Systematization* of the FCAM Model

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*Systematization of experience is a method aimed at improving practice based on a critical reflection and interpretation of lessons learnt from that practice. http://www.knowledgerepos.net/Methodology
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Over the last 40 years, Ana has dedicated her life to the financial and political sustainability of the feminist movement in Central America. Strategic thinking, movement building, fundraising and non-profit management are her main contributions and skills. During the 80’s she has been co-founder of the Women’s Department of a national union of rural workers and Co-Coordinator of Entre Mujeres South-North, a Latin American women’s network on gender and development issues. As a sociology teacher at a Nicaraguan college, she also created the first Women’s Studies unit in the country. in 2005 Ana has been selected by Ashoka as fellow, an award which honors innovative social entrepreneurs from all over the world. Her publications include various essays and research reports on women’s issues, gender, development aid and organizational capacity-building. Since 2010, she works as an independent consultant, specialized in feminist non-profit start-up, management and resource development.
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The Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) is a feminist foundation with its headquarters in the Central American region, that is dedicated to mobilizing resources – both from multilateral or governmental international development agencies, such as international NGOs, public and private foundations, businesses, and individuals - in order to strengthen women’s movements and support initiatives of women’s groups and organizations, particularly young Central American women, who promote and defend women’s human rights.

The vision of the Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) is a world in which Central American women, in all their diversity, have their rights to physical and emotional integrity, economic and social justice guaranteed, and they can participate as leaders in decision-making which affects their lives and their communities.

The Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) is guided by a set of values that give meaning and direction to its work, as much on the internal level with its members, Board, and staff, as externally, with its partner organizations, donors, and allies:

- **Equity between all people, regardless of their social conditions or roles, position in the organization, or society in general;**

- **Consistency between discourse and practice;**

- **Transparency in decision-making, and in obtaining and administrating resources;**

- **Creativity in all areas of work;**

- **Sisterhood with all women in all their diversity;**

- **Autonomy from governments, political parties, religious institutions, businesses, or any other social organization.**

From its beginnings, FCAM has set itself apart as an innovative institution. Although it has based its work on the experiences of other women’s funds throughout the world, it has developed its own model that to this day has inspired other foundations with a variety of focuses.
FCAM has received the attention of donors and peers on an international level because of its emphasis on supporting mainly young women’s initiatives, its participatory methodology in the selection of partner organizations, its extensive capacity-building programs, its individualized follow-up with each of its partner organizations, its creativity in the search for new funding for women in the region, and its persistence in the search for new ways to perform impact evaluations of its work.

As a result, the Fund has been receiving numerous requests to share its experience. FCAM has tried to do this on an individual basis as best it can, but it has not been able to do it in an efficient or systematic way. This systematization of the FCAM model is the first attempt at responding to this demand and as well as rescuing the organization’s institutional memory.

II. Description of FCAM’s history

The *Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres* (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) was created in 2003. At the time, it did not yet have its own office space and for several months functioned in founder Ana Criquillon’s house and then was generously allowed to borrow office space at the *Puntos de Encuentro* Foundation in Managua, Nicaragua. Initially, only two people were working part-time for the organization: Ana Criquillon and Millie Brobston, whose previous experience in resource mobilization with North American foundations proved to be very valuable for the start of the Fund.

The idea to create a women’s fund in Central America emerged out of the context of growing financial difficulties that women’s groups and organizations in the region were facing at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. During this time period, several international development agencies, which had been important allies and had provided funding for the previous two decades, began to pull out of the region.

This adverse financial context was accompanied by tougher conditions for organizations to access funding: aid became more and more concentrated in larger and more consolidated organizations that were located in the capitals
or other major cities. The tendency was to support specific projects which fell within specific priority categories as defined by the development agencies, short-term projects, and using indicators for success and ways to evaluate impact that generally were not adequate to measure the type of complex social change promoted by women’s organizations.

At the same time, funds were increasing for supporting social services (health, housing, education) or income-generating and micro-credit projects at the expense of funding for programs primarily aimed at promoting and defending women’s human rights.

The historic economic dependence of the majority of non-governmental feminist and women’s organizations in the region on international cooperation aid contributed to a gradual loss of political autonomy for these organizations because their agenda was influenced by the type of funding they were able to obtain. This caused internal tensions between the women’s movements that led to deep internal divisions that still remain today.

