



CONCEPT NOTE

Having reached the half way mark of the UN International Decade for People of African Descent¹ and in the wake of the elevation of women's voices and movements, now is a prudent moment for innovative approaches to address sexual violence.

VidaAfrolatina is a new international women's fund created to support often invisibilized women of African descent in Latin America. We seek to fill a void in resources to strengthen and expand the work of Black women's organizations addressing sexual violence.² We will mobilize resources and connect them to leaders with lived experience who:

1. create culturally relevant healing practices, experiences and spaces for local women and;
2. implement strategies to decrease and, ultimately, eliminate sexual violence in their communities and societies.

This document provides an overview of VidaAfrolatina's origin, the problem we are addressing, our approach to solutions and next steps.

1. <https://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/index.shtml>.
2. In Latin America, people of African ancestry use various terms to indicate racial, ethnic and cultural identity. For example, in Colombia, women of African ancestry can self-identify as Negra (Black), Afro-Colombiana, Raizal or Palenquera. In Brazil, women of African ancestry commonly self-identify as Negra, Preta or Afro-Brasileira. A single term can have broad-ranging connotations. Prieta, which can have a neutral, positive or pejorative connotation, is one such word used to indicate Black identity in multiple countries. VidaAfrolatina focuses on all women of African ancestry, recognizing the need to ensure the inclusion of Black women who may experience marginalization even in Afro-descendant spaces because of such dynamics as colorism. For the purposes of this document, the following terms, used interchangeably, indicate all women of African ancestry in Latin America: of African descent, Afro-descendant, Black. We value and respect the right to self-definition and follow the guidance of leaders with lived experience in Latin America in our use of identity terminology.



BACKGROUND

VidaAfrolatina developed as an outgrowth of When and Where I Enter, Inc. (WWIE), an all-volunteer philanthropic organization founded by Veta Byrd-Perez in the United States. WWIE operated from 2007 to 2016, giving 17 grants in a variety of program areas to Black women's organizations in nine Latin American countries and Puerto Rico.

Lori Robinson, VidaAfrolatina's founding executive director, served on the Board of Directors of WWIE from 2009 to 2016. She played a key leadership role, which resulted in her election as board secretary from 2011 to 2016.

Keenly aware of the devastating impact of sexual violence on Afro-descendant women's health, lives and communities, in contexts of systemic discrimination deeply ingrained over centuries, Robinson conceptualized VidaAfrolatina with this specific issue focus. Selected as an Echoing Green Global Fellow in 2018, she began receiving seed funding in 2019 that supports the initial research and planning phase.

In collaboration with Black women community leaders across Latin America, through deep listening, data collection and the growth of our network, VidaAfrolatina is carefully crafting a collective vision for this initiative.

We will use a participatory grant making model through which vetted grant applicants collectively decide which groups receive funding. This process produces knowledge sharing, capacity building and mutual accountability, and shifts power to women who've been historically excluded. We believe local survivors, health and wellness practitioners, activists, students, teachers, artists, advocates, entrepreneurs and other leaders with lived experience, are best equipped to guide funding decisions about the culturally specific remedies and interventions their communities need.

For funders committed to erradicating violence from women's lives, improving women's health and wellness, strengthening feminist movements or addressing systemic racism, VidaAfrolatina provides a mechanism to reach women who are disproportionately impacted, routinely overlooked and outside the purview of traditional philanthropy.

Vision & Mission

VidaAfrolatina creates a world where Black women and girls are free to flourish because safety and wellness are their everyday reality. We do this by connecting diverse resources, including philanthropic funding and capacity support, with Black women's groups in Latin America, with a specific focus on organizations that provide healing services for sexual violence survivors and that create and lead systemic change to end sexual violence.



