



THE VALUE OF IWDA AS A FEMINIST AND DECOLONIAL PARTNER: PROGRESS ON THE PATH TO A GENDER-EQUAL FUTURE

A Review of IWDA's Feminist and Decolonial Approach to Partnership

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IWDA and the women's rights organisations they partner with.

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Acknowledgements and Authors’ Note

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people and the Kurna people as the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which we live and work. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders past and present. We honour the strength, generosity, and knowledges of First Nations peoples, and commit to ongoing learning and action in support of justice and self-determination.

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The views expressed are those of the authors; any errors or omissions are our own.

As consultants not Indigenous to Oceania and as contractors for IWDA, we recognise our own positioning within systems that perpetuate inequalities between the Majority and Minority Worlds. We are invested in holding a critical gaze on IWDA as a Minority World organisation committed to feminist and decolonial systemic change.

All authors were born in Asia and maintain strong ties to the region while living and working as migrant-settlers on unceded Wurundjeri and Kurna Country. Muktasree Chakma remains a prominent feminist leader in Bangladesh and beyond, and is Executive Director of SPaRC, an Indigenous women-led organisation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This work was grounded in the principles of decolonisation and reflexivity, trust and relationships, power sharing, and cultural humility.

**Impact
Advisory
Group.**

¹ Guttenbeil-Likiliki, ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka (2020), *Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*, Melbourne: IWDA.

² Lawrence, Salmah Eva-Lina. *Decolonising International Development: The view from the Majority World*. London. Forthcoming. Cited in IWDA (2023). *Decolonising Framework and Strategy*, Melbourne: IWDA.

³ IWDA, *Stakeholder Perception Reviews 2022-23 and 2023-24*.

⁴ End of program evaluation of Feminist movements for transformative change: We Rise Coalition Phase 3 program.

Contents

Terms and Definitions	2
1. Executive Summary	7
2. Introduction	10
3. Methodology	12
4. Key Findings	15
5. Recommendations	40
6. Conclusion	45
7. References	46
<hr/>	
Annex 1: IWDA Decoloniality Framework and Strategy - Five Principles of Decoloniality	48
Annex 3: Interview questions	54
Annex 4: DFAT's Locally Led Development Continuum	55
Annex 5: Nine (plus Four) Roles of Intermediaries	56

Terms and Definitions

We draw on IWDA's Decolonial Framework and Strategy⁵ (herewith 'IWDA Decolonial Framework')—a key paper on the nexus of coloniality, feminism and international development. For a fuller understanding of the terms and definitions below, we recommend referring to the original paper.

Coloniality

Coloniality is an analytic concept to understand global and inter-cultural relations of power. Coloniality is exercised through a matrix of hierarchies that were constructed to justify seizure of land, enslavement, genocide and colonisation.

A key feature of coloniality is that European values have been imposed on others under the pretext that these values are universal and globally applicable. In the process, different ways of being, knowing, doing, relating, perceiving and living have been violently extinguished meaning that coloniality has been extremely harmful to peoples whose ethnicities, histories, religions and cultures are not European-derived.⁶

Decoloniality

Given the harmful, oppressive and violent impacts of coloniality on Majority World people, and the fact that international development has deep roots in modernity and coloniality, it is clear that organisations like IWDA, located in the Minority World and engaged in the development sector, must take action to decolonise our practice.⁷

Five principles of decoloniality that underpin this transformation for IWDA are:⁸

PRINCIPLE 1 Perspective, framing and diversity matter.

[Extract] Respecting diversity necessarily means that we respect historical and cultural variation. On a planet as diverse as ours, one cannot generate sustainable or ethical solutions without multiple diverse voices framing the issues that matter and how they should be addressed.

PRINCIPLE 2 Pluri-verse not uni-verse.

[Extract] A decolonial approach embraces the idea of a "pluri-verse", meaning that we understand there are multiple, different and equal ways of being, knowing and doing, relating and perceiving.

PRINCIPLE 3 Power with. Anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, anti-oppression.

[Extract] A decolonial approach rejects racism, discrimination and the use of 'power-over' others (although soft indirect forms of influence and persuasion remain possible).

⁵ International Women's Development Agency (2023), *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*, Melbourne: IWDA.

⁶ Lawrence, Salmah Eva-Lina. *Decolonising International Development: The view from the Majority World*. London. Forthcoming 2024; cited in IWDA (2023), *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*.

⁷ IWDA, *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*, p. 9.

⁸ Lawrence, Salmah Eva-Lina. *Decolonising International Development: The view from the Majority World*. Forthcoming.

PRINCIPLE 4 Rights and responsibilities are equally important.

[Extract] *A decolonial approach recognises that our collective wellbeing is linked to the relational responsibilities or obligations we have towards each other and other life forms.*

PRINCIPLE 5 Humility matters.

[Extract] *A decolonial approach, therefore, encourages us to ‘sit with’ issues, situations, problems, engagements or decisions when it is not clear what the best course of action is, at this point in time.*

International Development and Coloniality

Significantly different ethical systems, and the practices that arise from them, are rarely considered let alone given prominence in mainstream international development. And ‘beneficiaries’ of development interventions are rarely, if ever, allowed to participate as equally knowledgeable, if not more so, about their context and community, than the ‘development expert’.⁹

At IWDA, we understand that international development is based on the myth of European superiority...Despite the exit of colonial powers from Majority World jurisdictions, they have managed to retain a high level of institutional power in the form of the international aid infrastructure – another matrix of power within coloniality. International NGOs like IWDA are part of this institutional power. We believe it is imperative that all Minority World international development actors confront our complicity in maintaining these power structures with the objective of transforming them to be equitable.¹⁰

Locally led development

There is no one definition of locally led development.¹¹ The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Guidance Note: Locally Led Development provides:¹²

Locally Led Development Cooperation: Sustainable and effective development co-operation that supports locally led development by respecting and enabling the agency, leadership and decision making of diverse local actors in framing, design, delivery, resourcing and accountability, in given local and operating contexts.

See Annex 4 for DFAT’s Locally Led Development Continuum.

Also the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), which includes an emphasis on shifting power:¹³

Locally-led development and humanitarian action recognises, respects and strengthens the leadership and decision-making of local actors who are best placed to understand and respond to the needs of their communities. By its nature, this will look different in each country context, and even within countries or programs. Successful locally-led action recognises how power imbalances influence development and humanitarian initiatives. It is facilitated by strong and equal partnership, quality direct funding, transparency and mutual accountability, and diversity and empowerment in staffing and leadership. (Adapted from draft ACFID Locally-led Action Framework)

⁹ Lawrence, Salmah Eva-Lina. Decolonising International Development: The view from the Majority World. Forthcoming.

¹⁰ IWDA (2023), Decolonial Framework and Strategy.

¹¹ Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2024), Guidance note: Locally Led Development, Canberra: DFAT. Available at: [<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development.pdf>]. Accessed 13 June 2025.

¹² DFAT (2024), p. 3.

¹³ Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). (n.d.). *Good Practice Toolkit*. Retrieved June 26, 2025, from ACFID website: <https://acfid.asn.au/good-practice-toolkit/>

1. Executive Summary

The Value of IWDA’s Feminist and Decolonial Approach to Partnerships

The International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) has taken bold and evolving steps to redefine how international partnerships can centre feminist and decolonial principles. A key milestone in this journey was the launch of its Decolonial Framework and Strategy in 2023, articulating IWDA’s commitment to challenging colonial power dynamics in development practice.¹⁴ This review, grounded in the insights and experiences of women’s rights organisations that partner with IWDA and complemented by critical analysis, affirms that IWDA’s approach creates deep value—relationally, operationally, and systemically—while also navigating the complex tensions of operating within traditional, donor-driven development systems.

“We really feel that IWDA stands with us—not above us.”

Grantee partner

Research purpose and methodology

The review was structured around three guiding questions:

1. What is IWDA’s partnership approach in theory and practice? How does it compare to other Minority World (Global North) actors?
2. What value does IWDA create for women’s rights organisations and feminist movements? Why and how?
3. How can IWDA strengthen this value over the next 3–5 years?

Drawing on interviews, a meta-review of internal and external documents, and a rapid literature review on the decolonisation of development, this review was guided by feminist and decolonial research principles. A total of nine partner organisations (six grantees and three collaborators) were interviewed, along with twelve current and former IWDA staff. The research was grounded in the belief that a feminist, decolonised approach to partnership holds inherent value—because it is a rights-based approach to development, based on the principle of self-determination. Attempting to articulate the ‘value’ of this approach inevitably raises tensions: whose definitions of value are being used, and who decides what counts. Even at the global level, there remains an evidence gap around the ‘value’ of locally led development.¹⁵ At its core, this research centres partner perspectives in the findings and recommendations, with IWDA insights and critical analysis included where complementary and supportive.

¹⁴ International Women’s Development Agency (2023), *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*, Melbourne: IWDA.

