

“Re-think.Experiment.” Where Social Innovation Meets Feminist Programming

Extract from UN Women
Fund for Gender Equality's
Annual Report 2018-2019



In 2018, the FGE tried its first social innovation initiative, “Re-think. Experiment.”. Grantee partners explored the application of design-thinking methods to women’s rights programming and feminist grantmaking. The objective? Come up with tested models to solve women’s empowerment challenges and catalyse significant social change.

Why innovation?

Following its first independent evaluation in 2017, the FGE realized that grantee projects were not tapping into the full potential of the organizations behind them. Much more could be achieved with the same or even fewer resources.

A self-reflection exercise gave rise to a series of questions. Are we—grantmakers and project implementers—working in the most effective and efficient ways? Are projects designed to respond to the real needs of women who are furthest behind? What alternative approaches and tools can lead to more transformative results? These questions were the starting point of “Re-think.

Experiment.” It challenged nine grantees in 11 countries to find and experiment with new approaches to specific problems preventing them from achieving a desired result. They asked questions like: “How might rural women from disadvantaged communities transition from small-scale producers to profitable entrepreneurs?” “How can we find creative solutions to keep women’s rights on the political agenda in a conflict setting?”

Unpacking and solving complex and “wicked” issues like these requires engaging with unusual actors, exploring new points of view and trying innovative solutions.

What do we mean by social innovation?

For the FGE, social innovation puts beneficiaries at the centre of project design through more flexible and co-creative processes. It uses a range of tools from design and systems thinking and behavioural science, with the ultimate objective of creating positive impacts in the lives of women and girls.

At a different level, innovation also entails better responding to the needs of civil society by exploring alternative partnership dynamics and grantmaking models.

Overall, it means being ready to challenge our assumptions, re-think our approaches and experiment with new strategies for greater and longer lasting impact.



IMPACT

Human-centred design approach and feedback loops ensure focus on what works for project beneficiaries



SUSTAINABILITY

Systems thinking, human-centred design and stronger capabilities enhance ownership beyond a one-off project



COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Prototyping, iterations and early testing during project design limit the potential for failure

Women-centred design

Over eight months, grantees identified a challenge, conducted research among potential project beneficiaries, ideated possible solutions, and selected, prototyped and tested one of them. They drew on tailored coaching and training sessions by specialized experts and the FGE along with US\$ 15,000 for experimentation added to their grants.

The guiding principle was to place beneficiaries – mostly women from disadvantaged groups – at the core of the process.

Rather than jumping to designing an intervention and creating a results-based framework as the FGE usually requires, grantees devoted several months to initial research and reflection. They set aside previous knowledge and assumptions, and opened up to a deeper understanding of the women they work with, empathizing with their context, their needs, their challenges, their daily lives and their emotions, with

the help of tools such as actors' maps, and journey and emotional maps.

While all grantees had extensive experience working with the populations they serve, new insights emerged. This helped them conceptualize challenges in different ways and see the nuances more clearly. In some cases, it completely transformed the definition of the problem into one that responded better to the needs of target beneficiaries.

With a specific statement defining the challenge, grantees opened up again to a broad spectrum of possible solutions before selecting one for prototyping and testing. These processes were conducted with their own colleagues, partners, project beneficiaries and international peer innovators, using co-creation methods. Seven organizations have completed the process, while another two had to delay the experiment due to political and contextual constraints.



We gained more insights on how to improve our methods and adapt them to the realities of the majority we are unable to reach.