For women’s groups and organizations to raise funds through the sale of products or services also did not prove to be the solution to solve their financial needs. In the majority of cases, attempted efforts were not efficient or profitable and they distracted the organizations from the actual mission for which they were created.

At the time, there were already international women’s funds based in the northern hemisphere, such as Mama Cash in the Netherlands, the Astraea Foundation, the Global Fund for Women and the Urgent Action Fund in the United States, Filia in Germany and a few others located in the Global South: Semillas in México, Tewa in Nepal, Nirmaya in India, the African Women Development Fund (AWDF) for the African continent, Elas (formerly the Angela Borba Fund) in Brazil and Alquimia in Chile.

These Funds used a resource mobilization model previously unknown in Central America. Even though a few foreign foundations were working in the region (mostly from North America) and a few foundations that raised funds to carry out their own programs, there was no foundation with its headquarters in Central America that was making donations to civil society groups and organizations, much less exclusively to women’s groups.
Neither was there a philanthropic culture towards social justice causes. Philanthropy in Central America was associated with churches and charitable institutions or organizations providing social services.

However, the women’s fund model was an innovative and interesting alternative to explore. It was attractive because its origins were anchored in the feminist movements of the countries where they working and because of its forms of funding. Inspired by these pioneering funds and counting on their support and shared experiences, The Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) was officially launched on February 24, 2004 in the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation’s auditorium in Managua. In the presence of national media, feminist activists and a diverse group of civil organizations, FCAM made its first grants to five Nicaraguan women’s organizations for a total of $13,000 (Thirteen thousand US dollars) provided through a seed fund from the Global Fund for Women with its headquarters in San Francisco, California.

FCAM began working without registering as its own official NGO, receiving fiscal sponsorship and administrative and financial support from the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation in Nicaragua. During its first three years, the Fund was able to fully dedicate itself to raising funds and developing its programs. Coordination with the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation was done directly by the Executive Director. However, after two years, the Fund had grown substantially, and not having its own administrative team became a serious limitation, both for receiving external funding and for grant making. In early 2006, FCAM created its administrative area and at the end of that same year formed its General Assembly, elected its Board of Directors, and received official legal status as a national NGO in Nicaragua with regional programming. The resources that had been accumulated under the name of Puntos de Encuentro during this first stage as an organization were transferred to FCAM.

III. Theory of change

The Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (Central American Women’s Fund-FCAM) develops its theory of change on the basis of a holistic, historical, feminist analysis of existing power relations in Central American society as a whole, and
based on the fact that this society is immersed in a global, patriarchal, and exclusionary system, which functions based on multiple relations of power and dominance, exploitation, and oppression that interact and reinforce themselves.

These power relations are socially constructed on the basis of differences such as gender, age, sexual identity, ethnicity, skin color, physical and mental abilities, as well as nationality, social class, whether one lives in an urban or rural area, level of education, and religion, to mention the most common, giving different traits a superior status over others.

Relations of power and dominance manifest themselves between people at many levels - interpersonal and institutional, ideological and material - and generate violence, destruction, and death. They can also lead to individualistic and predatory attitudes and behaviors that are all around us.

In order for the system to change and transform relations of dominance into relations of collaboration, solidarity, equality and equity between people, especially people of different genders, there must be changes in individuals and their communities, as well as structural changes within the institutions of our societies. During the time of the Popular Sandinista Revolution, it was argued that a change was needed first in people's material conditions that maintain and replicate relations of power and dominance. Only then could individual and collective ideas, attitudes, and behaviors change.

It was also argued that some power relations, particularly those of class and rural-urban origin were the most important, and that these needed to be overcome first.

However, in practice evidence has shown that these processes of change are more dialectical and that it is necessary to analyze them, work intersectorally, and at many different levels at once. These changes also cannot only be generated at an individual level. They require profound cultural changes, changes in social norms that determine individual and collective attitudes and behaviors in our societies.
How can these changes be achieved? FCAM’s strategic priorities

This system of relations of power and dominance between human beings is an extremely complex one. It depends greatly on the historical and social context in which power relations are expressed, and it is subject to constant changes, many which are unpredictable and uncontrollable. Despite the enormous diversity of the sub-systems of subordination, exploitation, and oppression that conform this system, throughout history and the struggles and rebellions of oppressed peoples, certain patterns of change can be identified, as well as factors that lead to these changes.

