We welcome the opportunity to engage with you further about our Roots Lab pilot program in Lebanon, and appreciate your commitment to women and girls. Together, we can ensure that money and attention are directed to where they’re most needed in the fight for gender equality.

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The Roots Lab is a new two-year pilot program that seeks to test how best to incubate social change driven by young women activists. Global Fund for Women, FRIDA the Young Feminist Fund, Oxfam and the Young Foundation have joined together to design this pilot program, in collaboration with local young women activists and women’s rights organizations, as well as to identify funding to implement it. Lebanon is the location for our first Roots Lab pilot.

Participants in the program will be supported, trained, mentored and given the resources that enable them to start and grow innovative ideas that will create change in their communities. Teams of young women will be given the tools to test and try their ideas, some of which may be adapted and taken to scale.

Why Now and Why Lebanon?

The Roots Lab was conceived in response to some of the most pressing challenges for sustained change to women’s rights: the need for stronger, multi-generational women’s movements, the need for new and innovative cross-sectoral strategies that address entrenched problems for women, and the need to fortify young women activists (especially the most marginalized women) so that they can have the greatest impact as change makers.

Lebanon’s vibrant civil society, internet connectivity, vocal and engaged youth population, and challenging women’s rights context make it a strong choice to host one of Roots Lab’s pilots. Young women activists in Lebanon who are best placed to imagine and develop high-impact solutions in their communities often lack the opportunity and capacity to do so. Our combined experience shows us that many young women leaders already have excellent solutions, yet their potentially ground-breaking ideas are being lost without ever being adequately considered or attempted. In the development space, projects are often ‘for’ young women but not ‘by’ them.
Young women we consulted for the development of Roots Lab in 2015 spoke about the lack of women’s participation in decision making spaces, from the domestic sphere to the government—and the inability to talk openly about sex, relationships, or women’s rights abuses. Although Lebanon’s parliament passed Domestic Violence legislation in 2014, it contains extremely narrow definitions of women’s rights, domestic abuse and does not make marital rape illegal. Domestic and sexual violence, including honor killings, are common but under-reported and those we consulted told us that Lebanese women who face violence have no options: no recourse, no access to justice, and no shelter. Syrian and Palestinian refugee women are doubly excluded from decisions about local and national policy, justice and services. Those we consulted told us they faced additional challenges in all spheres, given their restrictions on work and speech.

Yet, Lebanon’s specific demographics indicate opportunity for social transformation. Nearly 90% of the population lives in urban areas, the population is young, and the literacy rates amongst women reach 91.8%. Lebanon is also connected and engaged online; as of the end of 2014, 80.4% of the population used the internet, including social media platforms. This context provides a rich environment for potential programs such as The Roots Lab, a social innovation lab that will give young women the tools, skills, networks, and financial support they need to take their ideas for how to advance women’s rights in their communities and make them a reality.

The Opportunity

“My mom was a fighter, she taught me to believe in other women. I believe in every single woman in this world. I know they can overcome challenges they are facing. As activists, we need to believe in ourselves... Women are strong and they can achieve anything.” – Young Lebanese activist, Beirut Roots Lab consultation,

The Roots Lab will equip young women who are most impacted by Lebanon’s social and political challenges to see themselves as social innovators, and to enact their innovations—in response to locally identified women’s rights challenges.

Throughout the 2-year pilot period, The Roots Lab will engage an estimated 100 young women from different sectors (e.g. technology, front line service delivery, private sector, civil society groups, etc.) and those most affected by the issues identified to develop and trial innovative solutions. Individuals and teams will be hosted and supported throughout a well-designed, staged process of accompaniment to develop, incubate, test and adapt their ideas—with tailored support from local women’s rights organizations (WROs), social innovation specialists and peer mentors.

Up to 10 young women or teams of young women activists will have access to tangible
resources like grants and stipends as well as links to networks, trainings, and peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities with which to design and prototype their initiatives, test and adapt approaches and, where possible, prepare to take these innovations to scale.

Each team will be hosted by a local WRO—or suitable host organization to be identified by them—which will accompany the teams as they develop their ideas and distribute funds. The Roots Lab will also develop high-quality communications and advocacy opportunities to promote the achievements of new Roots Lab innovations and to engage targeted policy makers, new donors and social innovation allies, traditional leaders, media and other influencers around the challenges facing young women in Lebanon.

The Roots Lab model has the potential to empower a new generation of young women activists—especially those who have not had access to traditional funding opportunities—to become active part of, and in turn strengthen, their local women’s rights movements and actions.