Atikha, Philippines

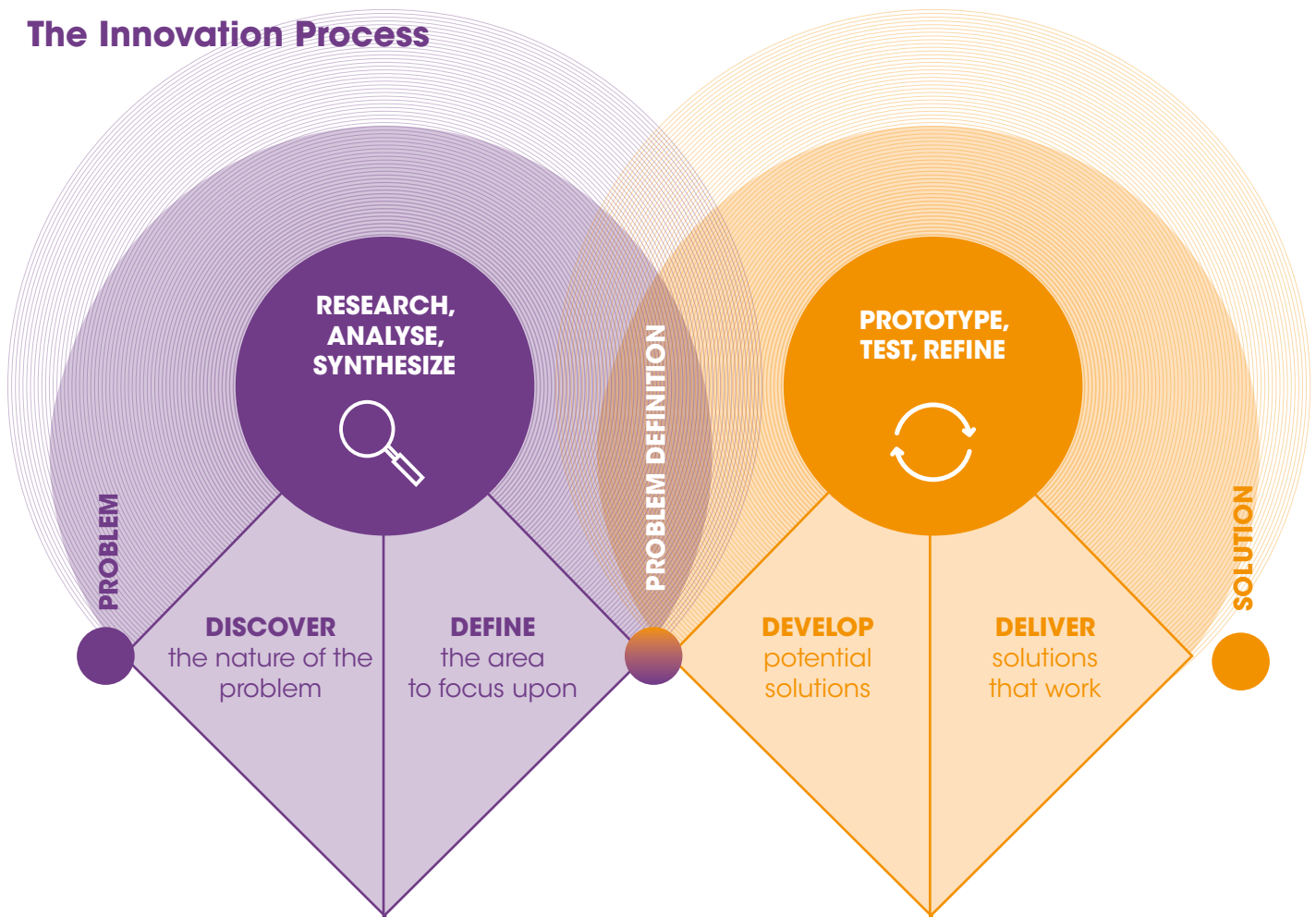
We thought we knew everything about the issue, but the interviews showed there are things we had not understood.

Pastoral Women's Council, Tanzania

In a development sector of increasing complexity, women's organizations are demanding new exchange, learning and innovation spaces to generate cost-effective, impactful and sustainable solutions for the multi-dimensional challenges that women face. "Re-Think. Experiment." is a unique framework fostering those spaces and institutional capabilities, unconstrained by procedural limitations.

María Tarancón, Social Innovation Expert and "Re-Think. Experiment." Consultant

The Innovation Process



Adopted from Design Council (2015)

Boosting Migrant Workers' Savings Choices with Behavioural Insights

Behavioural science provides useful knowledge about human decision-making. The FGE and its grantee partners are increasingly trying to apply such insights to maximize the effectiveness of interventions.

In collaboration with a team of researchers from Columbia University and the University of Cambridge, for example, the FGE and NGO Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative are expanding ongoing efforts to support Filipino women migrant domestic workers to return home earlier and in a better financial condition.

