An illustration on a light green background featuring several hands in various poses. One hand holds a small green seedling with yellow soil. Another hand holds a blue and green bird. A third hand is a clenched fist with flames above it. A fourth hand is open with a purple band. A yellow string winds through the scene, connecting the elements. There are also yellow butterflies and a yellow flower scattered around.

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FONDO CENTROAMERICANO DE MUJERES  
FOUNDATION

AGENDAS AND PRIORITIES  
**OF ADOLESCENT  
AND YOUTH  
ORGANIZATIONS**

IN CENTRAL AMERICA



## AGENDAS AND PRIORITIES OF ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Key Findings

Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres Foundation (FCAM Foundation)

2025



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## INTRODUCTION

This research stems from the commitment of Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres Foundation (FCAM) to strengthening, sustaining, and amplifying the movements led by young women, feminists, trans, and non-binary people in Central America. With a strong track record of supporting diverse youth organizations, FCAM works collaboratively to promote inclusive, equitable, and supportive relationships that sustain long-term movement building.

The study was conceived as an exercise in active listening and collective analysis, seeking to understand the organizational experiences of young people across the region. Its main objective was to explore how women, trans, and non-binary individuals under 30 participate in organizations and social movements, how their forms of organizing have evolved in recent years, and what factors explain these transformations.

The research followed a qualitative, feminist, and intersectional approach, recognizing that, far from being homogeneous, experiences of oppression are intertwined with gender, ethnicity, age, social class, and territory. Data collection combined an online survey (shared through FCAM's social media channels), group and individual interviews, and a social listening analysis. In total, 100 Central American youth organizations participated. Nearly half of them were newly established (under five years old), while the rest had more sustained trajectories.

The process concluded with an in-person regional meeting in which 37 organizations from Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala came together to share and reflect on findings. Conducted between July and October 2024, the study offers an interpretive map built from the voices of young activists themselves, capturing the

political, methodological, organizational, and emotional dimensions that define their collective action today.

Some of the key questions that guided the research included:

- » What is the participation of young women, trans, and non-binary people under 30 in organizational spaces and social movements in Central America?
- » What do these spaces look like today, and what forms of support and accompaniment do they provide?
- » How has youth participation changed in recent years, and what factors explain these shifts?
- » What contextual conditions influence how youth groups organize and sustain themselves?
- » What transformations can be observed in the agendas, priorities, and strategies of these movements?



## CONTEXT

The study reveals that youth organizations in Central America operate in a context marked by deep social inequalities and the consequences of democratic erosion, which undermine both their sustainability and their internal organization. In this environment, repression, institutional corruption, and the manipulation of judicial systems have restricted freedom of association and participation, while the rise of authoritarian regimes has further intensified the criminalization of dissent and social protest, as well as the closure of civic spaces.

Within these structural forms of violence, gender-based violence occupies a central place. It remains one of the main causes of exclusion and risk for young women and LGBTQI+ people, exacerbated by the absence of comprehensive sexuality education and the weakening of reproductive health services. These shortcomings are linked to the advance of fundamentalist and anti-rights discourses promoted by conservative sectors that exert growing influence in politics and public opinion.

Economic and educational limitations further compound these inequalities. In contexts of informal employment and inadequate public policies, lack of economic autonomy forces many young people to prioritize survival over political participation. The educational gap disproportionately affects rural and Indigenous youth, who demand an education that is linguistically equitable, intercultural, and scientifically grounded. These deficiencies perpetuate exclusion and reinforce gender and class inequalities.

In such conditions, migration emerges as a response to violence and the lack of opportunities. Some organizations have lost members to displacement or political exile, yet many have sustained their activism through regional and digital networks that enable connection and continuity.

Finally, political exclusion limits youth representation in decision-making spaces and fuels distrust in institutions. In response, young people create autonomous, community-based spaces where they strengthen their advocacy and redefine organizational methods. Through solidarity and the construction of safe collective environments, they transform experiences of exclusion into shared action, affirming that social change is only possible through collective effort and mutual care.