These factors include the following:

1. The creation of a favorable public opinion environment towards the desired changes: questioning the status quo, redefining relationships between genders and people in general, and raising awareness in the general population about the needs for these changes.

2. The promotion of and support for changes in the individual and collective attitudes and behaviors according to a specific vision.

3. Strengthening collective action and mobilization to pressure institutions (families, private education and health institutions, media, businesses, civil society organizations, governments, and international institutions, etc.) to make changes in public policies that will establish new social norms of coexistence and collaboration between human beings.

Evidence has shown that the most effective strategies to achieve these objectives combine mass communication actions (such as the TV series produced by Puntos de Encuentro, campaigns, video clips, movies, radio shows, etc.) with actions of political advocacy (in the broadest sense), and actions that raise awareness, educate, and train people at a local level and include some type of face-to-face interaction (street theater, workshops, informal speaking engagements, and formal and informal educational sessions).
A key actor for pushing these types of actions in the region are the women’s and feminist movements and the organizations or the institutions that they are a part of. There are women’s and feminist movements and organizations with a long history and a great ability to organize and mobilize in Central America. Many of them implement actions like the ones described above of very high quality and that make a significant impact.

a. Hence, FCAM’s **first strategic priority** is to **direct its efforts towards the strengthening and sustainability of these movements and organizations** (instead of directly funding the implementation of our own programs).

   We see the women’s and feminist movements of the region as a system in which organizations of all sizes have a role to play. We believe in the complementary nature of their actions. We also believe in the vital importance of grassroots groups that work at the local level, and whose work is often invisible, because they are the lungs of the movements. These groups in general have very little access to resources and support, and they need to link themselves to other organizations that are more consolidated at the national and international level.

b. **Our second strategic priority is to: support numerous, small, local initiatives and promote knowledge sharing and relationship building between them and other organizations within the movement.**

c. **A third strategic priority is linked to the topic of diversity.** Besides considering inclusion as an essential value, we believe that recognizing and appreciation for diversity and differences is an accelerator for social change. It decreases the risk that movements will become stagnant, opening them up to new possibilities and perspectives.

   In particular, we believe in the dynamism and renovating capacity of young women’s participation. This has been and continues to be a cornerstone belief of FCAM.

d. **A fourth strategic priority has to do with creating a participatory and cooperative model of resource mobilization and redistribution.** We did not want to have a model in which a few people (donors, Board, staff) made the most decisions about the work of the Fund and how to use its resources.
IV. The role of FCAM and its contribution to strengthening the sustainability and autonomy of women’s movements in Central America

In addition to external challenges linked to the evolving world economic situation, political changes, setbacks to formal democracy, as well as to an increase in violence, an increase in insecurity for citizens, and the rise of fundamentalists in the region, women’s movements and organizations face internal challenges that threaten their sustainability, restrict their ability to take action and limit their potential. Among these internal challenges, the following stand out:

a. **Financial sustainability of the movements**: Women’s organizations do not have enough stable financial resources and materials, and in the majority of cases, they do not have control over their use, limiting their autonomy to push forward their own agendas. On the other hand, the few resources that women’s movements do have are concentrated in the biggest and most organized organizations that work on a national or regional level and are usually located in the capital cities or other major cities in the region.

b. **Political sustainability of the movements**: The dominant political culture in the region, which also permeates the women’s and feminist movements, is a patriarchal, authoritarian, hegemonic, caudillistic*, exclusionary, and discriminatory culture. It does not respect or appreciate the diversity of identities and priorities, and justifies the use of violence as a means to an end. This political culture reinforces relations of power and dominance between women themselves and increases the fragmentation of and competition between women’s movements and organizations instead of fostering solidarity, sisterhood, and joint action.

* “Caudillismo” is a cultural phenomenon that first appeared during the early 19th century in revolutionary South America, as a type of militia leader with a charismatic personality and enough of a populist program of generic future reforms to gain broad sympathy, at least at the outset, among the common
people. Effective “caudillismo” depends on a personality cult. (From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caudillo)

- Physical and emotional sustainability of feminist activists in the region: The physical security and health of activists are constantly and increasingly threatened by governments, paramilitary forces, or by sectors linked to drug trafficking and human-trafficking.

