

Partner Perception Review Report

2020 - 2021

IWDA INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY

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Introduction

Review Objective

The objective of the Partner Perception Review (PPR) is to obtain feedback from IWDA partners on IWDA and their work.

The aim is to provide IWDA with insights into the effectiveness and impact of their work to promote organisational learning. IWDA is particularly interested in their partners' feedback on their performance and approach in 2020-21 which was the first year of implementation of IWDA's new Strategic Plan (2020-2023).

This is the first time IWDA is undertaking a PPR.

One of the key elements of the recently commissioned Equitable South-North Engagement Model, as a result of IWDA Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships Research (2020), is **Nurturing the Vā** or nurturing the spaces between the relationship which is a critical aspect of Oceanic identity. This PPR speaks right to the heart of nurturing the vā. It provides a safe space for partners to reflect on both their personal and professional relationships with IWDA over the last 12 months of work.

Why should this matter? Because it is critical for achieving integral partnerships that are based on equality, diversity, inclusivity and shared values. This is part and parcel of decolonised development practice and shared power, contextual sensitivity and global south power, agency and autonomy.

Methodology

The Partner Perception Review (PPR) 2020-21 was undertaken with eight partners.

The qualitative methodology was primarily individual partner interviews, carried out over Zoom, WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. Partners were given a set of four questions by an independent consultant to guide their responses:

1. How has IWDA supported your work this past year?
2. Could IWDA have done anything differently to provide more support to your work?
3. How would you describe the approach IWDA takes to its work? Do you have any feedback about what you value most about IWDA's approach? Do you have any feedback on how IWDA could be a more effective ally?
4. In the past 12 months did IWDA do anything that surprised you (positive or negative) in their work? If so, what?

The eight partners were approached to take part voluntarily. There was a 100% positive response rate to participate in this PPR. "I am a bit surprised with this perception survey- but all good. They have been good at listening to what we have to say so I think they will be able to take the good with the bad and ugly." (Partner)

1. How has IWDA supported your work this past year?

"We have been working with IWDA for a long time...out of all the donors supporting our work right now, IWDA is the one we feel most comfortable with...". (Partner)

Partners spoke positively about the way IWDA has provided support in the last 12 months (2020-21) mostly in terms of financial and project implementation mentoring and capacity building. The key appreciation was that the support, was done **"without us feeling belittled or ignorant...."** **"...They very much took on our ideas and supported us in bringing to the table what we thought would work best..."**. (Partners)

Apart from IWDA's financial assistance in terms of funding projects and key project or organisational costs, there were also other examples of IWDA support during the 2020-21 period which mainly covered three main areas of support; Financial, Project Design and Project Implementation which has been summarised in the table below. IWDA's support during this period was mostly positive and in some cases, the outcome was beneficial in more ways than one; **"they [IWDA] have continued to provide support in helping us achieve international standards in financial reporting and that has opened up doors for other donors to come in"**. (Partner)

FINANCIAL	PROJECT DESIGN	PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION
"helping us to attain & maintain international standard as well as capacity building with narrative report writing and financial reporting".	"they are unique because not many donors are feminist or support feminist organisations and feminist driven activities".	"we really appreciated their monitoring visits because they got to see first hand the challenges we face with implementation".
"due to COVID19 and travel restrictions they engaged a local finance person to assist us".	"we worked together as not a funder-grantee but more as collaborators on our LGBTQI from perspective of non binary people".	"there was capacity building with narrative report writing and financial reporting" "...revision of projects and work plans".
"when we were under budget we were supported to come up with how we could reallocate it to other important & critical work".	"assisting with design and allocation of budget line to be fully utilized by project..".	"they provided ongoing training and mentoring to staff. Assisted staff to access University of the South Pacific/TAFE programs" "they provided COVID19 budgeted activities".

2. Could IWDA have done anything differently to provide more support to your work?

Partners expressed that IWDA seems to come across as **"always trying to do better"** IWDA is seen as good at global policy. Linking back to the national and local level and assisting with connecting the dots from global to local. **"They are also good at Generation Equality stuff and keeping us up to date and encouraging us to participate"**. (Partner)

What IWDA is noted for not doing so well in is "keeping partners up to date with what is going on within their own organisation, their own politics so that partners are not caught off guard when staff leave.

"For me, it's important because it ensures transparency and accountability". (Partner)

One partner had quite strong views about how IWDA needs to be more interactive and proactive: **"IWDA could be more vocal in holding their own government to account in terms of how they provide support to our country, they [IWDA] have a role in building that bridge but they say they don't have the resources to do that, to me, this is their mandate, they should call their government to account, just like how we do ours"**. (Partner)

FUNDING	PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	RELATIONSHIPS
"we had asked for a volunteer to work with us specifically on a specific LGBTQI campaign but it didn't happen. There was silence from IWDA".	"we needed to spend more time on reviewing & implementing changes that were needed but this wasn't possible".	"We need to strengthen our collective power so we are more resilient and equitable relationships in holding our governments to account".
"they are our best donor but limited in what they can fund. Australian Government needs to give them more funding so they can continue to do more work".	"due to COVID19 too many online meetings, maybe we could find other ways of communicating. Bad internet is frustrating".	"we need to continue building trust between us and IWDA so that they feel free and open to share with us what they are going through".
"be more transparent about why and who they fund in our country and also explain delayed payments as some of our staff had to go without pay for a while".	"we needed legal volunteers to help us provide free legal aid as the lawyers could only work a certain time, but we had no luck, we still need it now".	"provide online spaces for cross cultural exchange with other Pacific feminist orgs" "..continue to build the wider feminist movement in the Pacific".