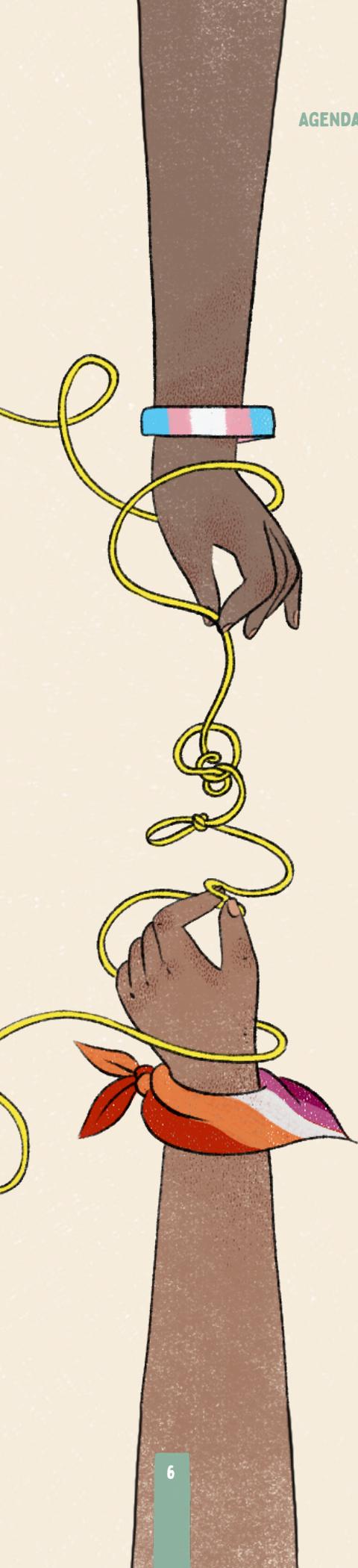
## OTHER WAYS OF ORGANIZING

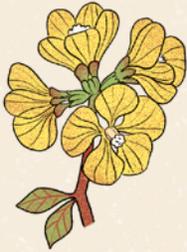
Central American youth involved in social movements have transformed the ways they organize politically and socially. Unlike previous generations, they no longer rely on permanent organizations or fixed territories; instead, they create spaces that are mobile, flexible, and often temporary. Although their practices are less institutionalized, their leadership, commitments, and struggles remain integral to broader movements for rights and justice.

This organizational and temporal fluidity gives youth movements the ability to adapt to contexts marked by repression, economic insecurity, and shrinking civic space. Many organizations evolve, disperse, or even disappear, yet the leadership, ideas, connections, and lessons they generate resurface in new configurations. Rather than a linear continuity, there is an ongoing trajectory—an energy that reactivates at key moments, sustained by affective, digital, and community networks that preserve collective memory and shared action.

On a territorial level, these new forms of organizing challenge traditional notions of borders. Activism now unfolds simultaneously in physical and digital spaces, where online networks have become political territories linking rural, urban, and exiled youth. Through these environments, organizations share strategies, amplify their voices, and build transnational alliances, even under conditions of surveillance and censorship.

Today's youth-led movements are not rigid structures but dynamic, relational processes that continuously reinvent themselves in response to changing realities. Their strength lies in their capacity to act from shared values, solidarity, and the conviction that social transformation is only possible through collective action.





## HISTORICAL STRUGGLES WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES

Central American youth continue to uphold the historical agendas of social justice, gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, sexual diversity, and civic participation, but they do so through perspectives that expand and reinterpret their meaning. These causes, long championed by previous generations, remain at the heart of their collective action, yet young people reframe them based on their own experiences, needs, and territories.

Feminism continues to be the strongest political reference point, articulating the struggle against patriarchal violence and for the right to choose. However, young feminists, trans, and non-binary people are introducing more intersectional and everyday perspectives that integrate the body, mental health, pleasure, and wellbeing as essential dimensions of justice. This broader feminist vision transcends institutional activism and is expressed in practices of self-care, healing, and mutual support that sustain life amid high emotional and political demands.

Likewise, sexual dissidence and the defense of LGBTIQ+ rights remain central themes, but young people now emphasize identity affirmation, the creation of safe spaces, and community-based support practices over formal advocacy. In terms of civic participation and social justice, their aim is not only to transform power structures but also the everyday relationships where exclusion, violence, and inequality take root.

Although the agendas remain constant, the ways of advancing them are changing. Young activists are grounding their struggles in community, emotional connection, and symbolic action, keeping their historical roots while branching into new expressions and nuances in the present. These transformations are reflected in the practices and commitments of their organizations, where this generational understanding of feminism and rights is lived and embodied through personal, collective, and political decisions.