Evidence shows that women who set up migration goals prior to their departure are more likely to come back and reintegrate successfully. It also highlights opportunities for more salient communication to aid in better decision-making. This intervention will test: (1) a commitment contract for women to sign upon their departure setting up savings goals for work abroad, and (2) an online calculation tool so women can more easily plan and manage finances for immediate and long-term benefits.

OVERVIEW OF GRANTEE EXPERIMENTS



CHALLENGES



SOLUTIONS



RESULTS & FINDINGS

ALLIANCES FOR AFRICA (AfA), NIGERIA



A community outreach meeting discusses tradition and its role in advancing women's political leadership.
Photo: Courtesy of AfA / Israel P.C.



The Ili-Noyo tradition promotes male participation in community decision-making and prohibits women from taking an active part



Establish a group that will spearhead an advocacy campaign promoting inclusive leadership



10 men were involved in group discussions and co-creation of a campaign; this changed attitudes towards women's participation

Men became champions of women in decision-making and have encouraged families to send girls to school

330 people have advocated for change through the campaign

Grantee applied new knowledge to other projects

SHOQATA E GRAVE ME PROBLEME SOCIALE (AWSP), ALBANIA

Weak coalition to monitor implementation of the recently adopted National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security



Participatory and all-inclusive process with coalition members to raise awareness, and build capacities and ownership



Increased motivation, ownership and participation of civil society organizations

Participatory creation of working groups

Common needs identified and joint priority action plans co-created

AWSP is integrating innovation tools in everyday work

ATIKHA, PHILIPPINES



Grantee Atikha is testing a Facebook iTV programme that provides valuable information to Filipino women migrant domestic workers about their saving and investment opportunities.
Photo: Courtesy of Atikha Overseas Workers and Communities Initiative



Limited participation of Filipino migrant domestic workers and their family members in a programme that supports their successful return home



Migrant workers-led weekly web-based TV programme posted on social media as a complement to or substitute for the training programme



iTV programme reached 3,000 women (double the expected number)

Over 1,000 women and family members joined the reintegration programme, increasing participation by 50 per cent after only a few weeks

Increased sense of pride and community among women who watched or participated in the iTV programmes

CENTRO DE DOCUMENTACIÓN Y ESTUDIOS (CDE), PARAGUAY

Rural women producers of cheese, honey and wool struggle to sell their products in male-dominated markets



The low number of domestic workers joining unions limits the effectiveness of advocacy



Weekly radio programmes by and for domestic workers inform and encourage them to actively engage



Faster growth in affiliation rate

Increased pluralism and participation in the unions, especially of young women

More workers voice their demands

Policy advancements influenced

EL-GHAITH ASSOCIATION, ALGERIA



Communication and marketing campaign highlighting women's life stories and the organic aspect of the products



Women feeling heard and valued, and having a sense of a place in society

Women feel stronger and more independent; they go outside of their homes more often

(Note: campaign not fully rolled out yet)

LEBANON FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & FAMILY EMPOWERMENT (LFPAGE), LEBANON



Agri-food businesswomen from rural Lebanon experiment with new fruit jam recipes.
Photo: Courtesy of LFPAGE



Small-scale traditional agri-food producers struggle to sell their products despite trainings and organization in cooperatives



Product innovation: enhancing product value by using different recipes and production techniques from Italy



Four new products showed market potential (quality, taste and "Italian" brand), adding technical value and variety to the cooperatives' agri-food production base

Women producers with capacities to think creatively and invent new recipes

Women with increased self-confidence and interest in taking on leadership roles in the cooperatives and communities

PASTORAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL (PWC), TANZANIA

Women from the pastoralist Maasai communities struggle to access land and property to carry out productive activities



Engage in conversations about writing a will with educated Maasai men and women



Five men began the will-writing process; one allowed his wife to register property in her name

Issue talked about openly for the first time

Men sharing their personal stories changed perceptions and attitudes towards will-writing

Grantee invited to the district council to speak about the issue for the first time

Low levels of women's education identified as a critical issue, with some initial mobilization around addressing it

CASE STUDY

Women domestic workers in Paraguay make their voices heard



In Paraguay, Marciana Santander and Higinia Vázquez, members of the SINTRADESPY domestic workers' union, launch the first radio programme of "Doméstica Ñe'ê" ("The Voice of the Domestic Worker" in the local Guaraní language).