THE PROBLEM

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 35.6 percent of women worldwide have experienced sexual violence by someone other than an intimate partner, or sexual or physical violence committed by an intimate partner, or both.³ WHO also reports that the Americas region, with 30 percent of women falling in one or more of these categories, has the second highest prevalence in the world.⁴

Before the #MeToo movement ignited, #Cuéntalo, #NiUnaMenos, #PrimeiroAssédio and other hashtags had become rallying cries against rape and other forms of violence against women in Latin America.⁵ Despite some recent developments in legal measures addressing gender-based violence in several countries in the region, improvements in women's lives have not materialized.⁶

Sexual violence is a major contributing factor to women's ill physical, mental and reproductive health. It can result in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide attempts, sleep disorders, inability to work, lost wages, self-cutting, eating disorders and many other issues.⁷ It is a human rights violation that impedes what is possible in women's lives. Additionally, it diminishes the potential development and advancement of families, communities and nations.⁸

Statistics on sexual violence are notoriously inadequate worldwide, and Latin America is no exception. Most perpetrators are known to victims — such as a partner, family member, friend or co-worker. Even among family and friends, much less law enforcement or other authorities, survivors often don't feel they can or should report their victimization. The number of people who are assaulted or abused and do not disclose or report sexual violence remains unknown.⁹

Sexual violence data disaggregated by race is particularly sparse throughout the region. However limited, existing data indicates the disproportionate impact on Afro-descendant women. For example, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean published a report stating that in Ecuador the incidence of sexual violence among Afro-descendant women is 7 percent higher than for Indigenous or Mestiza women.¹⁰

In another example, Colombia's National Victims Unit registered 24,576 victims of war-related sexual violence in 2017. Of those victims, 73 percent were Afro-descendant and Indigenous¹¹, while the Colombian population is 9.3 percent Afro-descendant and 4.4 percent Indigenous.¹²

The philanthropic sector's response has been negligible.

Although one out of three women and girls have experienced gender-based violence globally, less than 1 percent of total grants disbursed by human rights funders in 2010 was directed to gender-based violence.¹³ From 2013 to 2015, human rights funding for women and girls in Latin America decreased by \$22 million, more than in any other region tracked by the Advancing Human Rights trend analysis.¹⁴

Afro-descendant women in Latin America are often the most vulnerable to sexual violence and have the least access to resources for healing and systemic change.¹⁵

People of African descent are one-third of Latin America's population.¹⁶ Yet, of the total number of grants made in Latin America from 2009 to 2019 by human rights funders globally, only 2.93 percent were directed explicitly to people of African descent.¹⁷ And of funding disbursed in Latin America from 2011 to 2015 by U.S. foundations, only 1.4 percent was explicitly designated for Afro-descendants.¹⁸

In Brazil, where Afro-descendants are 55.8 percent of the population, the same paradox exists.¹⁹ In 2016, of the Brazilian foundations and corporations surveyed that identified human rights as a priority domestically, 2 percent said they focus on Black or Indigenous people and 4 percent said they focus on women and girls.²⁰

Without investment in Afro-descendant women's solutions for their own communities, the structural, intersectional issues that are key factors in the perpetuation of sexual violence will continue on largely unchecked and ignored.²¹

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5. Daniela Esquivel Domínguez, "Construcción de la protesta feminista en hashtags: aproximaciones desde el análisis de redes sociales," *Comunicación y Medios*, no. 40 (2019): 184-198, <https://scielo.conicyt.cl/pdf/cym/v28n40/0719-1529-cym-28-40-00184.pdf>;
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9. Abrahams et al., 32.

10. Gloria Camacho Z., La violencia de género contra las mujeres en el Ecuador: Análisis de los resultados de la Encuesta Nacional sobre Relaciones Familiares y Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres (Quito, Ecuador: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, 2014), 34. https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/violencia_de_gnero_ecuador.pdf.
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18. Figure is based on Candid’s research set, which includes all grants of \$10,000 or more awarded by 1,000 of the largest US foundations. Figure is drawn from analysis done for “The State of Global Giving by U.S. Foundations, 2011-2015” and reflect total grantmaking by US foundations from 2011 to 2015 with a geographic focus on Mexico and Latin America and an explicit population focus on people of African descent.
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OUR SOLUTIONS

Approach

Women of African descent in Latin America have been plagued by centuries of sexual violence, but through collective action and resources, the future will be different.

A report issued by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative states that community-based groups in Latin America have been critical “in increasing public awareness about women’s rights and violence against women and transforming community attitudes around gender norms. Community leaders are central to prevention... and referring victims to support.”²²

VidaAfrolatina’s goal is to contribute to the proliferation and strengthening of community-based healing and systemic change work, led by women of African descent and benefitting women of African descent. Building on histories of organizing and activism, many Black women’s groups today are addressing issues of sexual violence in their communities, but are largely without access to philanthropic support.