¹⁵ Lucas, B. (2024). *Approaches to Institutionalising Locally Led Development* (K4DD Rapid Evidence Review No.106). Institute of Development Studies.

Key Findings

A Fundamental Tension

IWDA is at the forefront of international non-governmental organisation (INGO) efforts to decolonise development, even as it continues to operate within systems that remain deeply colonial. This creates ongoing tensions that IWDA must carefully navigate in its partnerships with women's rights organisations and feminist movements. Nowhere is this more evident than in the issues raised by the due diligence and compliance requirements of institutional donors like the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Any consideration of the value IWDA brings to women's rights organisations and feminist movements—both now and in the future—must be grounded in an understanding of this broader and often contradictory context.

Spectrum of Partners, Spectrum of Experiences

Women's rights organisations that partner with IWDA span a wide range of contexts, sizes, priorities, and stages of organisational development—from new grassroots women's rights organisations to well-established regional feminist networks. Naturally, their experiences and expectations of partnership with IWDA vary. Even within similar partnership types—such as one-to-one, project-based grantee partnerships focused on service delivery—there are some varying views on the effectiveness of IWDA's support.

More than an INGO – A Sister Organisation

According to partners, IWDA stands apart from other NGOs in both its approach (“How”) and its activities (What)—while there is also room for growth. Over the past decade, partners have observed a clear evolution in IWDA's partnership model — from a more traditional, ‘Minority World’ top-down approach to one that is distinctly feminist, locally led, and increasingly decolonial. IWDA's approach is experienced by partners as distinctive in several key areas. These include:

- Flexibility
- Whole-of-organisation approach - not just funding
- Funding and resource mobilisation
- Feminist principles
- Decolonial values and practices
- Locally led
- Power sensitivity and power sharing
- Equality, respect, reciprocity
- Mutual learning.

“IWDA remains one of the great partners among feminist organisations. They are learning and doing at the same time... [Other INGOs] say they apply a feminist lens but IWDA... really do it.”

Grantee partner

‘Locally Led’ and Beyond

IWDA goes beyond a ‘locally led’ model, embracing a feminist and decolonial approach to partnership. Nevertheless, it is notable that IWDA's practice clearly aligns with both the Advanced level of DFAT's Locally Led Development Continuum and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) definition of locally-led action.¹⁶ This alignment is consistently reflected in partner experiences and feedback, reflecting IWDA's commitment to shared power and mutual learning.

¹⁶ Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). (n.d.). *Good Practice Toolkit*. Retrieved June 26, 2025, from ACFID website: <https://acfid.asn.au/good-practice-toolkit/>

The “So What” of IWDA’s Feminist, Decolonised Approach to Partnership

IWDA brings both intrinsic value (inwardly felt) and extrinsic value (externally visible) to partners. These benefits reinforce each other to strengthen partner organisations, increase resilience, support growth, and contribute to broader movement-building.

INTRINSIC The How	 Inter-related Positively or negatively reinforce	EXTRINSIC The What
Confidence Transparency Trust Safe space Respect Power sensitivity and sharing Agency Can negotiate Equals Reciprocity Relationality Mutual learning Connection Networking	<p><i>“I feel they [IWDA] really care about us (intrinsic). They listen and they understand and if they don’t understand what we are saying, they keep asking questions so that they really do understand (intrinsic) and they listen some more and ask us how do we want to approach the problem (intrinsic). When we tell how we want to do it, they approve it (extrinsic) and support us with extra funds (extrinsic) if we need it and can justify it. This is not normal – well, not with other donors.”¹⁷</i></p>	Responsive programming Operations capacity Stronger governance Sustainability Knowledge products and sharing - with ethos of open source sharing for the benefit of the feminist movement Influence and advocacy Linkages across local, national, regional, and global levels Coalition and movement strengthening

Room for Growth and Missed Opportunities

While the above reflects the overall experience of many partners, it is important to acknowledge that this has not been universal. There are instances where IWDA’s partnership approach has not fully delivered the intrinsic or extrinsic value expected by partners. This includes around continuity (due to staff turnover), support for independent sustainability, IWDA occasionally overstepping in decision-making, and the need to ‘nurture the Vā’ - valuing time, reciprocity, and relational depth in partnerships.¹⁸

IWDA’s Value from a Systems Lens: Powerful Critic, Alternative Visionary, Bridging Innovator

Global aid and development are in a moment of transition —a time marked by the disruption and gradual decline of a colonial, Minority World-led system, even as new, Majority World-led alternatives begin to emerge. In this in-between space, IWDA’s role is significant (see Figure 1 below). IWDA’s *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*, positions IWDA as both a Powerful Critic and Alternative Visionary and provides enabling guidance for development practice and relationships—challenging dominant aid structures while articulating feminist and decolonial alternatives.

¹⁷ IWDA Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

¹⁸ See Guttenbeil-Likiliki, ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka (2020), *Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*, Melbourne: IWDA.

Simultaneously, IWDA acts as a Bridging Innovator—working within existing systems to model transformative change, as reflected in its 2025 Strategy commitment to building “*feminist and decolonial pathways to a gender equal future for all.*” This dual role—inside and critiquing the system—offers influence, but also brings tensions. Drawing on its Decolonial Framework, IWDA is intentionally *Sitting With* these tensions: embracing uncertainty, deep listening, and collective discernment. From a systems lens, this capacity to hold complexity is itself part of the value IWDA brings.

Systems Lens: IWDA’s value to women’s rights organisations and feminist movements



Source: Mark Cabaj, CFI Transforming Systems Forum 2023; adapted by authors to the IWDA context

Yet IWDA remains tethered to the existing system: 80 percent of its funding comes from DFAT. This reliance on traditional donor funding—with its heavy Western donor-driven compliance requirements and rigidity of timeframes—limits IWDA’s ability to fully realise its feminist and decolonial commitments. This tension—between decolonial aspirations and operating within colonial structures—surfaced consistently in partner reflections and underpins many of the structural and relational challenges they described, even as they acknowledged IWDA’s efforts to work differently within these constraints.

A question for IWDA is, in bringing value for partners: *how much should one adapt to, versus resist, the existing donor-driven system?*

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, as women’s rights organisations hold diverse priorities and expectations. Guided by a vision of vibrant and diverse feminist movements, and committed to supporting a broad spectrum of women’s rights organisations, coalitions, and movements, IWDA must respond in ways that are context-specific and relational. This means continually holding its broader vision in focus while adapting its role and support to align with the unique needs and capacities of each partner.

One way to help make sense of the varied and sometimes contradictory value that intermediaries like IWDA—committed to decolonising development while still operating within and dependent on colonial systems—bring is to draw on Peace Direct’s *Nine Roles for Intermediaries*,¹⁹ released in 2023 following its 2021 call to decolonise aid. Based on feedback from partners, we have identified four additional roles that reflect how IWDA is perceived. We found that IWDA currently plays *all* the intermediary roles below (Figure 2) at different times²⁰ (with the exception of Watchdog) (see Annex 5 for an explanation of each of the roles).

Peace Direct’s Nine Roles for Intermediaries



Four Additional Roles Based on Partners’ Feedback on IWDA’s Value



Transitions and Tensions: Opportunities and Risks

IWDA itself is also at a turning point. As it continues its journey toward being both *for* and *of* the feminist movement, it must grapple with questions of role, identity, and accountability—as a Minority World-based organisation that is not rooted in the lived realities of the movements it seeks to support. This demands ongoing reflection, deep engagement with feminist partners, and intentional staff recruitment and capacity-building to uphold its values and aspirations.

These are not new challenges; IWDA has long been in open dialogue with movement partners on these tensions. What remains essential is sustained investment in IWDA’s ability to navigate these complex and often contradictory spaces—so it can continue to deliver meaningful value to partners and feminist movements as it evolves.

“It’s very tricky where IWDA is - I respect the ideals they are striving for, to decolonise, but also understand the reality we are in and think that as partners, we need to give them grace, as what they are doing is ambitious and takes time, and it will not be perfect. They deserve our grace, like they do for us.”

Grantee partner

¹⁹ Peace Direct (2023). *The nine roles that intermediaries can play in international cooperation*. London: Peace Direct. Available here: [<https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/>]. Accessed 13 June 2025.

²⁰ This is Peace Direct’s Nine Roles for Intermediaries - with four roles we added to reflect the feedback from partners: Flexible Funder; Donor Buffer, Feminist Sister, Decolonial Ally.

“IWDA do this type of review regularly. We appreciate it. It keeps an organisation honest when they can have these partnership reviews. It’s a very gutsy move that IWDA engages in - good on them. The question is, where to from here?”

Grantee partner

Recommendations

To sustain IWDA’s value to partners and feminist movements as it continues to evolve, the following recommendations are offered. IWDA has or is already taking action in many of these areas. The report includes more detail based on partner feedback and further critical analysis.