In light of its own theory of change, focusing on the analysis developed above, FCAM aspires to strengthen women’s movements and organizations in the region in these three key areas.

How does FCAM contribute to the financial sustainability and autonomy of women’s and feminist movements in the region?

DIRECTLY:

- We find new sources of funding, not accessible by the majority of women’s groups and organizations in the region (either because of difficulties with languages, minimum size required, a very small institutional budget, a lack of efficient mechanisms for fundraising from individuals, etc.) and thus increase the total amount of resources available for the fight for women’s rights in Central America. One important aspect for us has been the principle of not competing with women’s organizations in the region for currently available funds - particularly with medium and small organizations.

- We provide institutional financial support to partner organizations instead of financing for projects or specific focus areas because we believe that the movements, and the groups and organizations that are a part of them, should define their own agendas and priorities. They should also be able to decide how to use their funding and have the flexibility to modify their operative plans to take into account the frequent changes in their
surrounding context and the lessons they learn along the way.

- **We provide funding and support for several consecutive years because we know that it takes time and requires a certain amount of stability for a group or organization to grow, become more organized, and be able to find other sources of funding.**

- **We mainly support groups and organizations of women that are just starting out, are small, many who are not officially registered as an organization, are located in rural communities or areas outside of the capital cities with little access to other funding sources. In fact, we think that large, medium, and small organizations are equally strategic and play complementary roles: some advocate on the national, regional, and/or global level, others at a more local level. The impact of more grassroots organizations with a local reach is sometimes less visible and it is difficult for many of them to obtain funding, however, they are the lungs of the movements. They are the ones that allow movements to spread their ideas and proposals to the most remote places and to generate popular support for changes that they propose. Without the efforts of these worker ants, movements’ proposals run the risk of remaining trapped at the level of the intellectual or political elites.**

- **We support formal and informal networks, as well as coordinating bodies within the movements, because they provide crucial spaces for generating new connections, new joint initiatives, and to coordinate actions with major impact. Generally these networks receive little support because they are not registered legally as organizations.**

- **We train groups and organizations that we fund about the administrative-financial management of resources, including the development of budgets and financial reports, how to open and manage bank accounts, establishing their own internal control mechanisms, the importance of internal and external transparency and submitting reports.**

**INDIRECTLY:**

- **We share FCAM’s knowledge and experience in resource mobilization with women’s groups and organizations in the region in order for them to be able to diversify their funding sources and that money for women’s rights work might be more available.**
• We develop a culture of feminist philanthropy and social change that attracts more women to the movements, generates new forms of activism, and allows for groups to carry out higher-risk, more controversial, and more difficult actions than would be possible with financing from development agencies and foundations (such as the defense of sexual and reproductive rights, the rights of sex workers, the lesbian and transgendered population, the decriminalization of abortion, etc.)

• We promote the visibility of international women’s funds by supporting their individual and collective action as key actors in strengthening women’s and feminist movements on the national and global levels.
  
  a. By contributing to the creation and development of new women’s funds with visions and missions similar to that of FCAM (such as CAWF, Calala, FRIDA, the Women’s Fund of the DRC, etc.)

  b. By helping to fortify women’s funds in Latin America and the Caribbean through an exchange of experiences and joint initiatives for resource mobilization and joint projects (example: CONMUJERES and the LBT project).

  c. By promoting joint initiatives with feminist allies (like the Association of Women’s Rights in Development - AWID, the Maquila Solidarity Network - MSN, Puntos de Encuentro) and women’s funds in Latin America and other regions of the world (example: MDG3, FLOW, the community of practice with funds who work with young women).

• We practice ongoing advocacy work in the international philanthropic world and with bi-lateral, governmental, and non-governmental development agencies with the goal of promoting a social justice approach from a feminist perspective in their interventions and to also transform existing power relations (North-South, global-local, donors-grantees, large donors vs. smaller donors) into relations of collaboration, mutual respect, and recognition of complementary roles in shared objective areas (example: participation in the International Network of Women’s Funds - INWF, in the Women’s Funding Network - WFN, in Grantmakers without Borders - GWoB, in the International Human Rights Founders Group - IHRFG, in the Social Justice and Peace Philanthropy Community of Practice, in conferences of the Council of Foundations, of the European Foundations (EFC), in the group of donor who support sex workers, in the virtual group coordinated by
For-AL about evaluation, as well as in the type of partnership relationships established between FCAM and some donors like the Ford Foundation, Hivos, Seattle International Foundation, OAK Foundation, Mama Cash, Global Fund for Women, and Oxfam-Canada, among others).