The primary mechanisms we are exploring for our work are:

- A grant category for single organizations and groups with a local scope to provide healing services or to create systemic change.
- A grant category for two or more organizations or groups to collaborate on initiatives that are national or multi-country in scope to create systemic change.
- In-person and online capacity-enhancing training and wellness support.

In addition to connecting grantee partners with financial resources through a participatory grant making process, VidaAfrolatina will provide capacity enhancement through online and in-person skill development trainings, peer learning workshops and wellness programming. Integral to these activities will be opportunities for grantee partners to connect with each other and build a regional network of visionaries, healers and agents of change.

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What We Have Done So Far

Our vision is guided by leaders with lived experience in Latin America.

VidaAfrolatina conducted community conversations attended by Black women in Colombia (Cali and Bogotá) in October 2018 and Brazil (Salvador da Bahia and Rio de Janeiro) in November 2018 and April 2019. In October 2019, we hosted a video-based digital convening with participants in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina. Data collected through surveys and individual conversations with Afro-descendant sexual violence survivors, organization leaders, students, artists, researchers, entrepreneurs and healers, are informing our early-stage research and planning.



Survey respondents and attendees of our in-person and online conversations expressed significant optimism for the impact VidaAfrolatina can have by connecting resources with Black women's groups and organizations in Latin America, particularly those that don't meet eligibility criteria set by traditional foundations.

Feminist funders, such as FRIDA The Young Feminist Fund and FemFund, have made accessible their blueprints for participatory grant making, which has informed our research and planning. VidaAfrolatina has cultivated a network of mentors and peer advisors at these and other philanthropic organizations in Latin America, Europe and the United States, who continue to provide support and guidance.

In 2019, VidaAfrolatina Founder Lori Robinson attended annual conferences hosted by EDGE Funders Alliance, ABFE (a Black philanthropic professional organization), Hispanics in Philanthropy and The Praxis Project. We are identifying synergies and initiating partnerships among broader feminist and social justice communities.

In October 2019, the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds hosted a call for Robinson with all its member funds in the Latin American region in order to explore possibilities for collaboration. The Mexican organization, Fondo Semillas, has already demonstrated support for VidaAfrolatina by recommending Dr. Lina Rosa Berrío, an Afro-Colombian resident of Mexico, to serve as the facilitator for our online regional convening.

Feedback from peer feminist funders has been positive. Angélica Gómez, a Fondo Semillas program officer, stated in our post-convening survey: "I think that there are very few, if any, funds that are exclusively supporting women of African descent, nor are there any with a particular focus on this population. I think this focus is necessary and that it requires strategic investments. I think this initiative is very positive and I am sure that it will yield good results that will benefit women of African descent and will advance social justice for this population."

VidaAfrolatina considers the conversations that have taken place thus far as launch points for a continuing dialogue and collaborative visioning process. Ongoing listening and learning will be a permanent aspect of our work.

As a fund based in the U.S., VidaAfrolatina is laying the groundwork to build a domestic base of support to include volunteers and individual donors. To that end, VidaAfrolatina partnered with the nonprofit Irwin House Global Art Gallery, recently launched by African-American women in Detroit, Michigan, to host a screening of the Afro-Brazilian film "Antônia."

Themes in the film include intimate partner abuse, homophobia, mass incarceration and the power of women's friendships to heal. Three Afro-Brazilian undergraduate students on exchange at Wayne State University led a post-screening community dialogue. This event was designed to raise awareness about the political, economic and social realities of Black women in Brazil, and more broadly, in Latin America, as well as to cultivate interest in VidaAfrolatina.

Also in 2019, VidaAfrolatina acquired a fiscal sponsor. The Praxis Project is an Oakland, California-based nonprofit with a focus on health equity and justice for all communities.



NEXT STEPS

It is clear that many Black women-led organizations and groups doing important work in the region do not have access to philanthropic funding. Several women's funds have acknowledged insufficient awareness of Black-specific challenges and needs, as well as a lack of relationships with Afro-descendant organizations and groups. VidaAfrolatina has planted seeds for a transnational partnership to expand safety and wellness in Latin America that explicitly centers women of African descent. We must now build out the institutional structure to grow and sustain alliances and participatory processes.

