

Tracking International Funding to Women's Financial Inclusion in Bangladesh

Summary

[Publish What You Fund](#) has tracked international funding to women's financial inclusion (WFI) in Bangladesh. Our aim was to provide greater insights into the funding landscape to support policymakers, funders, and gender advocates. This is part of a [broader programme](#) which examined funding for WFI, women's economic empowerment (WEE), women's empowerment collectives, and assessed gender integration approaches in [Bangladesh](#), [Kenya](#), and [Nigeria](#).

Our [methodology](#) for tracking funding to WFI utilised a market system-based approach to identify funding going to the core, supporting functions, and rules of the market system. We tracked funding from bilateral, multilateral, development finance institutions and philanthropic organisations between 2015–2019.

International funding to WFI remains a small proportion of funding to WEE

International grant funding to WFI increased between 2015–2019 but remained a small portion of total WEE funding to Bangladesh. In total we identified 23 grant funded projects with WFI activities. There was insufficient data for the non-grant funding (loans, guarantees, and equity) to make trend observations. We identified only one loan funded project during 2015–2019, funded by the International Finance Corporation.

In many cases, WFI activities are a sub-component of a larger project. To reduce the risk of overestimating funding amounts for projects supporting WFI, the rest of our analysis uses project numbers as the unit of analysis.

Poor reporting among development finance institutions (DFIs) is a barrier to tracking WFI funding

A more comprehensive picture of the WFI international funding landscape is undermined by gaps in funder project level reporting of non-grant financial flows to publicly available sources. We conducted a deep dive into DFI non-grant funding to test our methodology to see if a different approach would reveal additional funding, which it largely did not. However, the lack of detailed and accessible project level funding reporting by DFIs inhibits effective analysis of funding contribution not only to WFI but to financial inclusion (FI) overall.

Which groups of women did this funding intend to support?

Our analysis found that 13 of the 23 grant projects specified certain groups of women that they intended to support. Of those, girls and/or adolescents were the most cited group. Several projects focused on the financial literacy of adolescent girls, establishing savings and loan associations for out-of-school girls (including married girls), and creating access to savings and finance for adolescent girls and pregnant and nursing mothers. Other groups of women specified by funders included rural women, child brides, persons with disabilities, poor women, farmers, and merchants.

Identifying the specific group(s) of women that the funding is intended to support greatly enhances our ability to identify gaps in funding and address the differential needs of women given that economic empowerment and access to resources are shaped by intersecting discriminations.

How are funders targeting WFI in their programming?

The top funders of WFI programmes in Bangladesh included the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Commission's Directorate General for International Partnerships (EC - International Partnerships), Oxfam Netherlands (Oxfam NL), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Collectively, these funders accounted for 93% of international funding to WFI in Bangladesh.

Figure 1 shows the international grant funders we identified and provides a nuanced picture of how funders are embedding WFI into projects in Bangladesh. Our analysis suggests that international funders are integrating WFI into larger WEE/gender projects (seven projects) and broader development programmes (ten projects). In two projects, WFI activities were integrated into broader FI projects and five projects were purely WFI projects.^a The one non-grant project was also identified as a standalone WFI project, and it focused purely on banking.

International grant funders mostly integrated WFI into broader development programmes

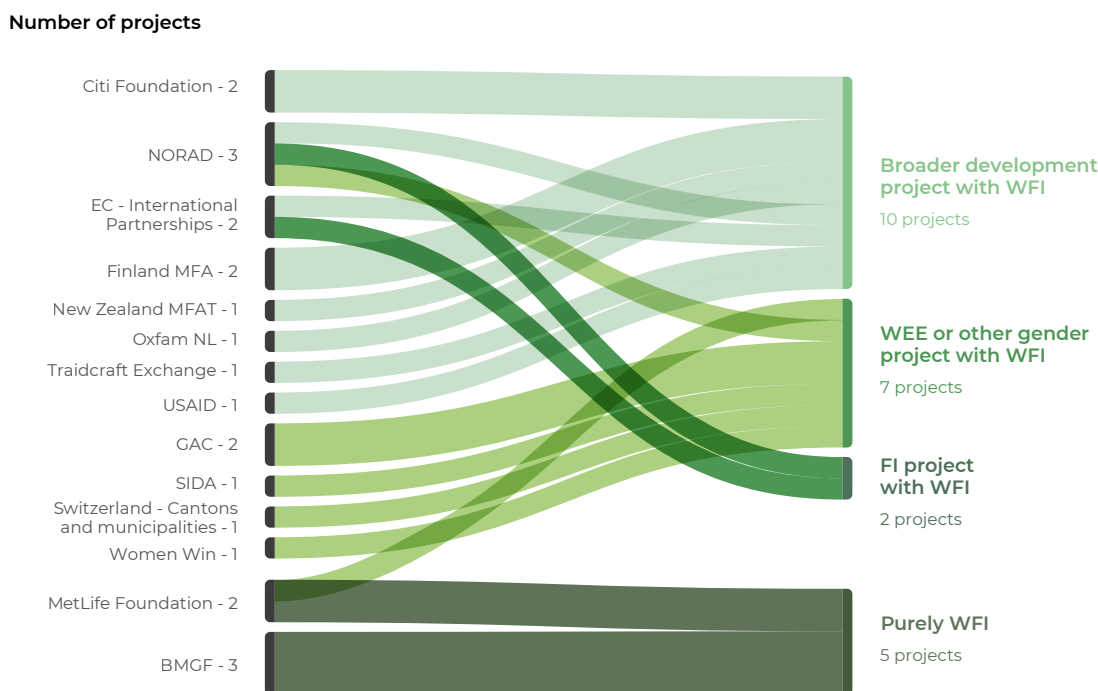


Figure 1: WFI grant funders mapped to project types (number of projects, 2015–2019)

How are funders targeting the financial market system?

When applying a market system-based approach we found that grant funded WFI projects mostly targeted supporting functions of the market system (11 projects), and supply side activities (ten projects), followed by demand side activities (five projects).^b We did not identify any projects supporting the rules function of the market system.

The supply side projects we identified mostly included savings groups activities which offered platforms for savings and accessing loans. The savings groups were targeted at different groups of women including people with disabilities, the rural poor, farmers, out-of-school girls, and entrepreneurs. We found no grant projects that targeted formal financial service providers, which are also vital in achieving WFI.

COVID-19 and WFI funding

Given the time frame and data constraints, we had limited data available to analyse funding addressing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We identified one grant funded WFI project that targeted recovery post-COVID-19 by providing women with more equitable FI opportunities and supporting them with accessing digital financial services and insurance schemes.

^a One project captured in our review had slightly different project descriptions which meant that it was classified as two different project types.

^b Projects can target more than one market system function.

Our complete report series can be accessed [here](#).