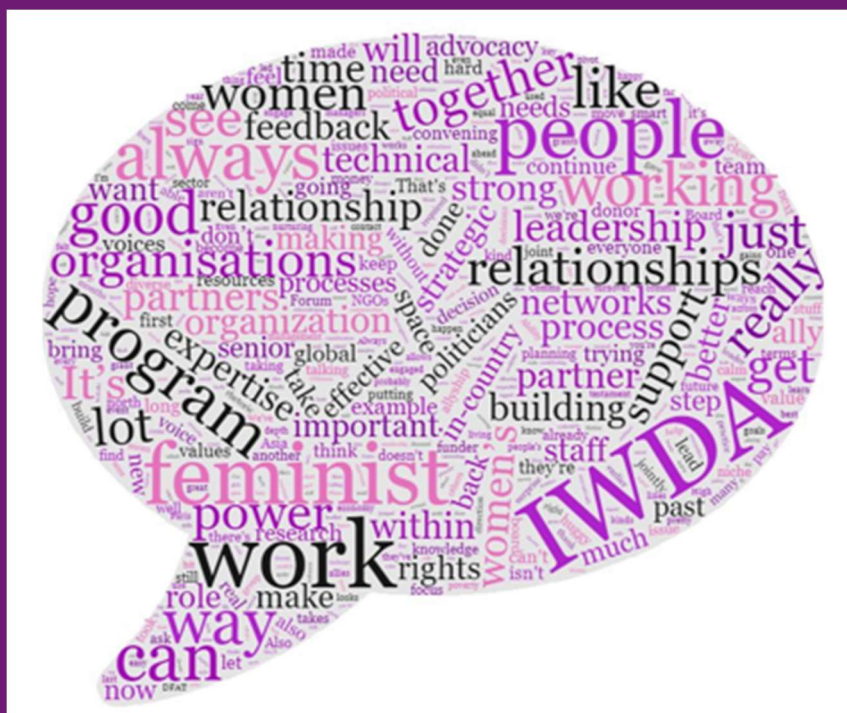


IWDA STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTION REVIEW

2020-2021



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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this review is to obtain feedback from external stakeholders on IWDA and our work in order to provide IWDA with insights about the effectiveness and impact of our work to promote organisational learning. Seven of IWDA's stakeholders were interviewed for this report. Many different forms of experience of and engagement with IWDA were represented within the interviewee group, including past partner, movement member, grant manager, consultant, patron, advisor, and researcher. Their interactions with IWDA varied greatly. Some had been associated with the organisation for many years, some for only 1-2 years. Some had engaged broadly across the organisation, others have relationships limited to one or two individuals, or one team or program. Some common themes and issues did emerge, usually through similar answers being given by three or four interviewees. There were also points that were specific to only one interviewee, and these have been presented where they seem to be particularly useful for IWDA's internal reflection. The interviewees were all assured anonymity in their responses. Quotes have been included in this report, but they are not attributed. This report is structured around the themes which emerged throughout the interviews, rather than by the questions which were used for the survey.

1. IWDA'S APPROACH

Most interviewees referenced this stakeholder perception report itself as an example of what they most value from IWDA. A real and demonstrated commitment to reflecting on how to improve and grow as an organisation.

"What stands out about IWDA is their willingness to explore how to be the next best version of themselves. A lot of INGOs do this reflection only as window dressing, it isn't genuine. IWDA listens to diverse voices and perspectives. This is the sign of a vibrant, dynamic organisation that is willing to change. They also have a sincere willingness to pay the cost of change. To pay the price to change and be more relevant, democratic, accountable."

"It's unusual for an organisation like IWDA, as a donor, to seek so much feedback on how they're doing. It's a step in the right direction, and I'm interested to see what comes of it."

"People at IWDA are good-hearted and well-intentioned. And they are trying so much harder than many organisations are to do better and be better."