- 1. Address structural barriers to feminist and decolonial development** by creating the conditions for feminist, flexible funding.
- 2. Enable decolonial practice** by renegotiating donor terms and exploring alternative funding models.
- 3. Centre IWDA’s partnerships approach on linking the local, national, regional, and global.**
- 4. Decolonise compliance processes** and work with partners to build **organisational sustainability**.
- 5. Sustain and strengthen IWDA’s partnerships team** through planning, resourcing, and role clarity.
- 6. Invest in professional development and shared learning** for staff and partners to enable feminist, decolonial partnership - from networking through to skills in decolonial collaboration, collective leadership and feminist governance.
- 7. Deepen IWDA’s role as “for and of the feminist movement”** through providing core funding, engaging in advocacy, and strengthening IWDA’s political awareness, experience and capacity in feminist movements and partnerships.
- 8. Resource IWDA’s Decolonial Framework as strategy and practice** through exploring opportunities to engage in-country, given the importance of First Nations women’s rights in Australia, and investing in skills, knowledge, recruitment, learning, and advocacy.

Conclusion

IWDA’s feminist and decolonial approach to partnership offers deep and distinctive value—relationally, operationally, and systemically. While tensions persist in navigating donor-driven systems, IWDA’s commitment to mutual learning, power sharing, and transformative change positions it as a trusted and evolving sister organisation in feminist movements. Sustained investment in these principles, and in IWDA’s capacity to hold complexity, will be essential for continuing to deliver meaningful value in a shifting global development and feminist landscape.

2. Introduction

This report presents an in-depth review of IWDA's partnership approach through a feminist and decolonial lens, grounded in the voices and experiences of its partners. At a time when global aid and development systems are facing increasing scrutiny for their colonial legacies and persistent power imbalances, IWDA's approach stands out for its commitment to transformative, values-based partnerships with women's rights organisations and feminist movements across Asia and the Oceanic Pacific.

The review explores both the theory and practice of IWDA's feminist and decolonial partnership model, identifying the intrinsic and extrinsic value it brings to diverse partners at relational, organisational, programmatic, and movement levels. It also interrogates the tensions and contradictions inherent in striving to decolonise development from within a donor-driven system, while proposing pathways for IWDA to deepen and evolve its practice. In doing so, the report aims to both affirm the unique contributions IWDA makes within the broader feminist ecosystem and offer practical insights to strengthen its impact, relevance and accountability going forward.

Purpose

In line with IWDA's feminist and decolonial values and approaches, the purpose of this review is to improve IWDA's understanding of:

- Whether their approach to partnership aligns to partners' understanding of locally led development and decolonial approaches;
- Whether their approach to partnership is delivering the anticipated impacts for our partners; and
- the most effective ways to partner with women's rights organisations.

Findings from the consultancy will support IWDA to:

- Identify how their approach to partnership has evolved and opportunities to continue to strengthen the ways in which IWDA works;
- Demonstrate accountability to IWDA partners and donors by detailing how IWDA resources have been utilised to add value to partners;
- Advocate for appropriate level of resourcing for the costs of a feminist / decolonial partnership approaches to donors, to the benefit of both IWDA and partners.
- Communicate IWDA ways of working to other INGOs and Women's Funds;
- Contribute to the discussion on effective approaches to locally led development and decolonising international development.

Scope

The scope of the review is informed by the Terms of Reference for this review (Annex 2). Through discussion with IWDA, the following key research questions were identified:

One

What is IWDA's partnership approach?

- In theory
- In practice
- How is this different to other Global North/Minority World organisations?

Two

What value does IWDA's partnership approach create for women's rights organisations and feminist movements? Why? How?

At the level of:

- Personal / relational
- Project / program
- Organisational
- Community
- Movement.

Three

How could IWDA's partnership approach create more value for women's rights organisations and feminist movements (in the next 3-5 years)?

Issues for Consideration

Approaching this review required deep sensitivity to the complex dynamics of power, participation, and positionality inherent in feminist and decolonial research. Central to this was acknowledging and mitigating the actual and potential power imbalances between IWDA, as a Minority World INGO, and its Majority World partners.

From the outset, the consultants acknowledged and reflected that they are not indigenous to Oceania, and that as contractors for IWDA, they are implicated in relations that reinforce epistemic, material and symbolic inequalities between Majority and Minority Worlds. The consultants were all born in Asia with strong personal and professional ties to the region, including one who continues to be an active and vocal feminist leader in Bangladesh, the region and internationally. The consultants are invested in the project's critical and necessary gaze towards IWDA, as a Minority World organisation, and its commitment to systemic change through decolonisation and feminism.

Sharing power in the process and research with participating women's rights organisations was a key consideration. The review prioritised voluntary, informed participation while ensuring processes do not impose undue burdens on partners who may be time-constrained or fatigued by previous consultations. Confidentiality and anonymity were respected to mitigate power imbalances and any concerns about negative consequences from participation. Issues of accessibility—such as language, technology, and cultural safety—must be actively addressed to ensure diverse and equitable participation. Building trust and accountability was essential, requiring transparent communication, culturally respectful engagement, and mechanisms for feedback that affirm partner agency. An important aspect of this was contextual sensitivity and cultural humility throughout the process. Furthermore, the review had to remain adaptive and open-ended within a fixed timeframe, allowing the Review Community—comprising IWDA and its partners—to shape its purpose, process, and use. By embedding these considerations throughout the design and implementation, the review aimed to be genuinely collaborative and ethical.

3. Methodology

We based our approach on Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)²¹, decolonisation research principles, IWDA's Feminist Research Framework and Decolonisation Framework and Strategy, and 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki's research on creating equitable South-North Partnerships.

A key FPAR principle is that research decisions are made by the community of women who are the stakeholders of the research project - i.e. IWDA and women's rights organisations that partner with IWDA ('partners'). We took into consideration time differences, project timeframes, language and access to technology to ensure optimal participation. Together, IWDA and participating partners are the 'Review Community'. It is critical that the Review community, especially participating partners, had the opportunity to inform the research scope and design.

We detail how we sought to do so below. But due to limitations of time, resources, technology and physical distance, our collective capacity to implement FPAR principles was limited. With more time and resources (for both IWDA and participating women's rights organisations), a more generative exercise may have been undertaken, ideally in-person and with space for collective sense-making and dialogue.

Research design

The research design was qualitative and consisted of three parts. The methodology focuses on a meta-review of key IWDA documents, including previous stakeholder perception reviews and partnership health checks, and literature on decolonisation and international development, and anonymous feedback from partners and IWDA staff about IWDA's partnership approach. The meta-review and feedback led to interviews with more partners and two previous evaluators.

The methodology aimed to gain an understanding of IWDA's decolonising and feminist partnership approach in theory and practice at multiple levels, such as relational, program/project, and movement. A further question it sought to address is how partners believed IWDA's approach added value for them and feminist movements, and what they could do to bring more value for them in future.

The meta-review sought to gain an overview and understanding of IWDA's decolonising and feminist approach according to IWDA, partners, collaborators and resource partners. As part of the meta-review, we identified existing literature on decolonisation and development, which informed the interviews and rapid survey with partners.

Partners had the opportunity to inform the research process from the outset to encourage co-ownership. For example, they participated in an anonymous open survey to advise on research priorities and considerations. This included in what way they want to co-own the research and how much time they would like to contribute to this piece of work. We provided subsequent advisory opportunities, including on the review's purpose, questions, process, and how the findings will be used, through multiple ways, such as email or drop-in sessions. In addition, we invited partners for one-on-one interviews. Noting time constraints, we provided information packs prior to their interviews.

We sought feedback from previous and current IWDA staff through interviews and anonymous mural boards for project managers and coordinators.

²¹ <https://apwld.org/feminist-participatory-action-research-fpar/>

Sampling strategy

We selected a cross-sectional sample of organisations and individuals who engaged with IWDA, based on IWDA's recommended list. The sample size was determined by the diversity of stakeholders and their availability, guided by the Terms of Reference (TOR), which specified up to 7 partner organisations and up to 10 IWDA staff. The sample size was relatively small due to IWDA's policy to not burden partners that have been recently interviewed (e.g. the annual stakeholder perception review). Though the small sample size was mitigated through the thorough analysis undertaken in the meta review. IWDA provided contact information, along with e-introductions and information about the review on behalf of the review consultants. Based on the meta-review and interviews, we also spoke with additional key informants, such as collaborating partners and two previous evaluators. Doing so allowed us to test research ideas.

Interviewee type	No. of interviews	Notes
Partner (Grantee)	6	
Partner (Collaborator)	3	
IWDA staff (current)	9	Including 3 x group interviews
IWDA staff (former)	3	

Data collection methods

The primary methods are meta-review, as described, surveys, interviews and Mural boards. IWDA provided key documents, such as the Decolonial Framework and Strategy, Feminist Research Framework and partnership health checks. We reviewed these as well as existing literature on decolonisation and development. We conducted open surveys and one-on-one individual interviews with Asia and Oceania women leaders. We employed a mix of individual and group interviews, and murals with IWDA staff. In interviews, we asked open-ended questions, such as 'how does IWDA's feminist and decolonial approach show up relational/individual, project or program level, organisation, movement?' and 'what should/could IWDA stop/start/continue? relational/individual, project or program level, organisation, movement' (Annex 3 – Interview Questions). We used Mural to provide another anonymous way of engaging staff groups, such as Program Managers and Project Coordinators.

