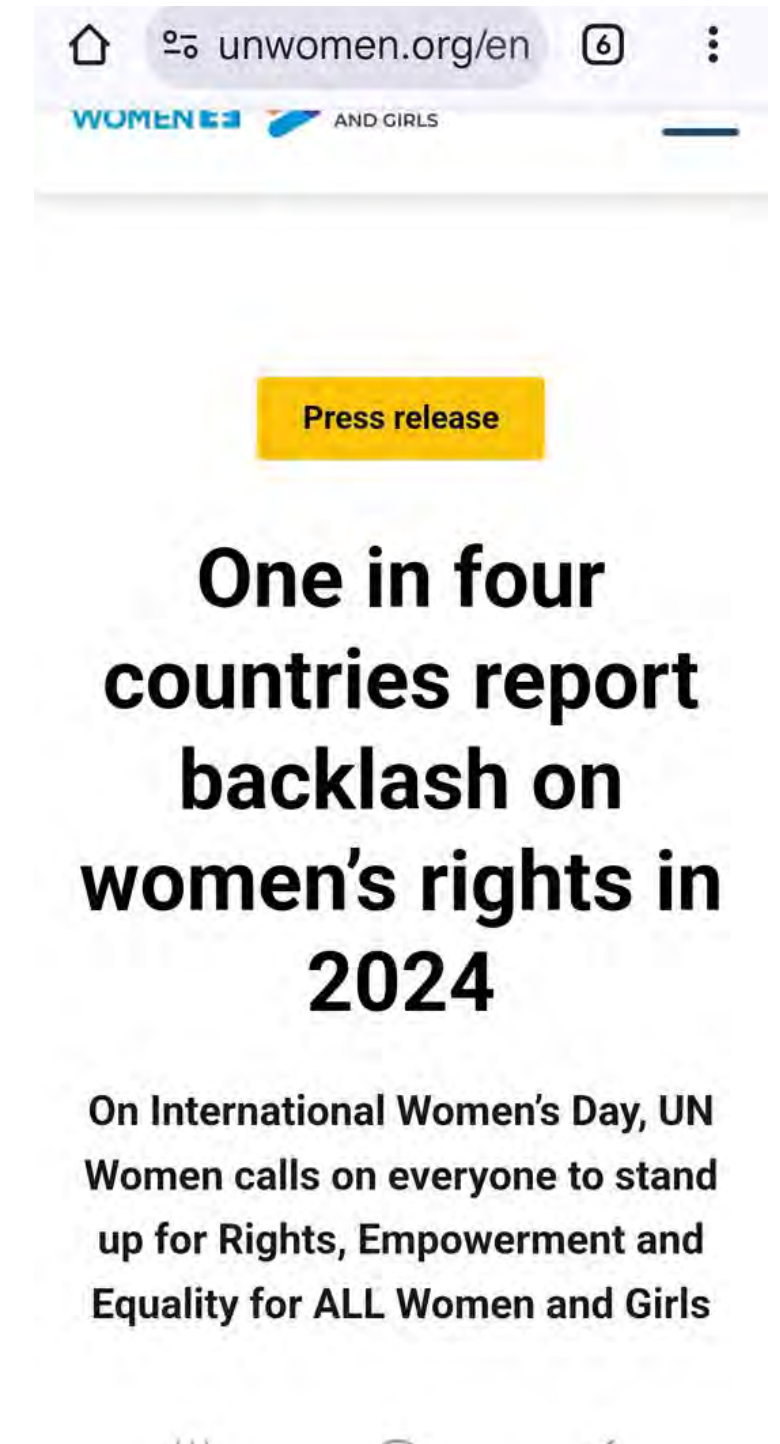
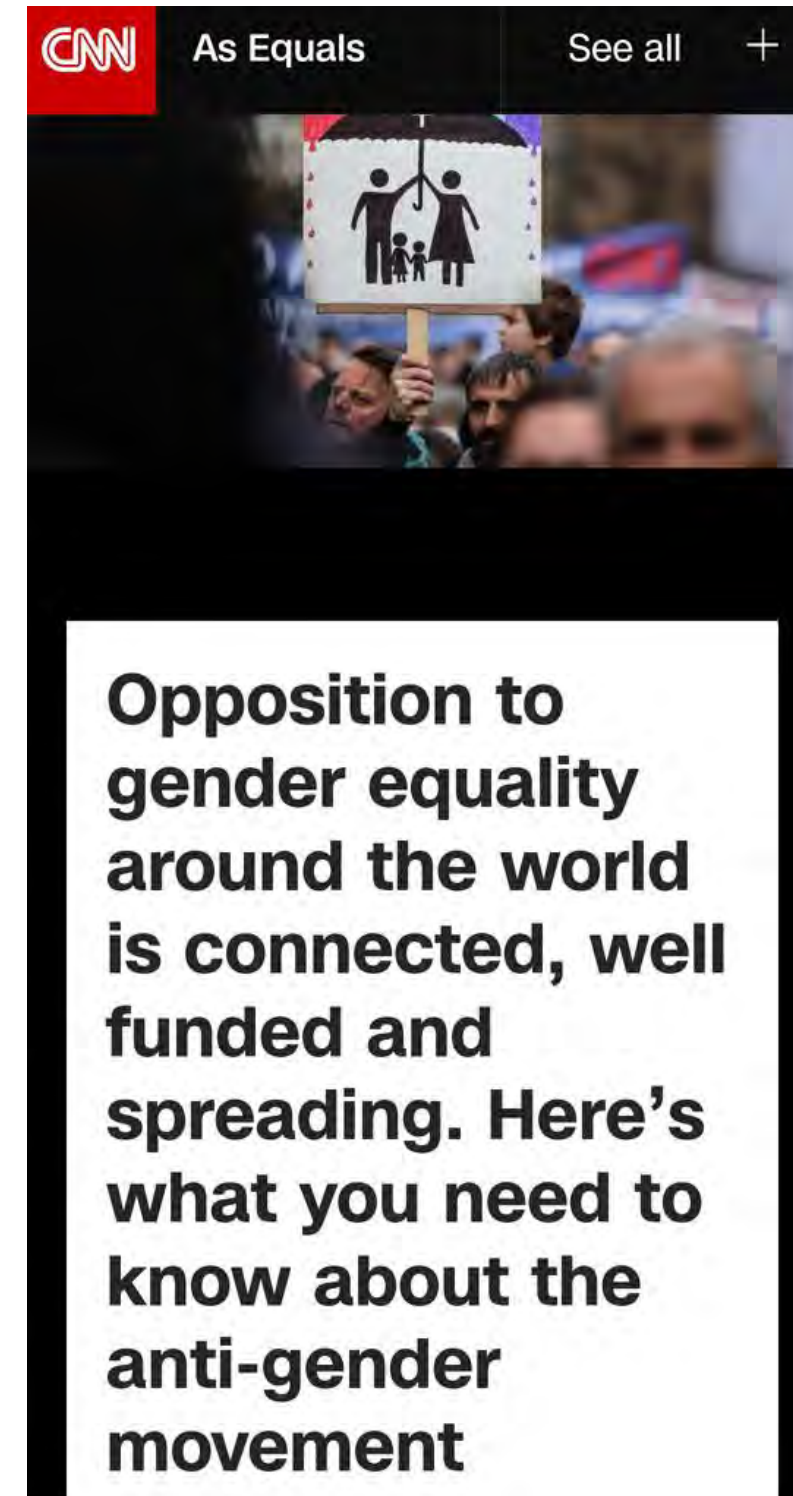
#BOARDSFORALL