Young and diverse organizations share and co-create initiatives that reflect this distinct way of inhabiting and defending their rights. Among their priorities are:

- » **Body autonomy:** Young people defend the right to be themselves — to live and express their identities and inhabit their bodies freely. They emphasize that there are many ways of being young and demand that these diversities be recognized, respected, and named in their own voices.
- » **Dignified conditions for their work and activism:** They question their relationship with money, voluntary activist work and constant states of survival that compromise physical and emotional well-being. Young activists call for dignified conditions that allow them to sustain their political engagement without sacrificing health or stability.
- » **Comprehensive health, with an emphasis on mental health:** Youth organizations understand health in an integral way, which encompasses physical, sexual, and reproductive dimensions, as well as emotional and mental wellbeing. They seek timely support and share collective tools to sustain themselves “in the here and now,” recognizing care as essential to their activism.
- » **Advocacy:** Their advocacy strategies are diverse and deeply rooted in local realities. Young people develop community-based and context-sensitive actions that respond to changing and often adverse political conditions. When possible, they participate in marches, sit-ins, awareness campaigns, or legislative initiatives. In more restrictive contexts, they rely on digital activism and social media as key tools for visibility and denunciation
- » **Comprehensive feminist protection:** This approach has gained strength among young women, trans, and non-binary activists who recognize that defending rights requires individual and collective protection strategies. They build networks and protocols to safeguard their physical, mental, and economic security.





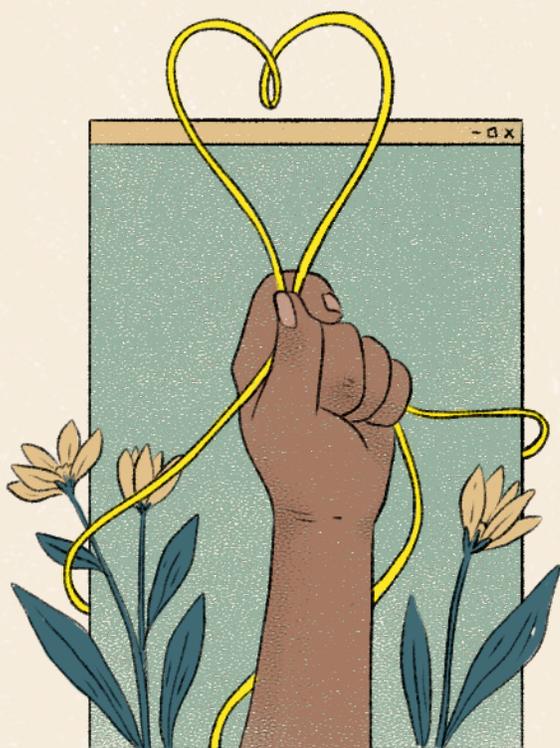
## ACTIVISM THROUGH BODIES AND EMOTIONS

Central American youth have expanded the horizons of their actions, incorporating new analyses, languages, and forms of political engagement. These do not replace historical causes but reinterpret them through lived experience. Emerging themes are closely tied to the body, emotions, and everyday life, challenging the idea that political action happens only within institutions or in the streets.

Care and mental health have gained unprecedented importance. In contexts marked by violence, exile, and precarity, young people view personal and collective well-being as essential to sustaining activism. Caring for oneself and one's community becomes a political act of resistance against exhaustion, fear, and loss. These practices do not replace protest; they make it more humane, sustainable, and strategic.

Art, culture, and digital media have also become vital spaces of activism. Through performance, photography, music, and humor on social media, young people transform creative expression into a political tool. These practices build community, evoke empathy, and allow them to communicate outside traditional activist frameworks.

For urban youth organizations with a digital presence, environmental advocacy is increasingly intertwined with gender justice, sustainability, and resistance to extractivism and the lasting impacts of colonization. More than a new cause, what is truly new is the intergenerational and transnational articulation that links these struggles, making the climate crisis a shared point of convergence across diverse movements.



## THE POLITICS OF THE EVERYDAY

Everyday politics among Central American youth is expressed as a situated, affective, and daily form of action that gives concrete meaning to their struggles. Rather than relying on large organizational structures or long-term institutional agendas, their activism unfolds in the immediacy of everyday life—within the very spaces where oppression is experienced and resisted.