Data analysis

We used IWDA frameworks and additional frameworks to analyse the data. That is, we compiled the data from the meta review and our interviews. We then used those frameworks as an overlay to see where this was alignment or misalignment with those frameworks.

In particular, we used IWDA's Decolonial Framework to see how the 4Ss – Step Up, Stand With, Step Back, Sit With - were showing up (positively or negatively) in our interviews or documented examples.

We used 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki's work on nurturing the vā, which spoke to recurring themes in the meta-review and interviews about the importance of relationships in doing and sustaining the work.

Additional frameworks were nine roles intermediaries can play in international cooperation by Peace Direct,²² and Mark Cabaj's work on organisational and systems change, inspired by Meg Wheatley (see figure on systems change lens).²³ We built on Peace Direct's framework to identify roles that IWDA stakeholders described in existing IWDA key documents, including additional ones. We asked interviewees in an open survey how they currently see IWDA and which roles they'd like to see IWDA move towards - though we only received one response. Wheatley's work supported an understanding of where IWDA currently sits in systems change.

To support IWDA to articulate their approach to external stakeholders, such as resourcing partners, we used DFAT's locally led continuum (Annex 4) and ACFID's locally led action framework.

Ethical considerations

The Review Community was critical throughout the process. We sought advice from them, particularly partners during key points, such as at: inception about research purpose and methodology, including guiding and interview questions; draft summary findings; and draft report. We also assured interviewees about the voluntary nature of the review, informed consent, and provided opportunities in multiple ways to share feedback and ask questions anonymously. We reiterated the importance of the principles, including decolonisation, sharing power, contextual sensitivity and cultural humility.

²² <https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation>

²³ Mark Cabaj, CFI Transforming Systems Forum 2023

4. Key Findings

A Fundamental Tension

IWDA is at the forefront of INGO efforts to decolonise development, even as it continues to operate within systems that remain deeply colonial.

This creates ongoing tensions that IWDA must carefully navigate in its partnerships with women's rights organisations and feminist movements.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the issues raised by the **due diligence and compliance** requirements of institutional donors like DFAT.

Any consideration of the value IWDA brings to partners—both now and in the future—must be grounded in an understanding of this broader and often **contradictory context**.

IWDA's Decolonial Framework and Strategy begins with the recognition that '[i] international development is...deeply embedded in colonialism'²⁴. IWDA acknowledges²⁵:

Despite the exit of colonial powers from Majority World jurisdictions, they have managed to retain a high level of institutional power in the form of the international aid infrastructure – another matrix of power within coloniality. International NGOs like IWDA are part of this institutional power.

As of May 2025, IWDA receives 80 per cent of its funding from DFAT. To receive funding from DFAT's Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), IWDA must be accredited with DFAT every five years.²⁶ To be accredited, IWDA must demonstrate compliance with DFAT's Due Diligence Framework and ensure these due diligence requirements are passed onto partners.

This creates a range of tensions for IWDA in its partnership approach. Nowhere is this more evident than in the issues raised by the due diligence and compliance requirements of institutional donors like DFAT. This is explored further in the report and provides an important backdrop to the question of the value that IWDA brings for partners - now and into the future.

²⁴ IWDA (2023), Decolonial Framework and Strategy.

²⁵ IWDA (2023), Decolonial Framework and Strategy.

²⁶ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/who-we-work-with/ngos/ancp/accreditation>

Spectrum of Partners, Spectrum of Experiences

Women’s rights organisations that partner with IWDA span a wide range of contexts, sizes, priorities, and stages of organisational development—from new grassroots women’s rights organisations to well-established regional feminist networks. Naturally, their experiences and expectations of partnership with IWDA vary.

While some partners have deeply engaged with and helped catalyse IWDA’s feminist and decolonial approach for over a decade, others are newer to the relationship or operate in vastly different sociopolitical environments. This diversity shapes how partners perceive the value of IWDA’s support, the nature of collaboration, and how decolonial principles are applied in practice.

Even within similar partnership types—such as one-to-one, project-based grantee partnerships focused on service delivery—there are some varying views on the effectiveness of IWDA’s support. These perspectives will be explored further throughout the report.

The diversity of women’s rights organisations that partner with IWDA—and partnership types—is a key factor to consider when assessing the value IWDA brings. This diversity shapes not only how value is experienced now, but also what it could or should look like in the future.

The following quotes illustrate the different forms of ‘value’ that partners seek from IWDA—shaped by context, history, and organisational priorities:

“[This coalition] is a carefully curated space. IWDA has no decision-making power in that space because of the [colonial] role of Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific. We’ve been very vocal about not accepting that anymore. IWDA is there as a partner - but only as a facilitator and a broker with the donor.” — **Grantee Partner**

This perspective reflects a clear boundary-setting around power and influence, with value placed on IWDA’s role as a facilitator and ally, rather than as a decision-maker.

In contrast, other partners emphasised a desire for more direct, hands-on support from the Minority World:

“We’ve asked for an Australian volunteer and asked IWDA to help us. We’d like one to help management staff to develop projects, proposals, our sustainability and practise our English.” — **Grantee Partner**

This diversity also reflects IWDA’s broader role within the feminist ecosystem—supporting a wide range of women’s rights organisations and feminist movements. Navigating the tensions that arise within this complex landscape is central to IWDA’s value, especially in its role as a ‘gap filler’ across the ecosystem. As we continue to explore the value of IWDA’s partnership approach, it is important to keep this broader context in mind.

More than an International NGO - A Sister Organisation

According to partners, IWDA stands apart from other NGOs in both its approach (“How”) and its activities (“What”)— while there is also room for growth.

Over the past decade, partners have observed a clear evolution in IWDA’s partnership model — from a more traditional, ‘Minority World’-top-down approach to one that is distinctly feminist, locally led, and increasingly decolonial.

Overall, guided by feminist and decolonial frameworks, IWDA’s approach is experienced by partners as distinctive in several key areas. These include:

- Flexibility
- Whole-of-organisation approach - not just funding
- Funding and resource mobilisation
- Feminist principles
- Decolonial values and practices
- Locally led
- Power sensitivity and power sharing
- Equality, respect, reciprocity
- Mutual learning.

These dimensions reflect how IWDA’s values are embodied in practice, shaping more equitable and effective partnerships.

Partners consistently speak highly of the organisation, often describing it as different from other Minority World actors. Even when offering critique, partners describe IWDA in consistently positive terms—reflecting a strong foundation of trust, respect, and shared values. IWDA is particularly recognised for **embodying its feminist values in practice**, and is appreciated for its leadership in developing a **Decolonial Framework and Strategy**, alongside its ongoing efforts to decolonise its partnership approach.

“Overall, the findings of this stakeholder perception report demonstrate that IWDA maintains a favourable position of trust and respect within Australia and the majority world of the Asia-Pacific Region. Its strength resides in the resilient relationships both formal and informal that diverse members of the IWDA teams (finance, program, advocacy and leadership) have with the different stakeholders. These relationships including personal friendships that have been forged over the years are the basis upon which trust and respect has been built.”

— Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

“IWDA are wonderful, amazing...what they’re doing with the 4Ss (IWDA’s Decolonial Framework)...They’re really different.” — Grantee Partner

“IWDA has come a long way in the last ten years since it started to ask how it can decolonise its approach. It is still on its journey but it is different to other INGOs working in the Pacific, although they set a low bar. IWDA’s partnership approach is different in how it centres feminist principles. IWDA staff are doing their work on decolonisation and the team composition is changing to better reflect the region. How IWDA engages with partners is different because of a relationship of reciprocity and power-sharing.”

— Collaboration Partner

“IWDA remains one of the great partners among feminist organisations. They are learning and doing at the same time...[INGO names redacted] say they apply a feminist lens but IWDA, at the program level, they really do it.” — Grantee Partner

Across both the meta-review and interviews conducted for this research, partners consistently noted that IWDA’s approach stands out across several key dimensions.

Flexibility

This strength is particularly evident in IWDA’s flexibility around programming, with partners leading the design and direction of activities. Partners also expressed appreciation for IWDA’s flexibility in funding—not only in trusting them to define how funds are used, but also in proactively working with them to reallocate resources when circumstances change or new priorities emerge.