**GLOBAL HEALTH 50/50
2022 REPORT**



Exacerbating factors

- Anti-gender movements on the rise
- Democracy under threat globally
- Climate change, conflict, and displacement have gendered effects
- Declining funding for international development



Conventional philanthropy

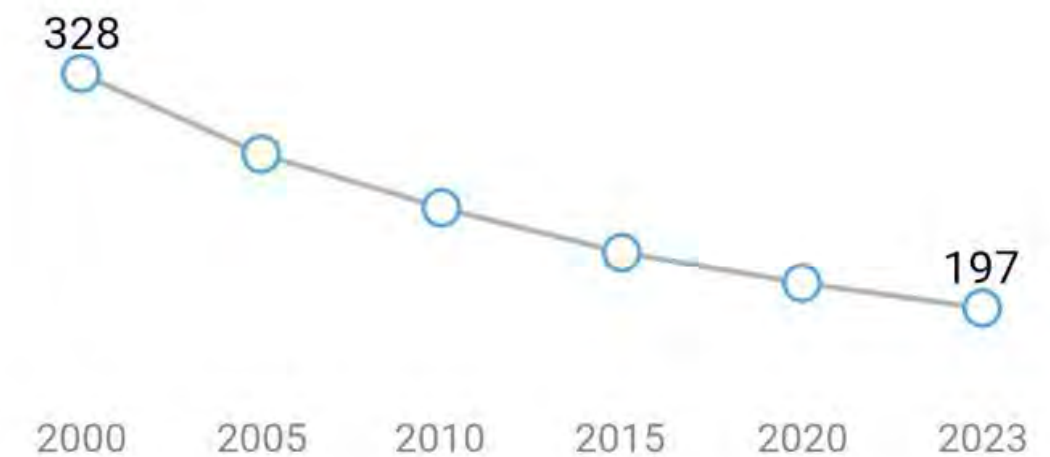
Has made profound impact on global health BUT...