- How does FCAM contribute to the political sustainability and autonomy of women’s and feminist movements in the region and their internal renewal?

- We promote a more active, visible, and recognizable participation of young women with the goal of contributing to greater generational democracy, dynamism within the movements, and an internal passing of the baton to the next generation:
  a. By funding initiatives that promote and defend young women’s rights in Central America, directed and developed by young women themselves, and in this way, contribute to the establishment of a regional institutional platform that allows young women to have their own stable spaces and resources to execute their own agenda.
  b. By encouraging inter-generational exchange, between peers and young women from different countries in the region, as well as by developing mutually collaborative relationships and other connections.
  c. By supporting the development of a new leadership from young women in Central America with a different political culture that is more inclusive, respectful of diversity, with more democratic leadership styles, non-violent policies and practices, and a region-wide vision and expression that includes women migrants living outside the region.
  d. By contributing to the emergence and strengthening of young women’s feminist movements in Central America and other regions of the world.

- We promote a new political culture that is more democratic and respectful of the diversity that exists within the heart of women’s and feminist movements.
  a. By contributing to the empowerment of typically marginalized women, both within women’s movements and in other spaces of civil society – such as young women, indigenous women, women of African descent, bi-sexual, lesbian, and transgendered women, disabled women, sex workers, domestic workers, maquila factory workers, and women living with HIV - with the goal that they can make their voices heard and their perspectives and priorities and taken more into account.
By organizing leadership formation activities and spaces for collective reflection about relations of power and dominance that we experience and reproduce in our own daily lives (feminist campouts).

- We implement and promote a new relationship model between the Central American feminist movement and money and resources through our commitment to achieve wide participation of our partner organizations and women’s movements in the region in all aspects of the Fund.

How does FCAM contribute to physical, mental, and emotional sustainability and autonomy of women’s movement activists in the region?

- We offer emergency response funds to activists in situations of risk.
- We actively support national and regional initiatives to protect and prevent violence towards women human rights defenders of women’s rights.
- We support (and directly offer) spaces for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual recovery and healing for activists in the women’s movement (of all ages) that need it, after situations of extreme or chronic stress caused by their involvement in support of women’s human rights.
- We promote advocacy actions in the international donor community to achieve greater commitment to the security, health, and self-care of activists and leaders of women’s and feminist movements.

V. The FCAM cooperative model

The uniqueness of the FCAM lies in large part in its management model, which aspires to be a cooperative-type model.

FCAM’s vision is to be able to build, little by little, and institution directed by the
same Central American women’s organizations that fight for women’s rights in the region. With that perspective in mind, a simple internal structure was created, composed of a small operative team, an Assembly of Founding Members, and an Board of Directors whose main role is to define internal policies that are in-line with this vision and to guarantee the efficient operation of the Fund in a manner consistent with its own values and principles.

Unlike the large majority of foundations and development NGOs, decisions about how funds that FCAM has raised in the name of women’s and feminist movements in the region will be used are decisions made directly by the organizations involved and not by the leadership of the Fund or its Board.

Staff reviews proposals that are sent in by the organizations and groups that apply in order to ensure that they meet the requirements of the public call for proposals launched each year. After this first round filter, a summary of each of the pre-selected proposals is sent to all of the participating organizations and the Fund’s current partner organizations who then select which proposals they consider to be most innovative, of most relevance, or that will have the greatest impact.

During FCAM’s early years, the Fund’s strategic areas and programs were defined by the founders and then by the Board and FCAM leadership team, based on their own participation in the work of movements in the region and the observations and recommendations of their partner organizations.

However, under the cooperative model, FCAM’s aspiration is to achieve more formal involvement from the organizations and movements of the region in future strategic planning.

The themed content of the peer exchange activities are defined with participation from the groups and are organized and coordinated by one of the participating organizations.

Initially during annual monitoring visits, we tried to have a representative of another partner organization or group accompany the staff with the objectives of learning from the group being visited as well as sharing their observations and suggestions. However, this model presented logistical difficulties and we had to abandon this practice.
Annual evaluations are also done in a participatory way and are shared during a collective evaluation workshop at the end of each funding cycle. The annual evaluations are also an opportunity for FCAM to report back to its partner organizations about the work that was done during the year and to listen to their suggestions.