Photo: Courtesy of CDE, Paraguay / Javier Medina

The Centro de Documentación y Estudios (CDE) in Paraguay supports domestic workers in organizing to claim decent work conditions and equal pay, including through forming associations and unions. Two unions, SINTRADI and SINTRADESPY, engaged in "Re-think. Experiment." This is a snap-shot of their innovation journey.

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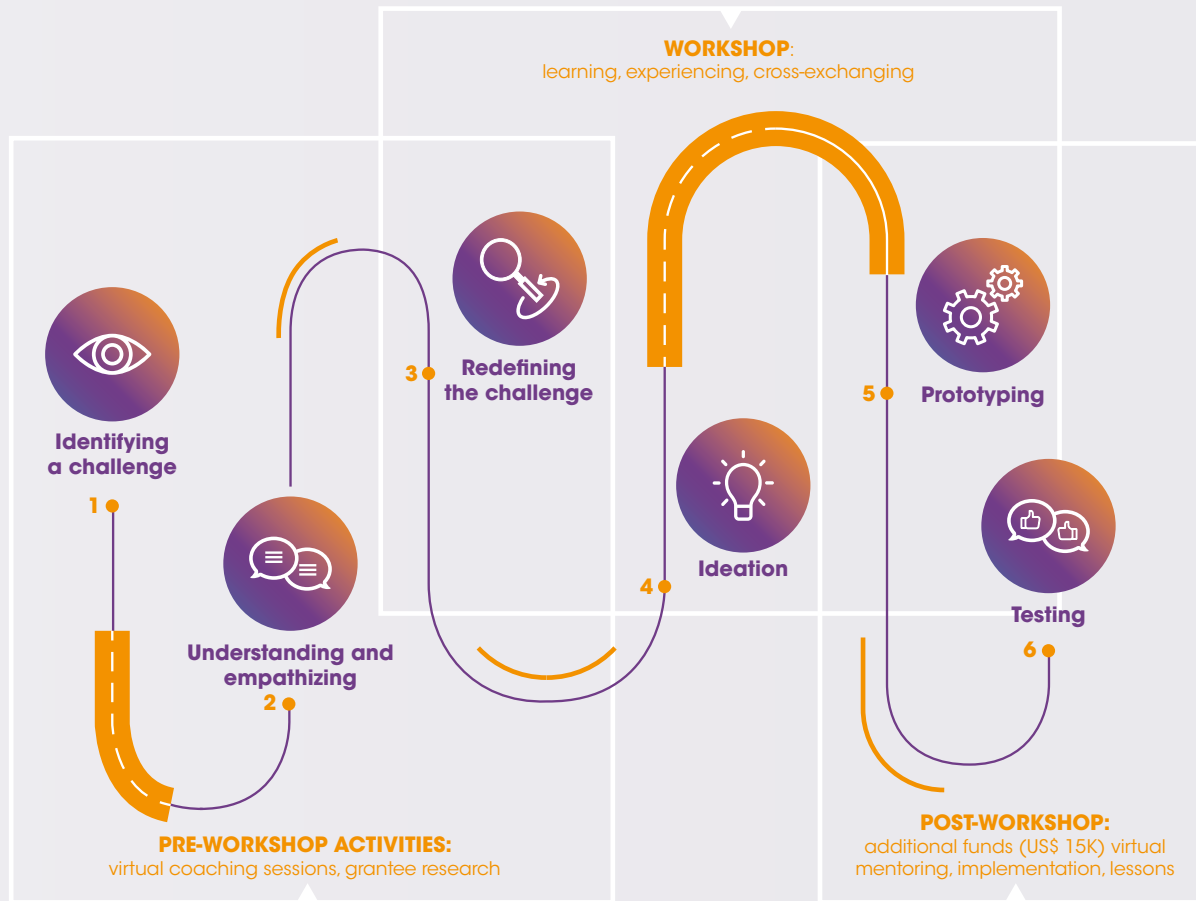
The best aspect of this exercise was to be able to have conversations [with beneficiaries] at such a personal and emotional level. It was a very special moment.

Lilian Soto,
Associate Researcher and Project
Coordinator at CDE

We never thought nor imagined ourselves doing radio. But after, I said: we are experts, we can talk about our experience. Many people have participated, and the messages they sent are impressive. Now they call me and ask what they can do to be in the union.