- Reinforces (neo)colonial and patriarchal power dynamics
- Is top-down and characterized by rigid, exclusionary application/reporting processes
- Tends to invisibilize local and indigenous knowledge and expertise
- Creates dependency rather than empowerment

Maternal mortality ratio

197 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023

▼ **-40%** (2000-2023)



Reuters

My News



Funding cuts leave women's aid organisations 'stretched to brink'

By Olivia Le Poidevin

May 13, 2025 4:56 PM GMT+3 · Updated 21 days ago

Case in point

- Half the world's population are women yet <5% of R&D funding on women-specific conditions
- Women underrepresented in clinical trials
- Gender-diverse participants rarely included





What is Trust-Based Philanthropy?

Values-driven, collaborative funding model characterized by mutual accountability & shared learning

1. Provide multi-year, unrestricted funding
2. Do the homework
3. Simplify & streamline paperwork
4. Be transparent & responsive
5. Solicit & act on feedback
6. Offer support beyond the cheque



TBP in action

Responding to high and disproportionate levels of infant mortality in the urban Black community in Cincinnati in 2012, the bi3 Fund provided multi-year unrestricted investment to Cradle Cincinnati, giving it the freedom to co-create solutions with women in the community.

Together, they identified potential interventions, including community-based doula support, safe sleep education, and public data-sharing from local birthing hospitals.

The result: Black infant mortality is now lower than 10 per 1,000 live births for the first time on record.



What is Decolonial Feminist Philanthropy?

At the heart of feminist funding is the centering of community needs, visions, and leadership by shifting power to activists and movements.

Feminist funding is built on several principles, including trust, democracy, intersectionality, and decoloniality, which lay the foundations for disrupting power hierarchy between donors and their grantees.

These foundational principles are reflected in funding processes that emphasize:

- transparent, participatory processes and flexible, multi-year funding
- multidirectional accountability between all parties/stakeholders
- grantees/partners and community members play a more significant role decision-making processes and governance structures.

“I call the analysis of racialised, capitalist, gender oppression ‘the coloniality of gender’. I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender ‘decolonial feminism’”.

--Maria Lugones

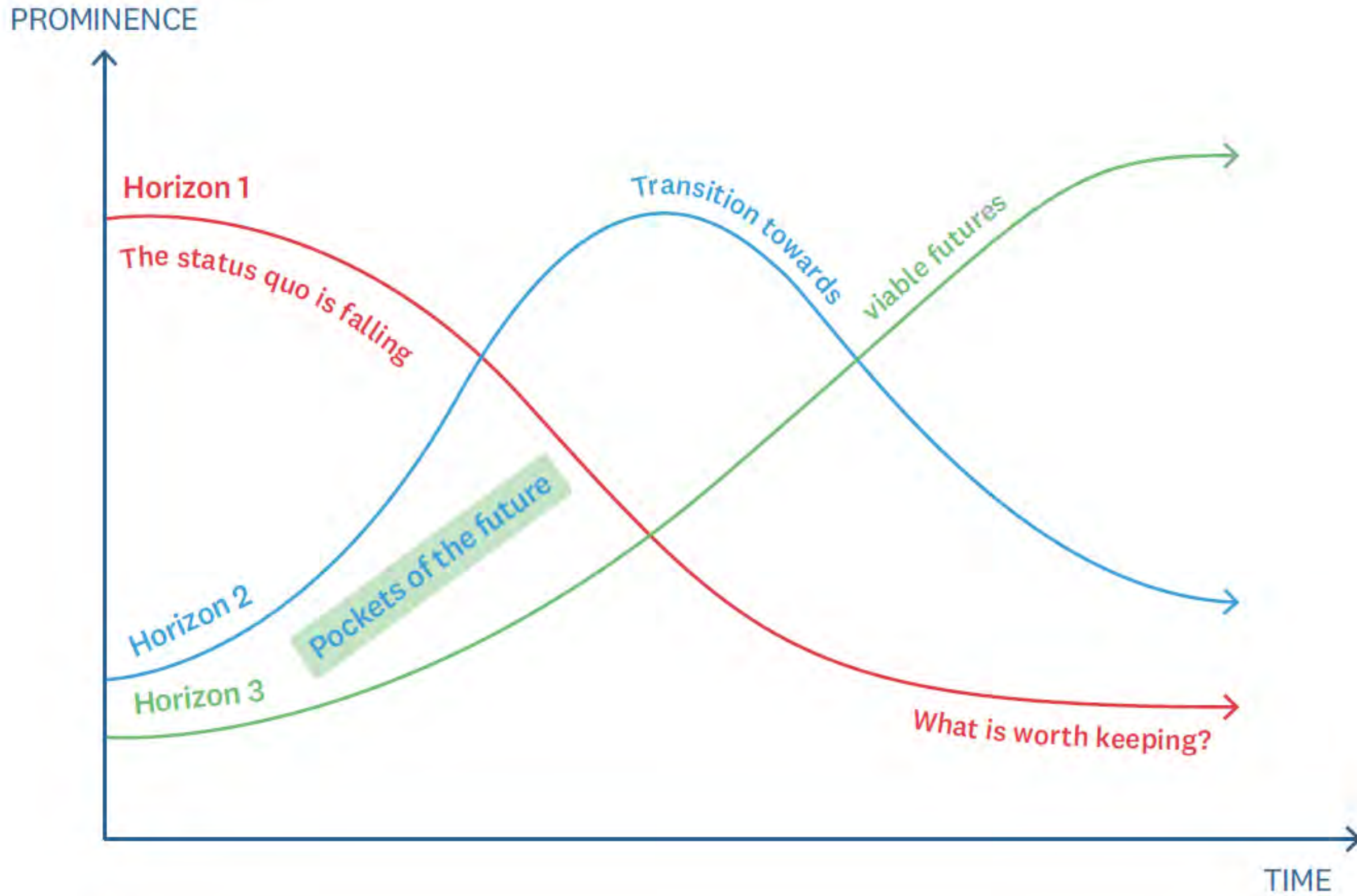
Reimagining global health
philanthropy to advance
gender equality



