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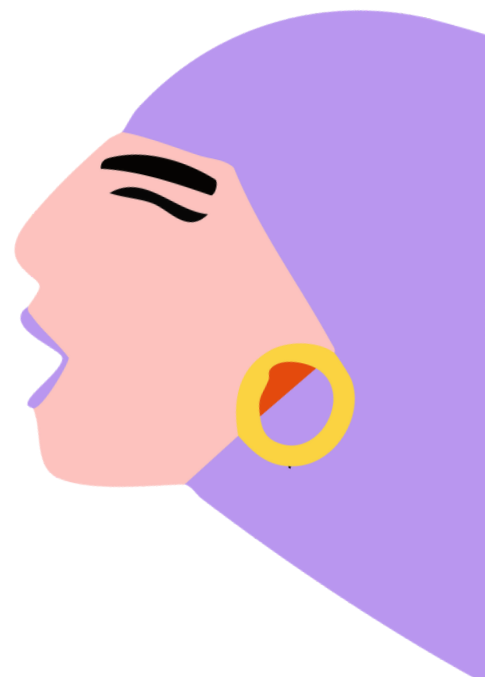
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Can Feminist Philanthropy Still Ignore the Leadership of Women with Disabilities?

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*“Women with
disabilities
are women before
they are disabled.”*

Leadership. Power. Systems.



A recent study conducted by the *Coalition pour une Philanthropie Féministe in France* highlighted a striking paradox: while gender equality is now widely recognised as a critical issue, **only 7% of philanthropic funding in France** is actually directed toward gender equality initiatives. More strikingly, the study points to a persistent gap between discourse and structural commitment, a lack of long-term strategic thinking, the difficulty philanthropy still faces in treating gender equality as a transversal political issue rather than a secondary theme.

Reading this study, I could not stop thinking about another blind spot, one that remains almost entirely invisible, even within feminist philanthropy itself: **the absence of women with disabilities from leadership strategies.**



Over the past two years, I attended the 69th and 70th sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York. I also participated in discussions at the European Parliament on the future of feminism in Brussels. In these spaces dedicated to women's rights, democratic resilience, and systemic transformation, I was repeatedly confronted with the same reality: **women with disabilities were almost entirely absent from the conversations.** Not absent from society: **in Europe, more than one in four women lives with a disability*.** But absent from the frameworks. Absent from the strategic imagination of power itself.

Source: European Disability Forum (EDF), citing EU data showing that women and girls with disabilities represent approximately 29.2% of the female population in the European Union.

Over the past months, I have had repeated conversations with organisations funding feminist movements and gender equality initiatives. Again and again, I heard the same sentence.

Each time, the contradiction became clearer.

“
We don't
fund
disability.”

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Women with disabilities remain absent from leadership strategies.

In feminist spaces today, many identities are rightly recognised as essential to understanding structural inequality. Conversations naturally include race, sexuality, migration, reproductive rights, economic precarity, and political representation.

DISABILITY STILL ENTERS THE ROOM DIFFERENTLY.

When I dare remind them they are women before being disabled.

THE DISCOMFORT IS ALMOST IMMEDIATE.

Almost every time, the reaction is the same: hesitation.

As if the possibility had never truly been considered.

Disability mostly enters the room through the lens of **vulnerability, social protection, or access to services, when it enters at all.**

At times, when I raised the question of leadership directly, another answer would emerge: “We fund violence against women, not leadership.” But even this distinction quickly collapses under scrutiny. Women with disabilities are among those most exposed to violence worldwide. Studies consistently show they are two to three times more likely to experience violence than other women. **If feminist philanthropy is serious about confronting structural violence, then women with disabilities cannot remain outside its strategic priorities.**

Today, disability is still predominantly approached through paternalistic frameworks: access to rights, social protection, inclusion, services, and employability. These issues matter deeply. Yet discussions around disability still rarely extend to questions of power, governance, political influence, or leadership.

Several times, after presenting the work we are building through AHADI around leadership pathways for women with disabilities, I heard another familiar response: “We’ll see whether the topic fits within our strategic priorities.” But how can the leadership of women with disabilities fit into existing priorities when the subject itself has almost never been recognised as a strategic field of investment?

Women with disabilities are rarely imagined as future ministers, parliamentarians, executives, philanthropists, negotiators, or institutional leaders. At a time when democratic institutions are being challenged globally, this matters profoundly. Not only because of who remains outside these spaces, but because of what institutions lose when entire forms of lived experience, resilience, and strategic intelligence are missing from decision-making itself.

The recent study on gender equality in philanthropy also warns about the growing sophistication of anti-rights movements, the underfunding of feminist infrastructures, and **the urgent need to “repoliticise and structure philanthropy” in the face of systemic threats.** But repoliticising philanthropy also means confronting its remaining blind spots. What remains unresolved is whether feminist philanthropy is prepared to see women with disabilities as part of its own vision of leadership and power.

AHADI emerged from this contradiction. From the observation that women with disabilities are still largely excluded from the structures where political and institutional influence is shaped. **Ultimately, the issue is who gets to shape institutions, priorities, and public decision-making.**

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If feminist philanthropy is serious about confronting structural violence, then women with disabilities cannot remain outside its strategic priorities.



2 to 3

TIMES MORE LIKELY

Women with disabilities are two to three times more likely to experience violence than other women.

Source: Multiple studies (WHO, UN Women, World Bank)

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WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES are consistently funded as beneficiaries of protection, inclusion, or services, but rarely as future leaders.”

THE REAL QUESTION

Repoliticising philanthropy also means confronting its remaining blind spots. The real question is not whether women with disabilities should be included. **It is whether feminist philanthropy is ready to see them as leaders, decision-makers, and actors of systemic change.**