This micro-level politics manifests through community, artistic, and educational practices: comprehensive sexuality education workshops, feminist reading circles, urban gardens, digital campaigns, and cultural

interventions that aim to transform local relationships and perceptions. The personal and the collective intertwine, as young people recognize that social transformation begins in their own bodies, emotions, and the relationships they nurture.

The concept of *acuerpamiento*—understood as mutual support and emotional accompaniment—has become a cornerstone of their political practice. From this perspective, resistance is not measured by the capacity to confront institutions, but by the ability to remain alive, connected, and in solidarity. Acts of friendship, trust, and care are recognized as transformative forces that make resistance possible in hostile environments.

This form of politics challenges traditional boundaries between the public and the private. For young people, cooking together, creating art, or sharing moments of rest can be just as political as participating in a march or issuing a public statement. In doing so, grassroots politics redefines the very meaning of activism, proposing an ethic of care, tenderness, and everyday life as the foundation for sustaining the larger struggles of our time.



## REDEFINING STRATEGIES IN HOSTILE CONTEXTS

In recent years, Central American youth movements have been forced to redefine their strategies and priorities. The increasingly hostile contexts in which they operate have compelled them to rethink how to act, how to protect themselves, and how to sustain their work without facing greater risks.

One of the most significant transformations has been organizational decentralization. In response to the closure of civic spaces, young people are building smaller, autonomous, and flexible networks that operate discreetly or through digital platforms. This structure reduces their visibility to potential threats while enhancing their capacity for adaptation and collective protection. In many cases, activism has shifted from the streets to the virtual sphere, which has become a new territory for resistance and communication.

At the same time, care and sustainability have become central priorities, replacing older models centered on direct confrontation. Young activists recognize that the struggle cannot be sustained without safeguarding emotional and physical well-being. Practices of healing, self-care, and everyday solidarity are now understood as vital political strategies that are as important as public mobilization.

Finally, in the face of limited economic resources and shrinking cooperation funds, youth organizations are turning to self-management and alliances. Regional and transnational networks are growing stronger, allowing groups to share knowledge, pool resources, and sustain their causes across borders.



## REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE

This section draws on reflections gathered through primary research, including in-person dialogues with youth participants. It also incorporates insights from ongoing conversations facilitated by FCAM as part of its accompaniment and monitoring processes. Building on these connections, youth organizations reflected collectively on their present and future. These reflections, gathered through the research process and through FCAM's ongoing accompaniment of partner organizations, reveal how young activists envision what lies ahead for their movements and communities.

When discussing the future, young activists emphasized that their perspectives are shaped by both individual and collective realities, influenced by community, national, and regional contexts. Thinking about the future evokes a wide range of emotions and thoughts: for some, it brings uncertainty; for others, hope.

Perceptions of an uncertain future are often tied to recurring challenges: Economic limitations, which make it difficult for organizations to provide fair salaries or labor benefits to their members; organizational precarity, which is reflected in unstable structures and limited sustainability; and a sense of ongoing mourning, caused by multiple losses, e.g., the withdrawal of international cooperation, the closure of organizations, and the migration or exile of colleagues, among others.

“The future feels uncertain—everything looks blurry—but we want to believe that even then, we’ll keep fighting and resisting for our people: for trans men, for diverse women, for the LGBTQI+ community.”

– *Non-binary activist from El Salvador*

“I feel uncertain [about the future], and in the middle of that uncertainty, I’m scared to think about what to do with this urge to keep fighting and defending human rights.”

– *Salvadoran activist*

Their hopeful visions for the future are rooted in a desire for growth and continuity, dreams of strengthening their technical and professional skills, expanding advocacy within their

communities, and sustaining their activism in environmentally responsible ways. They imagine stronger alliances and greater coordination with networks, collectives, and other activists and human rights defenders across Central America, working together toward a more equitable and sustainable region.

“ I imagine a future with a strong operations team, a safe house, a healing space, a research center, an amazing legal team—and our organizations with their own offices in every territory.”

– Honduran activist

“ Wow, I picture a future with a community clinic for trans men, a team of facilitators offering workshops on PAP tests and mental health, and advocacy efforts to include more trans men—but also, where everyone in the collective has a decent job.”

– Guatemalan activist

“ I envision a future where my organization reaches across Abya Yala, working alongside other groups engaged in the same struggle, weaving creative proposals together.”