3. Describe IWDA's approach to its work

"They are very aware of their power and the advantage point that they come in with to the relationship, this is important, otherwise we would struggle to communicate that to them as we wouldn't want to affect the working relationship in a bad way by knowing this but never having the confidence to say it to them". (Partner)

Partners identified this as one of IWDA's strong suits, is sensitivity to power, "they weren't like this in the beginning, about 7 to 8 years ago, it was a different story, I remember it was very much a donor-recipient relationship". (Partner) The 2020-21 period provides many examples of how IWDA acknowledges its power.

Partners feel there has been a genuine attempt by IWDA to talk about power and privilege dynamics. Conversations around decolonization, diversity and inclusion have become critical entry points into self-reflection and asking **WHO ARE WE?** for IWDA management and staff. Some partners expressed that because of IWDA's recent focus on this, that it reflects their approach to decolonizing processes: "I like how they call us or email us first to ask permission before using our photographs and quoting us in their reports or articles, it may not mean a lot to them but I really appreciate this because often our stories and images were told through the eyes of foreigners and colonialists who used our ancestors' photos and wrongly quoting them..." (Partner)

VALUE THE MOST

"they are the most progressive feminist donors we have and they have core values that are feminist based and driven, this is definitely what we value the most, it makes our relationship strong".

"their staff are highly sensitive about their power and so are very careful when working with us..." "when we talk about delonization, this is how it starts by owning up to your power and privilege".

"we struggle with speaking English so they have provided translators to help us build that communication gap we are grateful for that because not speaking English has blocked us from accessing other donors in the past".

NEED TO WORK ON

"when IWDA came in to do their monitoring they only achieve so much in such the short time they are here but we want to do more but it's unrealistic and we miss doing things that are critical".

"sometimes IWDA is too conscious of their power and this holds back meaningful conversations...they hesitate to make a decision, which misleads the process and makes it awkward...we need to have courageous conversations".

"Have a partners system within their own structure so that if one focal point leaves, there is at least another IWDA staff who is aware of what is going on and can brief the next person coming in to avoid starting all over again..".

4. In the past 12 months did IWDA do anything that surprised you?

"When our program coordinator left, we only received the email about it one day before she left." (Partner)

Perhaps the most important learning from the conversations that unfolded was in relation to IWDA's turnover of staff. **"We noticed a restructure and change within IWDA which affected the ongoing partnership support.."** **"We have had to reconnect and start discussions all over again and it's not easy.."** **"..You have to start re-building the communication, the relationship and the understanding..."**. (Partners) One partner described three departures of IWDA focal points during the lifetime of the project.

There could be several reasons for the recent high turnover of IWDA staff, particularly in 2019-20, 2020-21.

However, as one Partner described: **"transitions are continuously happening there and it's a worry but which org doesn't have that. It[s] how to deal with the situation which shows the depth of leadership and management"**. (Partner)

Other surprises included partners being asked to participate in IWDA recruitment of staff processes, and, IWDA being pro-active with COVID19 support to its partners which required additional funding and also increased online communication due to travel restrictions.

"downfall of this is that internet connection is not always great." (Partner)

NEGATIVE SURPRISES	POSTIVE SURPRISES
"high turn over of staff over a short period of time" "not being told the reason as to why staff has left and we having to re-invest and restart our story".	"I was pleasantly surprised to be asked by IWDA to be part of their process of recruiting a senior position".
"we didn't receive our salaries for almost 2 months, we were not told why so we had to keep following up".	"we were scared when COVID19 broke out because we didn't have any PPE gear for staff or our clients. IWDA provided this under additional funding".
"I was surprised when I found out some of the partners they have accepted to fund and I was confused because I don't think they did their homework well".	"we are asked as Partners to evaluate IWDA staff through survey monkey and this is something that donors do not do, when I first learned about this I was definitely surprised".