There was an emphasis throughout the interviews on IWDA's commitment to strong feminist principles, and its willingness to tussle with what those principles mean in practice. A number of interviewees gave examples of occasions where they had seen IWDA staff working democratically, seeking feedback, making changes, and *"demonstrating a real commitment to actually interrogating how far we're falling short, as feminists, in terms of inclusion and investigating how we can do better."* Another consistent response, which emerged from multiple interviews, was the perception that IWDA is willing to openly address power dynamics and make space for courageous conversations about power within its range of relationships.

2. WHAT IS IWDA DOING WELL?

There were a set of strengths which multiple interviewees highlighted: IWDA's strong technical expertise and advice; in-country expertise and in-country networks built over long periods of time and skilfully maintained; strong communications and advocacy work, particularly in IWDA's ability to communicate complex issues in simple ways; IWDA's commitment to its feminist values, and the legitimacy it derives as part of the Australian feminist lobby, and part of feminist networks; and IWDA's commitment to striving for culturally appropriate and de-colonising ways of working with partners and networks.

“The combination of technical skills/comms and advocacy/ networking and movement building. IWDA can’t afford to compromise on any of the three. They need the technical elements to maintain funding, comms/advocacy to maintain their legitimacy, and networks/movement building for credibility and implementation.”

“IWDA has come a long way, they’ve changed the way they work. More fluid, transparent, respectful now than what people experienced in the past.”

There were also a number of strengths which were cited by only one interviewee, specific to their experience:

- The current fundraising approach. Calling people, making contact, and more effective promotions on social media. Program managers participating in fundraising, not just the fundraisers. In the past, fundraising hasn’t been as effectively targeted.
- The work on feminist futures, strategizing ahead of the current context. Not many organisations make the space and time to engage with partners in collective thinking and strategizing.
- The creation of the Director, Systemic Change and Partnerships and Feminist Movement Strengthening Advisor roles, giving more depth to senior engagement with partners and taking the convening role seriously.
- IWDA really dove into North-South power discussions in the research work with ‘Ofa.

“My perception before was that I had understood IWDA to be a pretty mainstream women’s rights development organisation. I was pleasantly surprised to experience really fierce feminist politics from them. I had thought of them as a more traditional, grant-giving organisation.”

“Blown away by the professionalism of the appeal on the WAVE application. Totally astonished at the level of detail, how they thought through every angle, the time they took, the way they utilised legal advice. I had no idea it was possible to mount that kind of process. They did everything they could have done and were so well prepared. I already had high regard for the team, and that was raised even higher from that process.”

3. WHAT COULD IWDA BE DOING BETTER?

Several interviewees cited the mismatch between younger, less experienced IWDA staff members working with senior staff and leaders in partner organisations and networks as a challenge in working with IWDA. Although several interviewees also stated that they knew IWDA was aware of this and was working on it, with more senior IWDA staff now engaging with senior staff in partner/stakeholder organisations.

“Relationships can sometimes be patronizing. The women we work with in-country are incredible people, some IWDA staff can be young, without a lot of life experience, and can come across as patronizing to the people they are working with.”

Also put forward by a number of interviewees was the challenge of using the term ‘partnership’ for grantor-grantee relationships, with the inherent power imbalance created by funding flows. One interviewee suggested that IWDA focus on defining which relationships were genuine partnerships, which were not, and find new terms for non-partnership relationships. Several interviewees suggested that de-colonisation did not mean protecting or nurturing partners, but rather being open and frank with them about the realities of different situations, and being responsive to their feedback.

“Sometimes it’s just about ‘tell us what we need to do to get the money.’ That’s hard when people are working within a feminist construct, because you’re wanting to see everyone as equal.”

De-colonisation should also not be interpreted as requiring that black and brown women should ratify/assess/approve IWDA’s internal decision making around program management tools and processes. The following statement was made generically, with regards to global north organisations interacting with global south organisations, not in reference to specific interactions with IWDA.

“We’re busy, we don’t have time, and we don’t need to be involved in those kinds of decisions. Let us provide feedback if things aren’t working for us, and take our feedback seriously, but don’t ask us to read your internal documents.”