– Honduran activist

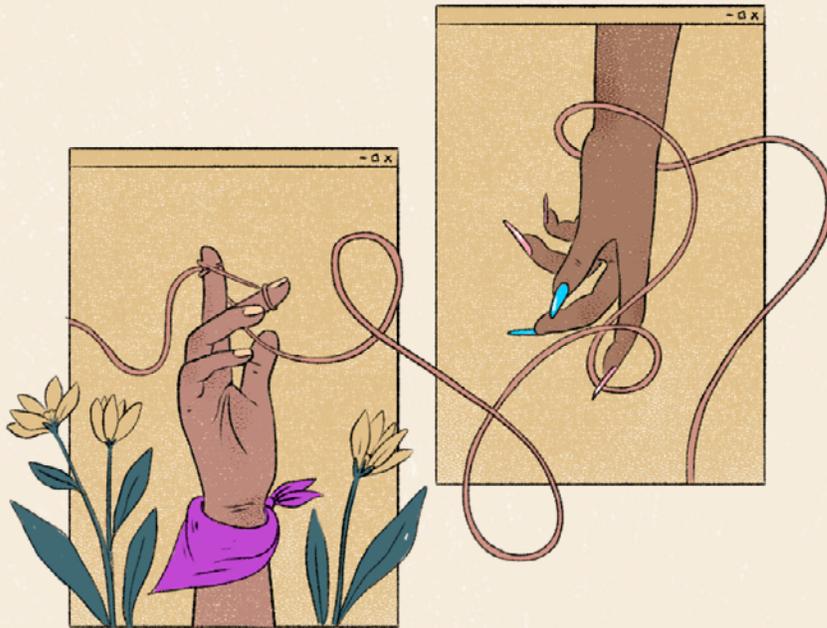
“ I imagine being able to travel across the country with the climate justice schools, and building a network of ‘climate godmothers,’ with seminars and exchanges led by Central American thinkers.”

– Costa Rican activist



Reflections on the future brought together members from different movements: the feminist movement, the Indigenous women’s movement, the movement for the defense of territory, and the trans and non-binary movement. When imagining what they hope to see in the future of their movements, participants agreed on the importance of greater intersectionality, inclusion, respect for diverse identities and for nature, and the recovery of historical memory.

In short, youth movements have responded to adversity with creativity, flexibility, and care. Their strategies are not about resisting through force, but through life itself, constantly reinventing their practices to keep acting and creating, even when external conditions attempt to silence them.



## SUPPORT TO STRENGTHEN AND SUSTAIN COLLECTIVE POWER

As part of this study's findings, key lessons have emerged about the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities that shape youth activism and organization in Central America.

Although each country has its own particular realities, the region as a whole faces a critical moment for the sustainability and future of social movements. Young people play a fundamental role in shaping this context. They are teaching us to reimagine activism through care and kindness, through collective action rooted in local communities, even within environments that promote fear and individualism. Their experiences demonstrate that the endurance of movements goes beyond formal structures and that it is both necessary and possible to broaden our perspective to include diverse realities and struggles.

As a philanthropic organization, FCAM has reaffirmed the importance of flexibility in funding and support strategies, enabling youth organizations to adapt their actions to changing and complex contexts.

This research process has also generated reflections that FCAM wishes to share with other philanthropic actors and allies, especially those committed to youth, human rights, climate and gender justice, and democracy.



## 1. STRENGTHEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:

- a. Expand the channels used to disseminate calls for proposals so they reach organizations led by young women, trans, and non-binary people—especially in rural and peripheral areas.
- b. Move beyond narrowly defined topics and incorporate diverse, cross-cutting themes so that more young people and their intersectional struggles feel represented in funding opportunities. It is time to respond to their call to stop thinking in isolation.
- c. Integrate language justice into all calls for proposals, ensuring accessibility and inclusion across linguistic and cultural contexts.