Best Practices

"IWDA is not what they were ten, even five years ago. They are realising their role in the women's movement in a proactive way now. They are listening to our concerns and where they can they are changing the way they operate and work. They have Pacific and Asia reps on their board, they are working on being more inclusive in their staff complement, they are realising their roles as partners with the rest of the WROs. So all is good. I wish them well in this process".
(Partner)

"I feel they [IWDA] really care about us. They listen and they understand and if they don't get what we are saying, they keep asking questions so that they really do understand and they listen some more and ask us how do we want to approach the problem and when we tell how we want to do it, they approve it and support us with extra funds if we need it and can justify it...this is not normal, well not with other donors". (Partner)

"In feminist sisterhood, IWDA is constantly saying "how would you like us to support you? Is everything okay? Our relationship with IWDA has really been a model with the relationship we take with other donors, but in saying that this only came about because we have had conversations in the past that were extremely uncomfortable but that had to happen. IWDA has become more conscious because of it, you know that they are the white face in the room. But we are also careful not to do harm to each other as sisters".
(Partner)

"We discussed and set up our Partnership Principles together, other donors do not do this. Even members of their board have met with us and they make sure that we understand that if the IWDA staff we are dealing with is not listening to us and not treating us in a respectful way that we can reach out directly to them. I was really shocked when I learned about this and I think that is what sets them apart from other donors".
(Partner)

Some of the partners indicated that during this reporting period 2020-21, COVID19 hit and IWDA was very responsive when it came to providing additional support for things like PPE gear for staff and clients and other safety and communication requirements.

Photo credit: Asian Woman Wearing Mask Praying, Canva Pro



Some of the partners indicated that in order for any donor partner to work effectively in the Asia Pacific region that they had to have a good understanding of the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and social unrest in this region and be open to changing activities, budget reallocation and additional budgetary support.

Photo credit: Demonstrators On Road, Canva Pro



There is some underlying expectation by 2-3 partners about IWDA needing to play a critical role in helping to (build/strengthen/maintain/nourish) the wider feminist movements in each of the partner regions, particularly during COVID19 and any future natural disasters. There is a sense that ever since COVID19 lockdown and travel restrictions, whilst there has been an increase in local advocacy and grassroots movement building, there is also a feeling that there has been a lack of care given to each other as sisters across the Pacific and Asian regions. "We need to make sure that this huge period of not seeing each other, not sharing with each other and not physically being re-energised by each other can do damage to the wider regional feminist movement and I think IWDA can play a critical role in this by linking all of the partners up so we can share our grassroots work..." "Keep up to date with what needs to be supported at the regional level so that our leaders don't start to play up and forget about our commitments". (Partners)

6. Things to Reflect On

- 1 Reframe monitoring visits & online meetings to nurturing the vā (relationships)
- 2 Document the relationship journey to avoid re-telling and re-investing
- 3 Continue to be open to conversations about power & privilege
- 4 Development & on-going review of Partnership Policies that is feminist based is a good practice - keep it up!
- 5 Good practice is listening to respond rather than listening to react
- 6 Consider creative methods or ways of reporting & evaluation due to unpredictable global and regional issues such as COVID19 and natural disasters
- 7 Continue the annual PPR. Partners to have courageous conversations on the review.



4

Partners from
Oceanic Pacific

3

Partners from Asia

6

Partners want IWDA to
be more transparent
about its internal
mechanics

7

Partners said that
IWDA is very good at
listening

8

Partners indicated
that IWDA is one of
their best Global
North partners

7. CONCLUSION

IWDA commissioned an independent consultant to undertake this Partner Perception Review (PPR) for the period 2020-21. A total of eight partners were identified and initially contacted by IWDA inviting them to take part. All eight partners voluntarily agreed to participate in the review. To create a safe space where partners could freely share their responses, it was agreed that any quotes, by respondents, used in the report would be unidentified.

The four questions used to guide the conversations enabled partners to reflect on how IWDA has undertaken organizational strengthening for each of their respective organizations. Partners identified some IWDA best practices that they believe is what makes IWDA unique; often described as behaving better than the rest of the donors that IWDA partners are dealing with. **"We know that our partnership is not forever and that eventually, our project will phase out and that's the end of our project and activities but because of the partnership and the relationship we have built together over many years, I just don't believe that IWDA will just leave us all of a sudden....they know our story and our challenges and our battles and what our hearts are fighting for and so I know IWDA will continue looking for ways to help support us and that is because of the strong ties we have developed over the years".**

There is evidence of some of the four elements of the Equitable South-North Engagement Model, and each of its set of goals, in IWDA's practices 2020-21 as perceived by the partners;

- IWDA validated existing knowledge of its partners and supported continuing knowledge-making
- IWDA re-educated, learned about and understood the local context of their Partners
- IWDA developed integrative partnerships based on equality, diversity and inclusivity
- IWDA embraced indigenous and decolonized ways of accessing, sharing, documenting and building knowledge.

The conversations held with the eight partners gave some historical context to IWDA 'not always being like this,' and hence it is obvious that during the recent period, there has been a paradigm shift from engagement built on power-over to shared power and some good evidence of decolonized forms of engagement. IWDA needs to keep going and building on this. The longevity of this practice is key.

"When we were experiencing social unrest and it became difficult to implement our activities, they listened to us. They were genuine in wanting to learn about the situation, we were not just a tick box activity or project. They sought our advice and asked us how did we want to do this differently. Now we are expanding and we are growing and most of this credit goes to our partnership with IWDA, they are our best partner without a doubt"

Partner



Acknowledgements

IWDA to PARTNERS: Thank you to all the courageous women who took part in this PPR in the hope that IWDA continues to grow from strength to strength.

PARTNERS to IWDA: Congratulations IWDA for undertaking this PPR for the first time! Nothing is perfect but if you keep trying to do better, that means you care and that's what matters.



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