“IWDA is the most flexible donor. IWDA always asks that our programs be what we want, not what they want.” — Grantee Partner

“A storm broke the bridge to our centre and people couldn’t come to our programs. Other funders weren’t willing to pay for the emergency repairs but IWDA helped find funding for us.” — Grantee Partner

One of IWDA’s unique attributes is that its strategy is grounded in supporting diverse women’s rights organisations and movements. Rather than requiring partners to align with a predetermined agenda, IWDA’s approach is to align its own strategy with partners’ priorities and visions.

“I really like that they look at partners’ strategic plan and build their strategic plan around that. This can be compared with others, who create their strategic plan then make sure they’ve got local partners who align with their plan.” — Grantee Partner

When it comes to compliance, partners report mixed experiences—a theme that will be explored later.

Whole-of-organisation approach - not just funding

Partners express appreciation that IWDA provides not only funding, but also personnel and organisation-wide support to meet their needs.

“IWDA’s technical assistance to partners for institutional strengthening, risk assessment and capacity building, along with its technical support for feminist research, strategic planning and advocacy demonstrated a level of effectiveness and understanding of complex local situations including in countries that are going through crises and where violence is prevalent.

Its strength resides in the resilient relationships both formal and informal that diverse members of the IWDA teams (finance, program, advocacy and leadership) have with the different stakeholders.” – Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

“We feel that IWDA is supportive and provides us with training and mentoring. We have learnt a lot in the process. All of our staff are pleased with the partnership with IWDA.” – Grantee Partner

Case Study: Grantee Partner “I really feel that IWDA stands with us. It’s not just about funding.”

“IWDA is the most flexible donor. IWDA always asks that our programs be what we want, not what they want.

IWDA has zero tolerance with fraud. After one incident, we reported to all donors – but some did not pay attention as it wasn’t their funds. IWDA wanted to know how we followed up. IWDA really appreciated it.

When we had to change to an online financial management system, IWDA came to [country] to understand the new system and supported us to manage the system with recommendations, following up each quarter, and keeping us accountable to actions.

For reporting, before we used to present all the activities we implemented. IWDA wanted the story of change, lessons learned, progress we achieve. IWDA saw that we did not understand what they wanted from the template. They came and discussed with us and guided us on how to write the report. We also practised with other donors, who were really happy with what we were writing. So the impact was not just with IWDA, but also other funds.

For M&E, tracking progress was a challenge. IWDA visited and did a mini workshop with us so we could develop our own template based on IWDA’s guidelines. We shared this with IWDA and they were happy with the template we developed. With this template, we apply to all the donors that fund our organisation. We shared a sample with other organisations in [country], “our donor (IWDA) taught us a simple template we can use for M&E”. This was recognised by other organisations at the national level.

IWDA shares with us opportunities with other donors. They work with us to develop projects. I prepare the proposal and IWDA reviews and helps us put into templates. It’s very helpful. In 2023 and 2024 we received new grants with [donor] and [donor]. That’s because of IWDA reviewing our application. We are working with IWDA on how we can access funding directly – that is our dream – and IWDA will stand in the back.

Recently we asked IWDA to help us hire a consultant to develop a proposal for [fund] which we haven’t been successful in the past.

IWDA linked us with DFAT so we could travel to [country] to present our report on [UN Convention]. IWDA shared with DFAT that we wanted to travel to [country] to present our findings. DFAT contacted us and arranged everything. IWDA prepared statements for us. Our government really appreciated and we provided data to our government.

While this broader, cross-team support is generally valued and rated highly, one partner reported not receiving the level of support they had expected, and others expressed a desire for more support from IWDA. This feedback is explored later.

Funding and Resource Mobilisation

IWDA is appreciated not only for providing flexible, core, and long-term funding, but also for actively supporting partners to identify and access new funding opportunities.

“At the management level, IWDA has strengthened our capacity to apply for proposals independently. We’ve learned how to manage and lead using a feminist leadership approach, benefiting greatly from IWDA’s support in our internal management practices.”

– Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

“IWDA shares with us opportunities with other donors. They work with us to develop projects. I prepare the proposal and IWDA reviews and helps us put into templates. It’s very helpful. In 2023 and 2024 we received new grants with [donor] and [donor]. That’s because of IWDA reviewing our application. We are working with IWDA on how we can access funding directly – that is our dream – and IWDA will stand in the back. – Grantee Partner

Feminist Principles

Partners consistently describe IWDA as living its feminist values:

“One of the ways IWDA is different to other Australian-based NGOs is how it centres feminist principles.” – Collaboration Partner

“Overall, partners and collaborators—both from interviews and surveys—consistently affirmed IWDA’s strong embodiment of their values. They rated IWDA highly, particularly in its commitment to feminist principles such as co-designing, co-responsibility, and co-leadership.” – Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

“IWDA genuinely cares about our well-being and safety, as well as our self-care initiatives. Last year, IWDA started supporting self-care plans for our partner organisations, and this has been incredibly beneficial. Given the challenging circumstances we live in, our staff now has access to counselling sessions and self-care resources, which significantly contributes to their overall well-being. This support has proven to be very useful for us.”

– Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

Commitment to Decolonial Values and Practice

IWDA's launch of its Decolonial Framework and Strategy in 2023 is widely seen as a significant and courageous leadership step. As Tongan researcher and activist 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki—author of the IWDA-commissioned research *Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*—noted:

“The theoretical framing/concepts and principles of the framework is bold, resilient, resistant and uncomfortable. Exactly where it needs to be.”

In practice, IWDA's Stakeholder Perception Review 2023–24 found:

“Institutionally, IWDA is perceived to embody decolonial and feminist values through clear policies and procedures, while IWDA staff are perceived to put these values into practice. As a learning organisation, IWDA actively seeks feedback from its stakeholders to improve its engagement practice, knowing when to Step Back—particularly in diverse settings—to limit risk and reduce harm to movements and solidarity efforts.”

A decolonial practice of IWDA that is highly appreciated by partners is the decentring of English. This was reflected in the Stakeholder Perception Review and also in our research:

“IWDA makes sure language is not a barrier. In workshops, they make sure English is not the main language, while other INGOs communicate in English.” – Grantee partner

This is not to suggest that the journey is complete. As IWDA acknowledges in its Decolonial Framework, the organisation is committed to being “open, transparent and vulnerable in sharing with, and seeking support from others, in the ongoing journey of decolonisation, including a willingness to make, and learn from, unique mistakes, with an intention to not repeat the same mistakes again.” Opportunities for growth and reflection are explored later in this report – see ‘Room for Growth and Missed Opportunities’.

Locally Led Approach

Partners' reflections on IWDA's partnership approach position IWDA firmly at the advanced end of DFAT's locally led development continuum. This positioning is further evidenced and expanded upon in the following key findings section, which draws directly from partner feedback to illustrate how IWDA operationalises a locally led approach in practice. For further discussion, see the section, ‘Locally Led and Beyond’.

Power Sensitivity and Power Sharing

Partners consistently highlight IWDA's attentiveness to power dynamics as a defining strength of its partnership approach. IWDA's willingness to share—and when appropriate, cede—power is seen as a key differentiator. This sensitivity to power is articulated both explicitly (“IWDA shares power”) and implicitly, through partner observations about how decisions are made and how relationships are nurtured.

Power sensitivity sits at the heart of IWDA's *Decolonial Framework* and its 4S approach (*Stand with, Stand by, Stand up, Stand back*). IWDA's capacity for reflexivity—particularly its discernment around when to Stand Back—was frequently noted by partners as a demonstration of deep respect and humility. These principles are also operationalised through practical tools such as the *partnership health checks*, where dialogue around power and decision-making is intentionally embedded. IWDA staff demonstrate a high level of reflexivity, noting, for example, that whether those tools are effective depend on how and with whom they are used.

I can negotiate and consult with IWDA on activities. They respect our opinion. They tell us, ‘We’re not here to influence your decision. It’s about what works well in your society.’ –

Grantee Partner

Their approach to knowing when to step up, step down, and navigate different situations is beneficial. It helps them understand how to effectively work with all of us, especially at (Coalition name redacted), where we have a diverse range of partners—some are new while others have been involved for a longer time. Their ability to engage with us appropriately, knowing when to escalate support and when to take a step back, is crucial for maintaining our existing relationships. –

Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023–24

“And to their credit, when I had my first conversation with X, and this will stay with me forever, X said to me, and I’ve repeated this story so many times, and I said would you be interested in working with the X government to deliver this project? And X said, well as a feminist organisation, we always assess that response from three positions. Do we want to stand up? Is this our role to lead? Do we want to stand with, do we want to work with another organisation or do we need to stand back? Because this isn’t our space and I need to go away and think about it. And I remember hanging up and saying, oh, for God’s sake, can X just say they’ll stand up because I just wanted to work with IWDA so much. But they were particular, and X is such a strong, wise leader and committed to sharing power, right. And so, X from the very beginning was very clear about that.”

– Collaborator Stakeholder, Stakeholder Perception Review 2022-2023

Equality, Respect, Reciprocity

Across the board, partners of IWDA note their relationships are characterised with equality and respect. Reciprocity is also often highlighted, directly or indirectly.