Our priorities for 2020 are:

Quarters 1-3	Host additional online convenings to provide a platform for Black women's groups
Quarters 1-4	Continue to raise seed funding.
Quarters 1-4	Continue to grow our network of Black women's organizations, mentors, peer advisors and collaborators.
Quarters 2-4	Host Afro-Latin American women's film events in several cities in the U.S. to raise awareness and build a base of supporters and individual donors.
Quarter 3	Host an in-person convening in the Latin American region to continue to deepen relationships with potential grantee partners and funders, and to collectively vision and plan our participatory process.
Quarter 3	Craft a strategic plan.
Quarter 4	Conduct a pilot micro-grant making season.

We invite organizations and individuals to grow with us – as volunteers, collaborators and donors. Please contact VidaAfrolatina Executive Director Lori Robinson with inquiries.

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LEADERSHIP

Executive Director

Lori Robinson is the founder and executive director of VidaAfrolatina, an international women's fund created to mobilize resources to strengthen and expand the work of Black women's organizations in Latin America addressing sexual violence. She is one of 35 fellows selected from a pool of more than 2,800 applicants from 155 countries to win a coveted 2018 Echoing Green Fellowship to develop and launch VidaAfrolatina.

Robinson worked as a journalist for 25 years, winning several national awards, including a first-place award from the National Association of Black Journalists for her magazine cover story about sexual violence in the African American community. She is the author of "I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse," and has presented about sexual violence in more than 20 U.S. states and in Costa Rica, Venezuela, Brazil and Cuba.

In addition to covering sexual violence extensively, she reported on Black populations in Latin American countries for two decades. As a freelancer, her work has been published in the Washington Post, The Root, Ebony.com, Detroit Free Press, Chicago Tribune and several national magazines.

In 2016, Robinson was selected as a "Gabriel García Márquez Cultural Journalism" Fellow by the Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano. Also in 2016, she was chosen as a "Bringing Home the World" Fellow by the International Center for Journalists. For both, she traveled to Colombia to report on the crisis of violence against Afro-Colombians.

In 2013, Robinson was chosen as a fellow by the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism at the City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism.

She served on the Board of Directors of When and Where I Enter, Inc., a Houston-based fund that awarded grants to 17 Black women's organizations in nine Latin American countries and Puerto Rico over a period of nine years.

Robinson is bilingual (English/Spanish). She holds a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish, from Spelman College in Atlanta, Ga., and a master's degree in journalism from New York University in New York, N.Y.

Board of Advisors

As a fiscally sponsored organization, VidaAfrolatina does not have a Board of Directors as legally mandated for 501(c)3 organizations. Members of our Board of Advisors are active participants in our work and perform a variety of roles beyond an advisory capacity.

Janet Arelis Quezada

Capacity Building Coach
Magnolia Community Initiative

Pilar Ocampo

Community Health Disparities Project Manager
City of Philadelphia

Veta Byrd-Perez

Associate General Counsel, Rice University
Founder, When and Where I Enter, Inc.

Dulce Reyes Bonilla

Transnational and Intersectional Activist,
Freelance Writer and Translator

Elsy Cipriani

Managing Director
International Institute of New England



Informal Advisors

The following individuals have provided guidance, facilitated introductions and shared informational resources on an informal basis, and will continue to lend support.

Amanda Alexander
Detroit Justice Center

David Baptista
Latin American Leadership Academy

Marcus Clarke
Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County

Carrie Cuthbert
Free Press

Nedgine Paul Deroly
Anseye Pou Ayiti

Alicia Díaz
Independent Filmmaker

Jovana Djordjevic
FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund

Amanda Gigler
Mama Cash

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New York University

Dr. Rosana Heringer
Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Elas Fundo de Investimento Social Board

Dr. Keith Jennings
African American Center on Global Politics and Human Rights

Keith Hammonds
Solutions Journalism Network

Rachel Johnson-Farias
Esq. Apprentice

Edward Jones
ABFE | A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities

Daniela Konietzko
Fundación WWB Colombia

Sara Leedom
African Entrepreneur Collective

Rose Longhurst
The Edge Fund (UK)

Conniel Malek
True Costs Initiative

Michelle Materre
Matterre Media Consulting/Creatively Speaking Film Series

Diego Ontaneda
Latin American Leadership Academy

Dana Preston
Independent Consultant

Margaret Ramirez
NYC Health + Hospitals

Misan Rewane
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Graciela Selaimen
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