**Partners and Collaboration**

The Roots Lab is a collaborative project with an organizational structure that reflects and builds on the complementary strengths of the four organizations that created it:

**Global Fund for Women** will bring our decades of experience in grantmaking and movement building to support and accompany the Lebanese Roots Labs teams and WROs, and will work closely with those groups as well as Oxfam’s advocacy team to support high-profile and effective awareness, advocacy and visibility for the project. Global Fund for Women will be responsible for the direct grant-making to young women activists by transferring funds through “host” women’s human rights organizations.

**Oxfam’s** role will be to manage the day-to-day implementation of the pilot in Lebanon and to represent the partnership in all Roots Lab engagement with local allies and stakeholders. Oxfam will recruit and manage a project team—led by a full-time Coordinator—who will implement the project, engage with local WROs and provide high-quality information, outreach and support to Roots Labs teams. The Oxfam team will also build on a strong history and credibility as a women’s rights and development partner and influencer in Lebanon to coordinate local Roots Lab advocacy and
communications – as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning in close collaboration with Lebanese partners and key stakeholders.

**FRIDA** will play the leading role in developing the capacity development elements (including the trainings and skill building offerings) of The Roots Lab (including peer-to-peer mentorship) because of their expertise in managing capacity development activities, but also in designing activities so that they emphasize and trust young feminist activists to define and navigate their own needs. As the only youth-led partner in the Lab, FRIDA will play a strong role in fostering safe, open, and positive intergenerational relationships between participants and implementing partners via their global team and 3 Lebanon-based advisors and mentors.

The **Young Foundation** works with the public and private sectors and civil society to empower people to lead happier and more meaningful lives. The foundation will provide its significant technical expertise in social innovation, and will build on their recent Gender Futures work to advise the Lebanon project team on program design, as well as the wider gender innovation approach and concept.

**Project Design**

Roots Lab is designed to shift a status quo in which younger, more marginalized women are silenced by putting the power to make decisions back in their hands. Young women are the central figures of the project: they decide what resources, guidance, training, support, and relationships they will need to bring their ideas to life. Roots Lab will facilitate the relationships between established women’s rights organizations and younger women activists, so that The Roots Lab both models and contributes to opening up space for young women to participate in the decision-making process.

Effective collaboration with key media, private sector, academic and social innovation partners and experts will also be critical to the success of this pilot. The Young Foundation will work with local WRO partners during the Inception period to support the process of securing necessary and appropriate in-country social innovation expertise – and providing elements of this support themselves where these do not exist. The Roots Lab Coordinator, Lebanese partners and local FRIDA advisors will work from the outset with support from global partners to establish excitement about the potential of this innovative approach – and seek concrete offers of pro-bono support, sponsorships (of e.g. events, Awards and online trainings) and, ultimately, additional financing.
The Impact

The overall impact of The Roots Lab program is that **new and innovative solutions that have a tangible impact on improving young women’s lives and rights are developed and tested by young women leaders.**

The Roots Lab 2-year pilot in Lebanon will contribute to the following:

1. Innovative projects designed by young Lebanese women have created sustained change in women’s lives.
2. Young women participate in addressing complex social issues through cross-sector collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and intergenerational cooperation.
3. Innovation is integrated into women’s rights and social justice movements.
4. Increased resources and support are available for social innovation led by young women, and young women are seen as leaders for change.

Our theory of change for The Roots Lab is based on the idea that change to women’s rights happens when movements are strong, sustained, intersectional, and intergenerational. By creating a program that offers effective tools, resources, and support, we believe young women will take the opportunity to lead initiatives that align with their most pressing needs. We also assume that by linking young women’s rights actors with women’s rights organizations, we will help build a bridge that will facilitate a more sustainable and transformative movement.

Conclusion

Around the world, deeply-rooted gender inequality prevents women and girls from taking control of their own lives. Generating innovative, sustainable, and intergenerational solutions to these problems is an urgent task. The Roots Lab project sets out to do just that, by adapting a social innovation lens, and applying it to the most critical women’s rights issues in Lebanon today.

Once the pilot model is tested and adapted, The Roots Lab has the potential to empower a new generation of young women—especially those who might not have access to traditional funding streams or grant opportunities—to become active part of and in turn strengthen their local women’s rights movements and actions. We hope you will join us in supporting young women activists to become social innovators, and drivers of lasting change for gender equality in their communities—now and in future.
### Sources of Pilot Funding

- **ShineMaker Foundation**: 11%
- **The Open Society Foundations**: 38%
- **Oxfam**: 19%
- **Partner Commitments**: 6%
- **Funding Gap**: 26%

### Project Costs

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