“We really feel that IWDA stands with us—not above us.” –

Grantee Partner

“One of the ways IWDA is different to other Australian-based NGOs is power-sharing and reciprocity.” –

Collaboration Partner

“IWDA is different in how they are fully standing in the partnership role, giving opportunities to us like capacity building, networking. Other feminist organisations are not considering our country situation - understanding our issues, our working style – like IWDA does.” –

Grantee partner

Mutual Learning

Across multiple levels—individual, programmatic, and organisational—partners emphasise a strong sense of mutual learning and exchange within their relationships with IWDA. The partnership is experienced as a two-way process where learning flows in both directions, grounded in respect for diverse forms of knowledge, context, and experience.

“Among feminist organisations, IWDA remains one of the great partners. They are learning and doing at the same time.” –

Grantee partner

“IWDA has also contributed to our human capacity development by offering training on development tools. These tools have been adapted locally, allowing us to use them in our own context. For instance, we have created a “Plan Your Power” tool kit, which is a feminist advocacy tool kit tailored for Cambodia. While some aspects of it remain unchanged, we have localised and adjusted portions to fit our language and specific needs. Additionally, IWDA has connected us with other organisations working on similar issues, helping to build a strong feminist network among partnering organisations.

At the management level, IWDA has strengthened our capacity to apply for proposals independently. We've learned how to manage and lead using a feminist leadership approach, benefiting greatly from IWDA's support in our internal management practices.

– Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023–24

“Partners reflected on IWDA's support for local knowledge and researchers as an intentional decolonial practice around knowledge production. While in movement spaces, IWDA is seen practising a decolonial approach, knowing when to Step Back, and what to Sit With and continuing to be a learning organisation.” – Stakeholder Perception Review 2023–24

These quotes demonstrate the mutual respect that underpins the process of mutual learning within IWDA's partnerships. This respect—paired with openness—creates space for more relevant, responsive, and effective programming. By approaching partnership as a shared journey rather than a top-down exchange, IWDA and partners are able to co-create solutions that are grounded in local realities and enriched by diverse perspectives.

‘Locally led’ and beyond

IWDA goes beyond a ‘locally led’ model, embracing a distinctly feminist and decolonial approach to partnership. Nevertheless, it is notable that IWDA's practice clearly aligns with the *Advanced* level of DFAT's *Locally Led Development Continuum*.

This alignment is consistently reflected in partner experiences and feedback, highlighting IWDA's commitment to shared power and mutual learning.

At the same time, as explored in later sections, donor-driven requirements around due diligence and compliance can create tensions—at times complicating the relational and power-sharing nature of IWDA's partnership approach.

By “locally led model,” we refer to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) locally led action framework (see Terms and Definitions) and DFAT's *Guidance Note on Locally Led Development* (see Annex 4 – *Locally Led Development Continuum*). As DFAT notes, “locally led approaches do not translate into ‘one size fits all’ solutions.” While a detailed theoretical and practical analysis of the differences between “locally led” development and IWDA's partnership approach could form the basis of a separate paper, it is sufficient to note that DFAT's locally led approach is grounded in Australia's *International Development Policy*, which is shaped by national interests.

As a result, there is an emphasis on performance and delivery, alignment with Australian policy requirements, and the ‘policy’ and ‘business’ case for DFAT's investment. The *how* of the conventional model is assessed by the degree to which local actors are primarily responsible across the program cycle.

By contrast, IWDA begins with the assumption that development should be inherently locally led—and is further guided by a broader frame of feminist and decolonial values, principles, and objectives. This distinction is reflected in practice, as evidenced by the many examples shared throughout this report.

IWDA's alignment with the *Advanced* level of DFAT's *Locally Led Development Continuum* (see Annex 4) is consistently evidenced in partner feedback, both in the meta-review and the interviews conducted for this research. Much of this experience has already been illustrated through direct partner quotes and case studies in earlier sections.

“IWDA listens to what we need in country. They trust us to define our activities.”

– Grantee Partner

*“We feel very proud because we have the ability to design initiatives ourselves. It’s not only about IWDA creating a design and submitting a proposal to a donor. When the grant is approved, we collaborate on the design process, involving everyone, including the principal... **We consider this a partner-led program rather than a donor-driven one [emphasis added].**”*

– Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

*“Overall, partners and collaborators – both from interviews and surveys – consistently affirmed IWDA’s strong embodiment of their values. They rated IWDA highly, particularly in its commitment to feminist principles such as **co-designing, co-responsibility, and co-leadership [emphasis added].**”* – Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

In line with this Continuum, it is clear that women’s rights organisations that partner with IWDA are “primarily responsible” across key dimensions of local agency. A critical structural decision that supports this positioning is IWDA’s intentional choice not to maintain in-country offices or place international staff within partner contexts. This approach firmly situates IWDA as an intermediary and sister organisation, rather than an implementing presence—reinforcing the autonomy and leadership of local partners.

Importantly, this model does not diminish the significance of IWDA’s role. Intermediaries play vital functions in supporting locally led efforts, even as they seek to facilitate the decolonisation of development.²⁷ This is explored further in the section: Transitions and Tensions, Opportunities and Risks.

The “So What” of IWDA’s Feminist, Decolonised Approach to Partnership: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Benefits for Partners, Programs, and Feminist Movements

IWDA believes that a feminist, decolonised approach to partnership holds **inherent value**—because it is a **rights-based approach to development**, grounded in the principle of **self-determination**. Attempting to articulate the ‘value’ of this approach inevitably raises tensions: whose definitions of value are being used, and who decides what counts. Even globally, there is an evidence gap in the ‘value’ of locally led development.

Nonetheless, partners identify a broad range of benefits emerging from this way of working. These benefits can be understood as both:

- **Intrinsic** – inwardly felt, experienced, and often relational or identity-affirming
- **Extrinsic** – externally visible, measurable, and often linked to systems, processes, or outputs

Crucially, these forms of value are not separate—**they are deeply interconnected**, reinforcing each other across different aspects of partnership.

²⁷ Peace Direct (2023), Nine roles played by intermediaries. <https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation>

As earlier findings show, IWDA’s approach is distinctive in a few key areas, such as power sensitivity and sharing, which are in themselves benefits. In other words, how IWDA engages in partnership is an essential part of the partnership. Relationships are the work of partnership, where there is care and accountability, which strengthens the work that is seen and measured.

INTRINSIC The How	 Inter-related Positively or negatively reinforce	EXTRINSIC The What
Confidence Transparency Trust Safe space Respect Power sensitivity and sharing Agency Can negotiate Equals Reciprocity Relationality Mutual learning Connection Networking	<p><i>“I feel they [IWDA] really care about us (intrinsic). They listen and they understand and if they don’t understand what we are saying, they keep asking questions so that they really do understand (intrinsic) and they listen some more and ask us how do we want to approach the problem (intrinsic). When we tell how we want to do it, they approve it and support us with extra funds (extrinsic) if we need it and can justify it. This is not normal – well, not with other donors”</i></p> <p><i>Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review</i></p>	Responsive programming Operations capacity Stronger governance Sustainability Knowledge products and sharing - with ethos of open source sharing for the benefit of the feminist movement Influence and advocacy Linkages across local, national, regional, and global levels Coalition and movement strengthening

The interconnections between intrinsic and extrinsic value for partners

Intrinsic and extrinsic values are deeply intertwined—not separate categories, but mutually reinforcing dimensions of IWDA’s approach to partnership.

- **When partners feel trusted and respected (intrinsic)**, they are more likely to take initiative, experiment, and lead within the partnership. This results in **stronger programs and more effective delivery (extrinsic)**.
- **Having influence in governance spaces (extrinsic)** affirms partners’ sense of leadership and agency, contributing to **greater confidence and belonging (intrinsic)**.
- **A shared commitment to feminist values (intrinsic)** builds solidarity and deeper alignment across contexts, which in turn **enhances collaboration and coordination in movement spaces (extrinsic)**.
- **Being supported through flexible, long-term funding (extrinsic)** fosters a **sense of stability and long-term security (intrinsic)**, which is critical for resilience and sustained advocacy.

These feedback loops mean that IWDA’s approach doesn’t just “build capacity” or “improve programs”—it enables partners to thrive on their own terms, in ways that are both felt and seen.