Methodology:

- The scale of the structural shifts required to reform global health philanthropy can seem daunting.
- Thinking and strategizing for the long term is key to sustaining reforms and catalyzing action.
- Longer time horizons create space for us to collectively envision the radical changes we might not consider achievable within shorter time frames and to co-design pathways towards our desired futures.
- Futures thinking and foresight methodologies offer a suite of tools to do this, and this paper draws on **Three Horizons** for our collective visioning process.

Figure: The Three Horizons framework



Adapted from H3Uni.org

Horizon 1: Challenges of the present

- Problematic assumptions and entrenched interests
- The top-down nature of funding
- Lack of mutual accountability



Horizon 3: A vision of 2050: Trust-based decolonial feminist funding towards gender equality and health equity

- In response to the global poly-crises, we transition from “diabolical farsightedness” to strategic long-term thinking.
- Intersectionality and allyship became key strategic considerations.
- Local challenges being addressed by local expert became the norm.
- In the early 2030s, we experienced a seismic shift in the funding landscape that was initiated by a landmark report first published in 2029, *The State of Trust-Based Funding: Who leads the charge?*
- These shifts were formalized with the adoption of the 2032 Funders’ Code of Ethics (FCoE), which centered the principles of a trust-based decolonial feminist approach.
- The late 2020s and much of the 2030s were dominated by a sense of informed and pragmatic optimism, led by decolonial and feminist leaders across all sectors of society.
- By 2050, global health stands out as an exemplar of how to achieve gender equality in international development.

Horizon 2: Innovations

- Difficult conversations are needed
- Funders need to “walk the talk”
- Change is required across the ecosystem



Allyship is the bare minimum



Conclusion

- To realize the changes that billions across the gender-spectrum deserve, action needs to be taken now.
- In our preferred future, we visualize global health as an exemplar of how to achieve gender equality in international development.
- For this to happen, conventional philanthropy needs to integrate more trust-based and decolonial feminist approaches.
- Both approaches are rooted in shared values, redefining the role of funders as true collaborators who work alongside their partners and grantees.

CALL TO ACTION

*It is only when shaving the king's
hair that you can touch his head*

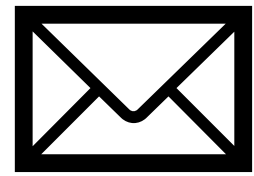
-African proverb



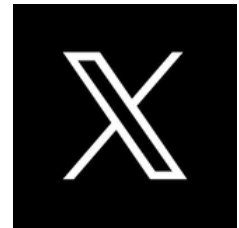
The background consists of a repeating pattern of speech bubbles in various colors (red, purple, yellow, grey) on a dark teal background. Each speech bubble contains a white question mark. The word "Discussion" is centered in the middle of the image in a white, serif font.

Discussion

Let's continue the conversation



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