As a part of the resource mobilization process, we have promoted the active participation of our partner groups. Some years, we have offered training workshops on resource mobilization to interested groups and have invited groups to participate voluntarily in our annual fundraising campaign, making them fundraisers and donors to the process at the same time. The initial effort we have made in this area needs to be deepened and expanded to more partner organizations and countries.

Finally, part of the Fund’s communication work is focused on making the work of the groups that we support visible and to facilitate direct relationships between these groups and local and national media. The other part is focused on creating a new culture of philanthropy in the region that converts each donor into an activist for women’s rights.

Annual reports include financial information from the year and are published and distributed widely. They are means of reporting back, to individual donors to the Fund, to the foundations and international development agencies that support us, to the groups and organizations that we accompany, and the women’s and feminist movements in the region.

VI. FCAM’s development and fundraising strategy

From its beginnings, FCAM has received solidarity support from the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation. In its initial organizing phase, before the official launch of the Fund, Puntos provided office space and furniture, and then they rented space within their building. At the same time, they provided administrative and accounting services, and acted as fiscal sponsor of the fund for three years until FCAM was able to legally register as its own organization at the end of 2006.

However, beyond this logistical-material support, FCAM benefitted from an important network of contacts and the prestige of the Puntos donor community.
In fact, FCAM almost from the beginning was able to receive the support of several institutional donors (all North American foundations): the Ford Foundation, Global Fund for Women, Moriah Fund and the Summit Foundation, that were already donors to Puntos de Encuentro and were willing to accompany the first steps of this new adventure for its founder.

The development and resource mobilization strategy that FCAM adopted was to take advantage of the short window of opportunity that it had ahead (about 5 years) in which some bi-lateral development agencies would still remain in the region, such as allied international NGOs, in order to consolidate institutionally create a resource mobilization team with high professional capacity, focused on international donors, while little by little developing the internal systems and knowledge necessary to recruit individual donors in the region and outside of it.

The goal of focusing on fundraising from international development agencies and foundations helped FCAM begin giving grants as soon as possible to groups of young women, first in Nicaragua, and then little by little in the other countries in the region. It also gave the Fund the chance to demonstrate in practice the potential impact it could have in the future and how the organization would function.

The interesting thing is that contrary to development tendencies at the time, the majority of donors to FCAM decided to give FCAM general support funding from the beginning. More than the concrete results that the partner organizations were going to achieve with FCAM’s support, its donors were attracted to the innovative model that the Fund was offering, its focus on young women and other women traditionally marginalized by society, the type of accompaniment and close monitoring that it offered its partner organizations, and its quick growth and success.

In financial terms, FCAM’s resource mobilization strategy was a success. FCAM’s budget grew rapidly and soon was able to confirm several multi-year commitments. Upon increasing its total budget, FCAM was able to earmark a high percentage of its total budget very quickly to its direct grants program, which was appreciated even more.

However, if we examine the other part of FCAM’s resource mobilization strategy, fundraising from individuals, this was not very successful. We knew from the
beginning that a philanthropic culture did not previously exist in the region and that we had to create it, but we did not know that what we had learned from the experiences of women’s funds in the North was not going to be useful or adaptable.

We assumed that by implementing an aggressive public relations policy, social marketing, and awareness raising campaigns that it would provide enough visibility to the Fund and above all the work of its partner organizations to do well. We were probably able to make our name known a little, achieve a certain credibility as an institution, and even raise more awareness in the population about the situation of violence that women suffer. We received substantial pro-bono support from the media, especially in Nicaragua, however, this did not mean that people were then willing to give money “to the cause”. We still have not been able to draw a lot more women to the movements or develop this new form of activism. Each year we have raised very little in cash, but some years more than others, we have invested a lot of human and financial resources into this task.

We are still convinced that building a broad base of individual donors is strategic for the sustainability and autonomy of FCAM, and is probably the only way to slowly build up our own endowment. We know that this philanthropic culture for social change is not built in a day and that it cannot be the task of only one institution. In any case, as with any cultural change, this task requires a specific and multifaceted communications strategy and the resources necessary to implement it.

In conclusion and despite no having been able to develop the base of individual donors that we had hoped to, focusing first on institutional donors was the right thing to do.