PROGRAMMING

*“IWDA is a valuable ally (**intrinsic**). There is mutual learning (**intrinsic**). IWDA wants to know from us what works in our society (**intrinsic**). We identified a gap for a boys and men’s behaviour change and awareness program. IWDA was the first international organisation to give budget to the program (**extrinsic**). We used Biblical references, so it wasn’t perceived as a Western intervention. After demonstrating impact (**extrinsic**), we were able to get additional support from [INGO redacted](**extrinsic**).” – Grantee partner*

OPERATIONS

*We consider this a partner-led program rather than a donor-driven one (**intrinsic**). IWDA genuinely cares about our well-being and safety (**intrinsic**), as well as our self-care initiatives. Last year, IWDA started supporting self-care plans for our partner organisations, and this has been incredibly beneficial (**extrinsic**). Given the challenging circumstances we live in, our staff now has access to counselling sessions and self-care resources, which significantly contributes to their overall well-being (**extrinsic**). This support has proven to be very useful for us.”*

– Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

*We reach agreements during workshops about various aspects, including rules, risk management, and other policies (**extrinsic**). If we disagree on any policy, we can voice our concerns and discuss them thoroughly (**intrinsic**), which helps us make fair decisions (**extrinsic**). We consider this a partner-led program rather than a donor-driven one (**intrinsic**). – Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24*

GOVERNANCE

IWDA worked with us to develop a template for due diligence and complaints. We now use that template to send to other donors. – Grantee partner

*At the management level, IWDA has strengthened our capacity to apply for proposals independently (**extrinsic**). We’ve learned how to manage and lead using a feminist leadership approach, benefiting greatly from IWDA’s support in our internal management practices (**extrinsic**).*

*On a personal level, IWDA staff embody feminist principles and carry these values into their professional and personal lives (**intrinsic**). They have developed friendships with us, allowing for discussions that go beyond work and into personal development (**intrinsic**).*

*Overall, our collaboration with IWDA has been mutually enriching (**intrinsic**). We have provided valuable insights to IWDA concerning critical thinking around partner engagement, equal partnership, and the decolonisation of funding practices (**extrinsic**).”*

– Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24

SUSTAINABILITY

*“Even when there are translation or interpretation issues, they ensure that all documents are translated. During workshops, they are particularly attentive to translation needs. They always provide an interpreter, allowing us to communicate in our own language if we struggle with English or feel uncomfortable speaking it (**intrinsic**). Their concern for their partners is evident, even in small ways (**intrinsic**), which will make them even more effective in the future (**extrinsic**).” – Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24*

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS AND SHARING

“I really value how open source IWDA is about intellectual property - like their Feminist Organisational Capacity Strengthening toolkit. This requires courage for organisations that work in our sectors, where there is pressure to differentiate ourselves. I’ve seen IWDA’s decolonial values here in not having ownership over knowledge, it not being top-down, inviting others to actively deepen their work. I’ve seen this time and time again with IWDA.” – Collaborator

INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY

*“[T]he Women Deliver activity was emphasised as a clear example of the success of practice of values in a co-responsibility setting (**intrinsic**) with a partner from the Pacific which continues to resonate... IWDA signature programs were cited by collaborators and partners that demonstrate both a co-designing and co-responsibility (**intrinsic**) elements to them including the Feminist Foreign Policy and the Equality Insights Rapid Survey.*

*“Respondents including partners and collaborators reaffirmed IWDA’s relevance (**extrinsic**) through IWDA’s signature programs - including the Feminist Foreign Policy, and Equality Insights Rapid Survey and involvement in Women Deliver, which all play a crucial role in collectively advancing a feminist agenda, effectively connecting partners with governments at national, regional and global levels (**extrinsic**). – Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24*

“IWDA’s work on Feminist Foreign Policy takes courage in this climate. It’s commendable how States have stepped up. We need to hold the line - keep pushing forward to not regress. We need movement actors being brave.” – Collaborator

LINKAGES ACROSS LOCAL, NATIONAL, REGIONAL, GLOBAL

“In global and more privileged spaces, IWDA adds value to bring the locally led ethos. IWDA is often the first one to ask, is this really a useful thing for us to do, or is there someone else who should be doing this? Should we Step Back?...IWDA also consistently makes sure that Majority World voices are platformed and unedited.” – Collaborator

COALITION AND MOVEMENT STRENGTHENING

“We’ve received support from IWDA for capacity building for our feminist movement agenda. We understand advocacy nationally, but we were not organising systemically or developing our advocacy strategy as a network. We learnt from IWDA’s Plan Your Power Toolkit - how to make an advocacy plan and how to consider it logically, step by step... We also learned from IWDA’s feminist principles and the five capabilities - how do we integrate in procedure policy, daily work, work plan, strategy, intervention...not only with staff but also with volunteers... How we can share power.” – Grantee Partner

*“Additionally, IWDA has connected us with other organisations working on similar issues (**intrinsic**), helping to build a strong feminist network among partnering organisations (**extrinsic**).” – Partner, Stakeholder Perception Review 2023-24*

Case Study: Stakeholder perception reviews 2022-2024 referred to the Women Deliver 2023 conference as a positive example of partnership

IWDA stepped up as a ‘convenor’ to be a ‘connector’ of Pacific organisations, whereby it used its ‘power to amplify their shared values with partners in the majority world’ (stakeholder perception review 2022-23). It ‘resourced’ the largest ever Pacific delegation to attend one of the world’s largest conferences on gender equality, and took part in Global Advisory Group and the Oceanic Pacific Regional Committee.

‘Last year, our collaboration with Women Deliver was a fantastic experience. We worked with many different organisations in the region to ensure that Women Deliver had strong representation from the Pacific. This collaboration was successful, particularly with IWDA taking on the responsibility alongside DIVA to hold space for us, which was greatly appreciated.’ (stakeholder perception review 2023-24 Partner).

‘Women Deliver activity was emphasised as a clear example of the success of practice of values in a co-responsibility setting with a partner from the Pacific which continues to resonate in this reporting period’ (stakeholder perception review 2023-24).

IWDA stood with: the organisation was ‘advocate and amplifier’ of Pacific voices as part of regional and international movement building. Pacific delegate: “the convenings showed us that when we make a genuine effort to share power, when we give space for voice and when we challenge ourselves to sit in discomfort, we can create an indomitable feminist movement that doesn’t leave anyone behind. Now it’s all about continuing that momentum’ <https://iwda.org.au/women-deliver-2023-regional-solidarity-and-feminist-power/>

Case Study: Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition was referred to positively across most of the stakeholder perception reviews. IWDA is ‘convenor’ and ‘connector’ of more than 200 individuals and organisations to enhance intersectional feminist foreign policy approaches in Australia. One stakeholder [the review did not specify if the quote was by a partner or resourcing stakeholder] was ‘seriously impressed’ with how IWDA set the Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition up: ‘So cleverly thought through, articulated, the way of building coalitions, getting people on board, the advocacy strategy’ (Stakeholder Perception Review 2021-22).

IWDA is also a ‘knowledge broker and producer’. The same review also found that IWDA was not only ‘well aware of’ current and emerging trends in foreign policy, they are ‘always across everything... they’re proactive – always on the front foot’. In addition, ‘[IWDA are] trying to shape the debate around feminist foreign policy, with academics, politicians, and non-government organisations. Framing the way we think about it and talk about it. Doing a lot to help shape the way we talk about the issues’. IWDA is described as ‘thought leaders, natural leaders amongst peers in Australia, IWDA’s analysis and research on gender discourse is singled out as of critical value to progress advocacy within Australia particularly its work on a Feminist Foreign Policy (2022-23 Stakeholder perception review).’ This positive feedback was echoed in the 2023- 24 stakeholder review, including that the Coalition having elements of co-design and co-responsibility.

What does this all add up to?

The combined intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of IWDA's partnership approach contribute to meaningful outcomes for partners, programs, and movements. Specifically, they lead to:

- **Organisational Capacity** – Strengthened internal systems, leadership, and ability to deliver impactful programs.
- **Resilience** – Increased ability to adapt, survive, and thrive amid uncertainty or external pressures.
- **Growth** – Greater autonomy, visibility, influence, and access to resources for partners.
- **Movement Strengthening** – Deepened solidarity, collective power, and alignment across feminist agendas and geographies.

Together, these outcomes not only support individual organisations but also contribute to a stronger, more sustainable, and more decolonised feminist movement.

“There is trust and a safe space. I’m really thankful to IWDA for their confidence and belief.”

Grantee partner

Room for Growth and Missed Opportunities

While the above reflects the overall experience of many partners, it is important to acknowledge that this has not been universal.

There are instances where IWDA's partnership approach has not fully delivered the intrinsic or extrinsic value expected by partners.

Important areas for growth include:

- Staff turnover at IWDA, which affects the continuity and quality of partnership.
- IWDA, as a donor broker/manager, to strengthen their support of partners on the journey to independence - that is, helping partners to 'stand on their own feet' and meet donor requirements related to organisational capacity, policies, and processes.
- Continue to listen, trust partners as experts, and Step Back on decision-making that should be made by partners who are 'on-the-ground'.
- Continue to credit existing knowledge in-country. Continue to reflect on what IWDA is learning and taking back (e.g. how IWDA is able to tell the story and take on Indigenous ways), and what is it leaving behind for sustainability.
- Continue to nurture the Vā - value time, reciprocity, and relational depth in partnerships - across the whole-of-organisation.

From Growth to Independence: What Was Missing?