A number of interviewees nominated the high turn over of staff over the last year in particular, and the loss of some staff perceived to be very good at their jobs, as an issue of concern. There was some confusion about why the turnover had been so high, and what that might indicate about what is happening internally at IWDA. It was pointed out that regular staff turnover more generally is one of the challenges of working with IWDA (with particular reference to having to continually build new relationships).

There was one issue which was nominated by only one interviewee, IWDA's willingness/ability to identify compromises in their feminist advocacy work to achieve outcomes with stakeholders who may not share all the same values.

"Sometimes there's limited value in just putting something out there, without following through on the political economy of how to affect decision makers."

4. IWDA'S THINKING WORK

Several interviewees discussed their appreciation for IWDA's intellectual work, critical analysis, and research products. The ability to take work which had already been done (either by IWDA or by others) and deepen that work, take it further, and find added value in it, was discussed a number of times. Interviewees said they appreciated the strong relationships which allowed them to work with IWDA staff to think together, question each other, and challenge each other to think a bit deeper. The collegial thinking work also includes sounding out IWDA colleagues on practical issues, seeking peer support on questions like 'will this piece of work fly? Is there a more practical way we could do this? How will this be received?'

IWDA was seen as being well placed to work with partners and networks to provide thought leadership on developing work consistent with feminist values, how to support feminist women's rights organisations, and what it takes to be a feminist organisation living the values within the organisation.

5. IWDA'S RELATIONSHIP/PARTNERSHIP WORK

IWDA's development and maintenance of strong relationships was consistently cited as a strength, and a significant contribution from IWDA to achievement of pieces of work. Those with consulting experiences with IWDA reported that such relationships never felt like transactional/contractual work. Consulting relationships are always constructed with care, and with as much attention to genuine collaboration as possible. IWDA is willing to be flexible and responsive on commissioned work as conditions change, and to collaboratively manage changes with consultants.

A number of interviewees with longer term relationships with IWDA said they had seen a change in IWDA's relationship management style over the last 3-4 years.

"Early on, they did have a bit of an identity crisis, around what exactly is IWDA? In those days, they used to have more center to periphery relationships with grantees. That's changed over the time, and the creation of roles like Emily's and Bronwyn's has IWDA paying more attention to their convening power, and how they can create connections between the people they work with. They used to be gatekeepers, to some degree blocking relationships between grantees, that has changed."

IWDA was consistently seen to have a team with a strong and diverse understanding of organisations, networks, and the operating environment, which allows the organisation to make connections and continue to build relationships, as well as maintain longstanding relationships, particularly in Asia.

IWDA's partnership approach has already been discussed above in section 3, where some critique was offered of IWDA's partnership model. Other interviewees offered a different perspective.

"IWDA plays an important role in grants management. Because they work from a feminist perspective it's not a typical sub-grantee hierarchical relationship. It looks like that from a donor perspective, but from a sub-grantee it looks more like a partnership. Whatever support grantees need is delivered in a more equitable, non-judgmental way. It's well-delivered support."

“They have an opportunity to lead by example. There are so many donor partnerships which aren’t partnerships, they’re just donor-beneficiary. IWDA is the one example of the global north organisation that is trying to make a better change. Even the UN agencies need to learn from this.”

In general, there was a strong appreciation for the care which IWDA staff take in their relationship management. One interviewee shared the significant impact on her team of receiving handwritten thank you notes from IWDA staff at the completion of a long-term piece of shared work. Another spoke of the respect and civility they experience in their interactions with IWDA, which they do not generally experience with other donors. IWDA staff demonstrate an awareness of the pressures their partners and stakeholders are under and are careful and polite in their communications. IWDA staff look for ways to share credit and attribution, which is appreciated. One interviewee cited validation as the most important element of the strong relational management offered by IWDA.

“Validation is the most important thing. We don’t get a lot of validation from other donors. It’s more like we should be grateful, and we’re sending you an expert to help you. Validation of people’s skills, knowledge and voice is so empowering. And being there to answer questions and support people through processes.”