Librada Maciel,
Secretary General of SINTRADI

The “Re-think. Experiment.” Process



1. Identifying a challenge

The CDE defined its initial challenge as domestic workers, leaders and activists facing work overload, and economic and emotional challenges. How could the organization help them find spaces for relaxation, community and solidarity that would bring more energy to their activism?

2. Understanding and empathizing

Research and consultations with project beneficiaries used informal interviews, journey maps, “a day in the life of...” techniques and emotional maps. Key findings included: women domestic workers value spaces of leisure and quality time with the family; there is a need to feel valued and important; collective actions are a powerful tool; there is a need for charismatic leadership and for spaces of trust to share experiences and advice among peers; and rights awareness is a critical first step.

3. Redefining the challenge

Based on the research insights, the CDE refocused its challenge around attracting more domestic workers to join the unions. This would lighten the workload of their peers, while strengthening the base of the unions as well as their reach and advocacy capacity.

4. Ideation

The CDE and union members agreed to organize a large fair to make the issues and demands of domestic workers visible and to attract new affiliates. It was a family-friendly, festive event. At the FGE global prototyping workshop in Istanbul, however, Atikha, a grantee from the Philippines that also supports domestic workers, offered a new idea: a radio show developed by and for domestic workers. The notion greatly resonated with the CDE team, which decided to bring it back to colleagues and activists.

5. Prototyping

During the workshop, the CDE team sketched a broad radio show concept and made a mock programme soundtrack. After returning to Paraguay, the team shared the new idea with women from the unions, who immediately and enthusiastically took it on. They continued to refine the concept and plan steps to implement it.

6. Testing

The CDE and the two associations established partnerships with two radio stations. They prepared communication and radio training for future radio hosts, who quickly started to develop scripts and rehearse with the support of CDE communication experts. The women engaged a popular singer to compose and sing the main cover song for the programmes. Ten programmes were broadcast.

Key results after five weeks of radio programmes

- The union gained 13 new members in five weeks, compared to 15 over five months using more traditional door-to-door recruitment. Another 40 women expressed interest in joining, representing a potential 40 per cent increase in membership.
- Participation and pluralism in the unions has increased, including through young, grass-roots members taking leadership positions through the radio programmes.
- Self-confidence and social communication skills have improved, especially among women conducting the programmes.
- The voices and demands of domestic workers have been more widely heard with over 4,200 downloads of the 10 radio programmes.
- Public visibility helped persuade both the Senate and the Congress to approve an equal minimum wage for domestic workers, one of the associations' key demands. The new law is expected to be endorsed in July 2019 after 10 years of advocacy.
- The CDE built an emotional connection with domestic workers, strengthening and enriching the relationship between both partners.



Kelly Agüero, a veteran domestic worker activist and pioneer of the SINTRADESPY union, celebrates with other colleagues after Paraguay's Senate passed an equal minimum wage for domestic workers in March 2019. The law was approved by the Congress in June 2019.

Photo: Courtesy of Centro de Documentación Estudios, Paraguay / Luis Vera

Main challenges

- The end of the experiment interrupted the radio programmes and the enthusiasm and momentum generated. The CDE is looking for additional funds to continue with them.
- The significant investment in time to design, prepare and implement this solution weighed on both the grantee and beneficiaries. Women's activists had to sacrifice limited hours with their families to attend trainings, preparatory meetings and broadcasts. While they all say it was worth it, the CDE is trying to find better ways to implement future iterations.

Spotlight on the innovator: Celina Barrios



Celina (middle) hosted a radio programme by and for domestic workers, and is a leading voice of the SINTRADI domestic workers union in Itapúa, Paraguay.

Photo: Courtesy of CDE, Paraguay / Frédéric Hayen

A nanny and a law student, Celina Graciela Barrios Maciel is no stranger to the realities of domestic work in Paraguay. The youngest of four siblings, she followed her mother and two sisters into becoming a domestic worker at the age of 16.

After joining SINTRADI, the union of domestic workers in the Itapua department, Celina thought she had to take a further step by enrolling as a law student. "I understood the importance for someone to know the laws and defend the rights of domestic workers," she says.