## 2. ADJUST FINANCING MECHANISMS:

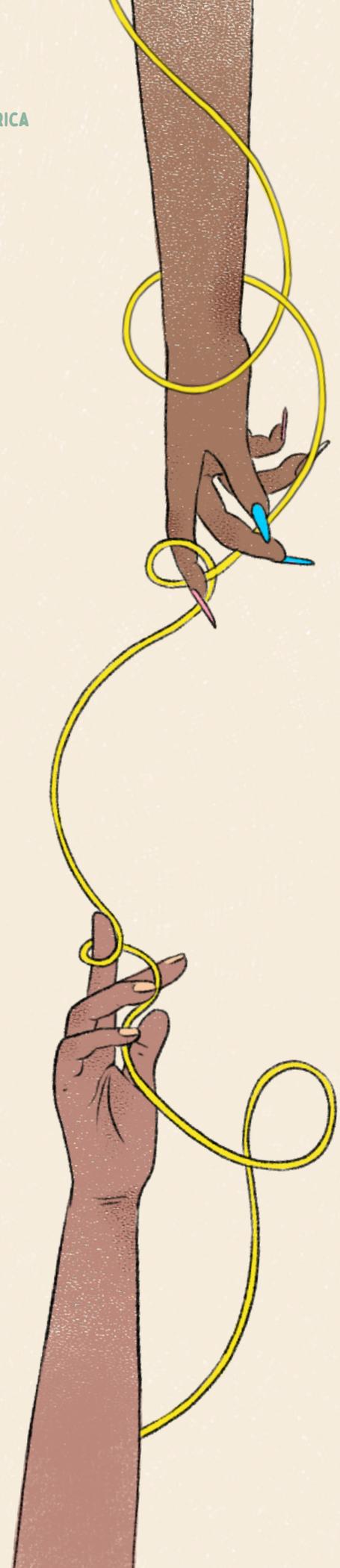
- a. Provide multi-year, flexible funding that allows organizations to cover costs related not only to their activities but also to the well-being and safety of their members.
- b. Offer small, flexible grants for emerging organizations to cover essential needs such as transportation, internet access, or training.
- c. Fund salaries and stipends so that activists can live and work with dignity—without this, sustaining collective struggles is nearly impossible.
- d. Support initiatives that create reserve funds and offer unrestricted seed funding to strengthen organizational self-sustainability.

### 3. DEEPEN TECHNICAL AND POLITICAL SUPPORT:

- a. Provide financial assistance that enables organizations to hire specialized advisors in areas such as fundraising, administration, communications, and collective leadership, particularly for newly established groups.
- b. Support the creation of training and exchange spaces focused on feminist communication strategies, including audience analysis and narrative-building tools.

### 4. PROMOTE DIGITAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

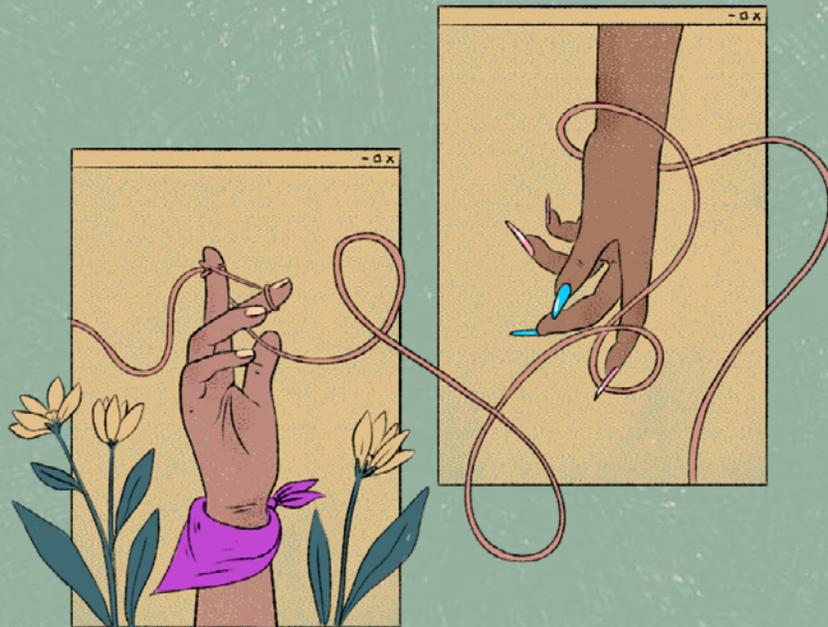
- a. Provide resources to strengthen both the internal and external digital security of organizations.
- b. Support the assessment of communication and information management practices, as well as monitoring and evaluation systems, that may inadvertently create risks to the safety of young activists.



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