6. ALLYSHIP AND IWDA

The question ‘how can IWDA be a better ally?’ was difficult for interviewees to answer. Some had had very strong experiences of allyship with IWDA, and one interviewee said, *“if it’s about engagement, taking space and giving space, we’ve had nothing but an excellent relationship of solidarity.”* Others saw IWDA’s allyship as a work in progress and suggested that the most important factor in being a better ally was for IWDA to ask what partners and stakeholders wanted from them as an ally. What has been their past experiences, negative and positive, of allyship? When have they felt let down by allies? It was suggested that such conversations need to be facilitated by an independent third party, and the broader question needs to be asked – how can a donor be a better feminist ally? One interviewee offered the following:

“We also need to upset the way of talking about global north-south in a binary way. For example, for a lot of people that we work with inequality happens within regions, organisations, and movements as well as at the macro/global movement. IWDA has been disadvantaged by the time zones throughout our process of working together, but they have been there in 1 a.m. meetings, always engaged, good humored. I’ve always felt that they’ve prioritized listening to global south women in the group. They’re always listening and alert to the possibility of exclusion. It’s been pretty incredible to have a global north organisation working in this way.”

7. LEADERSHIP

Leadership of different sorts was discussed at various points throughout the interviews. Several interviewees pointed to the Board’s recognition of its whiteness and its deliberate diversification as a strong and encouraging demonstration of leadership. One interviewee also cited the Board’s strong support for strategic thinking and strategic programs. The strategic planning process, the thoroughness with which it was done, and the bringing in of multiple voices and perspectives was seen as a testament to strong leadership within the organisation. And staff were appreciated for offering ‘calm, stable’ leadership in various forums, being willing to take leadership if required, but offering leadership, and valuing democratic processes and participatory decision making.

8. ASPIRATIONS FOR IWDA’S FUTURE

When asked how they saw their ongoing engagement with IWDA into the future, some interviewees came back with questions:

- In what ways can you use and deploy your power and positionality in a strategic, jointly agreed way? It’s not always about being apologetic about it. How does IWDA use its voice in Australia to amplify the voices of partners in rooms partners aren’t in?
- How is IWDA going to position itself in the future, as a women’s fund, and as a general actor in the development landscape? Where is IWDA happy to work towards their own redundancy? And what is the specialized niche IWDA wants to occupy?

- How will IWDA choose the issues they're going to have technical expertise on in the future? They won't have the funding to pay for the very best people, but they'll have to maintain their nimble and creative approach to get really good people, internationally, to work with them. They can't just become another technical voice.

Other interviewees offered their hopes for IWDA's future role, or the things they were looking forward to from IWDA:

- It would be good to see IWDA leading the way on intersectionality/inclusiveness with other NGOs. Being innovative in their partnerships and building an evidence base on how the NGO sector can be more effective on intersectionality and inclusiveness. Finding incentives to get people to work together.
- For a small organisation, they have a lot of exposure to programming, policy advocacy, and research. The more they can join up these areas, the more powerful their work will be.
- Ensuring a flow of accessible resourcing to women's rights movements.
- Convening connections between women's rights movements.
- Looking forward to hearing IWDA's commitments in the 2021 Gender Equality Forum, a civil society-centered, global gathering for gender equality. Excited to see what IWDA has planned. It will be exciting to see how we, as civil society representatives, can keep engaging on our Paris Forum commitments.
- Continue to understand the context, allow for the women they work with to grow and develop without any kind of influence. Keep maintaining and nurturing relationships the way they are now, which is not standard.

Finally, several interviewees noted the challenges IWDA has addressed recently on the issue of diversity within the organisation. Interviewees were impressed that IWDA was being transparent about addressing its diversity challenge, and they hoped IWDA would keep progressing. They also hoped IWDA would maintain its high level of transparency on the issues and actions taken to address it, to allow other organisations to learn from IWDA's journey.

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