If we had been more conservative and stuck with only distributing the funds that we could raise locally, the Fund would have grown very little, the number of groups and organizations in the region that would have benefitted would have been much fewer, and the Fund’s sustainability would have been put at risk.
VII. Programs of financial support and local capacity building in leadership and regional connections for young women

From the beginning of its work and in accordance with its strategic priorities, the FCAM decided to focus on the support of organizations led by and made up mostly of young women (under the age of 30), prioritizing among them groups and organizations made up of women who have been traditionally marginalized by society. The diversity criteria related to social conditions in the Ola Joven (Young Wave) Program was a central tenet from the beginning, given the cultural political changes that we wanted to promote. Another important criterion was to advance, step by step, towards a balance between partner organizations from different countries in the region.

Beyond the three criteria of age, diversity of social conditions, and geographic location, and obviously their commitment to fight for women’s human rights, the Fund decided not to define priority themes, allowing groups the possibility of deciding their own course and to be able to define their own indicators for the success of their work.

In this sense, FCAM’s long term planning (3-5 years) is flexible and works more as a guide than a formal strategic plan. At the end of each grants cycle, FCAM analyzes with its partner organizations what types of social changes have the majority of groups in the region worked on, what topics have been the focus of more attention, and what have been the limiting and accelerating factors for these changes, with the goal of being able to jointly identify regional tendencies and learned lessons along the way.

Alongside monitoring visits that are carried out each year and include all the Fund’s partner organizations, these are the elements that allow the FCAM team to adjust its operative plan for the following year.

FCAM’s strategic priorities for every 3-5 years have been focused on defining lines of action and general goals more than precise indicators of change, since we are clear on our role as a facilitator and catalyst for change, not as an implementer of change. The goals and indicators in FCAM’s operative plans refer more to the quantity of resources to mobilize and what type of sources,
the number of recurring and new partner organizations to support per country, and the projected number of technical assistance and peer exchange activities.

At the end of three years and after confirming the absence of organizations and groups led by young women among certain strategic and marginalized populations, both inside and outside of the movement, such as domestic and maquila workers, lesbian and bisexual women, and sex workers, FCAM decided to open a few programs in addition to Ola Joven. The double objective was to contribute to collective empowerment of these women while at the same time promoting a rise of young leadership within them. During the same time period, more and more situations emerged of women defenders of women’s human rights in situations of risk because of their activism, giving way to the new program called “rapid response” inspired by the work and example of the Urgent Action Fund (UAF), a global women’s fund with headquarters in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Besides providing financial resources, the Fund’s work from the beginning has included supporting groups with the technical assistance that they need (methodologies and operative planning techniques, budgeting, basic financial administration, monitoring and evaluation, conflict resolution, etc.) and offering spaces for peer exchange to reflect more deeply on shared topics (such as gender violence, sexual and reproductive rights, decriminalization of abortion, the situation of indigenous women in the region, etc.) Peer exchange spaces have also served for learning from the experiences of each group with similar work methodologies (community radio, street theater, working in a network, etc.) as well as for helping create the links that they want at the national and regional level.

The Fund’s goal for these activities, besides meeting concrete support needs on the part of partner groups and organizations, is to offer opportunities for groups to make new connections among themselves, promote intergenerational dialogue with organizations of adult Central American women, and to generate synergy within women’s and feminist movements and with other organizations and social movements in the region.

With this spirit, the Fund also began several years ago to organize its first young feminist campouts. Each campout lasts for 10 to 12 days and brings together
a hundred young women or more from the young women’s partner groups and organizations of FCAM. The objective of the campout is to collectively identify and analyze, through a lived-experience methodology of the Puntos de Encuentro Foundation, the complex relations of power and dominance in which we are all immersed, which we suffer, and that we also reproduce daily, consciously or unconsciously. Then we learn together to deconstruct these relationships and build new ones with other people that are based in solidarity, collaboration, respect, and an appreciation for diversity.

As the years have passed and FCAM has become a leading organization in resource mobilization for joint initiatives with other women’s funds and Latin American feminist institutions, sub-regional and regional capacity building and advocacy activities have been added.

Upon reaching its 10th anniversary, it is necessary for FCAM to review its current program of capacity building, evaluate its impact, and adjust it to the needs and demands of the Fund’s current partner organizations in this new stage of organizational development.