When she heard about the radio programmes being developed by the CDE, she joined other members of the union to develop one called "La Hormiguera" – Spanish for "ant hill", symbolizing hard work and strength when coming together. Training and the direct support of communication professionals made the women comfortable and skilled as broadcasters.

"The first radio programmes were tough," Celine remembers. "There were many silences. But now I don't have problems to give an interview to defend the rights of domestic workers. The Hormiguera gives us the possibility to speak on behalf

of those who cannot speak. We interview our peers and learn about their stories, and now we are also able to learn new things that help us in our daily work."

The CDE's communications specialist, Giovanna Guggiari, describes a palpable transformation among the young activists participating in the radio shows. "Empowerment comes from self-expression," she explains. "They interviewed all sorts of actors from professionals to politicians and public authorities. This has positioned them at a different level, one of great value, inside their unions and beyond."

Today, Celina is one of the key voices in her organization. On 8 March 2019, the Municipality of Encarnación awarded her a special "Inspiring Stories" recognition for her work as main host at "La Hormiguera" and as a domestic worker. For the first time, she dared to deliver a live speech when she collected the prize in front of a large audience that included the most important authorities in her city.

Celina dreams of finishing her degree and becoming a lawyer for domestic workers. "In a few years, I can see myself protecting the rights of domestic workers, giving advice to domestic workers organizations," she says.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

What we learned about social innovation



Social innovation works for gender equality and women's empowerment

These topics are extremely complex. Social innovation tools and strategies allow practitioners to identify new solutions and partners, and unlock the potential of women and men in different ways. Before going to long-used, default and not always effective approaches, it is useful to take a step back to re-think and experiment, and use feedback loops to inform successful strategies.



Innovation requires shifting focus to the design process

It calls for a significant time investment in research, consultations, analysis, testing and iteration before jumping to a project framework. While contrary to development practitioners' usual practices, investment in design pays off once solutions are tested.



Social innovation is in women's organizations' DNA

Most women's organizations are used to questioning assumptions, establishing different emotional connections, exploring new strategies, working collaboratively, and being imaginative and resourceful. Navigating the new yet somewhat familiar waters of social innovation felt natural for grantee partners.



Innovation allows greater responsiveness to real needs and triggers more sustainable social impact

Shifting the perspective to that of project beneficiaries can completely transform perceptions of challenges, interventions and measures of impact. This is especially the case when factoring in not-so-visible aspects such as beneficiaries' emotions and aspirations.

Social innovation is not rocket science



Doing grantmaking and programming differently is possible. There are many tools and methods from different fields that foster deeper understanding of beneficiary populations, and can improve project design and implementation. Co-creation is one approach that most grantees quickly adopted. Coaching and in-person trainings were praised as extremely useful and necessary to learning.

Social innovation is not for everyone



Organizations' leaders and employees need to be ready to step out of their comfort zone. They must recognize and question assumptions, and be open to doing things differently. It might not always be the right moment or context to introduce social innovation.

"Re-think. Experiment." was the first time that the FGE intentionally and systematically applied social innovation in its grantmaking and programming. The results, insights, new and exciting experiences, and closer ties among organizations made it worthwhile for the FGE team, participating grantees and beneficiaries.

Grantees have expressed high levels of satisfaction and enthusiasm with the initiative, which in some cases has overtaken a large part of their programming. All have started to apply new tools or methodologies to their internal organizational processes and project design. A deeper understanding of beneficiary needs on multiple levels allows them to tighten bonds and embed emotional aspects into projects. Most experiments have gone beyond what was intended either by the organizations or the beneficiaries, indicating strong ownership and relevance.

One aspect for future consideration is the complexity and time-consuming nature of such an effort, both for participants and facilitators. It

requires securing sufficient time and expertise. Another issue arose around the face-to-face prototyping workshop. It made a significant difference in the learning process, to the extent that some grantees would have preferred to have it as a starting point rather than in the middle of the process.

Looking forward, the FGE will apply learning from this experience in new funding cycles. We are ready to iterate, improve and further explore new ways of grantmaking that answer better to the needs of the organizations we serve.

This has never been more important than in the era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where high ambition for change requires innovation to accelerate progress. Much depends on comprehensive analysis of complex issues along with iterative processes with room for failure and learning. Social innovation should become a habit among practitioners. UN Women, through the FGE and its grantee partners, is already well on the way to embracing it.