A partner's perspective on the transition from support to sustainability

One partner reflected on both positive and challenging aspects of their long-standing partnership with IWDA. They acknowledged IWDA's critical role in their organisation's early development, stating that IWDA helped them stay connected and "get us into places where we can share our work." This "helped us to become more visible" and led to significant growth: "we had a lot of growth due to IWDA."

However, they also expressed frustration with high staff turnover at IWDA, noting that they had worked with eight to nine different program managers over the course of a 10-year partnership. This level of change disrupted relationship-building and slowed IWDA's ability to fully understand their context. The partner described the experience as a "rollercoaster ride."

Despite the length of the partnership, the partner felt that IWDA had not adequately supported their journey toward independence. "They haven't prepared us well to be on our own feet," they said. "Given how long this partnership has been, they haven't helped us become independent." They were specifically referring to a gap in support for building internal systems for grant and donor management—leaving the organisation unprepared to meet donor requirements related to organisational capacity, policies, and processes.

Their strong recommendation was for IWDA to place greater focus on organisational capacity building and to engage proactively with partners around exit strategies. They suggested practical tools, such as a checklist outlining the key components an organisation like theirs would need to become independent and confidently seek funding on its own.

A key theme raised in IWDA's *Stakeholder Perception Review 2023–24* was the challenge partners experienced as a result of staff turnover. As illustrated in the case study above, frequent changes in IWDA program managers can disrupt relationship-building, slow contextual understanding, and affect the continuity of support.

A Missed Opportunity to Step Back

While partners largely appreciate IWDA's consideration of the 4Ss, there are still instances where partners feel that IWDA should have Stepped Back more fully. One such example was discussed during our interviews and captured in the following feedback in the **We Rise Phase 3 - End of Program Evaluation**:

"There is a need for deeper understanding of each other and IWDA needs to listen to and to trust the coalition members and trust them as experts. For example, there was a consultancy and despite our suggestion and advice not to engage IWDA's preferred candidate, IWDA continued with the consultancy and it ended up not being beneficial. It made us feel that we were not trusted partners despite being experts and people from the country."

Besides the above case study, much critical feedback partners shared relates to a broader, systemic issue: the enduring tension at the heart of IWDA's work—the challenge of decolonising development while operating within a fundamentally colonial aid system. This central paradox continues to shape the limitations partners face and the areas where IWDA's value can be constrained by external donor expectations, compliance requirements, and structural power imbalances.

IWDA's Value from a Systems lens: Powerful Critic, Alternative Visionary, Bridging Innovator.

We are at a pivotal moment in the evolution of global aid and development—a period marked by the disruption and slow decline of a system long dominated by the Minority World and large institutional funders, while the contours of a new system have yet to fully emerge. In this in-between space, IWDA's role becomes significant.

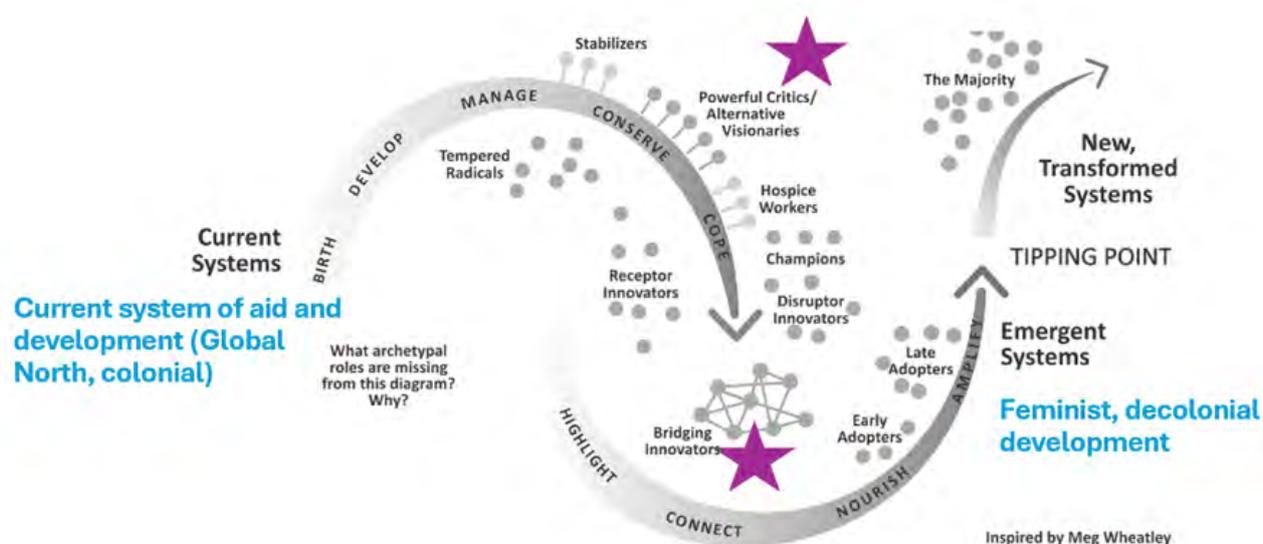
Through its *Decolonial Framework and Strategy*, IWDA is both a **Powerful Critic** and **Alternative Visionary**—challenging the assumptions and power structures of the existing aid architecture, while articulating and modelling more feminist and decolonial approaches. At the same time, IWDA acts as a **Bridging Innovator**—working within existing systems to demonstrate and advocate for transformative change, as reflected in its 2025 Strategy commitment to building “*feminist and decolonial pathways to a gender equal future for all.*”

This dual role—both inside and critiquing the system—offers IWDA a unique opportunity to influence the transition toward a more feminist and decolonial vision for development.

It also raises a number of tensions for IWDA - internally and externally - on how it does this. Calling on IWDA's Decolonisation Framework, IWDA is also *Sitting With this tension*. This means being able to “*SIT WITH uncertainty, embrace communal learning and deep listening, and accept that time is needed to collectively discern the best course of action.*” From a systems lens, that is another value that IWDA brings in its role as Bridging Innovator.

To understand where IWDA sits, it's useful to look at this systems lens map of the aid and development system.

Systems Lens: IWDA's value to women's rights organisations and feminist movements



Source: Mark Cabaj, CFI Transforming Systems Forum 2023; adapted by authors to the IWDA context

The current system of aid and development is deeply rooted in colonial history—a system dominated by Whiteness and the enduring myth of European superiority.²⁸

Despite long-standing calls for ‘localisation’ and some progress, power remains overwhelmingly concentrated in the Minority World (Global North), where the vast majority of resources and funding are held. Donors increasingly express a desire to ‘fund directly’, yet many continue to rely on cumbersome, Western-centric models of due diligence, compliance, and results-based programming, monitoring, and evaluation. Global North-based INGOs continue to dominate the landscape. Even as Global South organisations grow and gain visibility, top-down approaches to development persist.

IWDA, alongside many of its feminist movement partners, is actively engaging in what lies ahead—the “not yet known.” The current Global North-dominated system is in decline and disruption, but its replacement remains undefined. Across the ecosystem, we see the emergence of different roles that help facilitate this shift, such as innovators and disruptors. *Hospice workers*, for example, lay to rest parts of the old system that no longer serve. A case in point is Global North organisations that are dismantling ‘old’ practices of hosting mostly white technical experts to fly in to ‘build capacity’ in the Majority World.

In this in-between space, IWDA’s role is significant. IWDA’s Decolonial Framework and Strategy positions IWDA as both a Powerful Critic and Alternative Visionary and provides enabling guidance for development practice and relationships—challenging dominant aid structures while articulating feminist and decolonial alternatives. Simultaneously, IWDA acts as a Bridging Innovator—working within existing systems to model transformative change, as reflected in its 2025 Strategy commitment to building “feminist and decolonial pathways to a gender equal future for all.” This dual role—inside and critiquing the system—offers influence, but also brings tensions. Drawing on its Decolonial Framework, IWDA is intentionally Sitting With these tensions: embracing uncertainty, deep listening, and collective discernment. From a systems lens, this capacity to hold complexity is itself part of the value IWDA brings.

Yet IWDA remains tethered to the existing system: 80% of its funding comes from DFAT. This dependence on traditional donor funding—with its compliance requirements, pre-set timeframes, and rigid due diligence processes—constrains IWDA’s ability to fully realise its decolonial commitments at every level: individual, programmatic, organisational, and movement-wide. In the literature, this dependence on funding and funding conditions has led to criticisms of the ‘non-profit industrial complex’ and calls that ‘the revolution will not be funded’.²⁹

This core tension—IWDA’s aspiration to decolonise development while operating within and depending on colonial structures—surfaced repeatedly in partner reflections. It underpins many structural and relational challenges they described, even as they recognised IWDA’s efforts to work differently within these constraints.

These tensions manifest across multiple levels:

- **Immediate:** Some partners reported needing more support from IWDA’s partnerships team to manage compliance burdens—yet that team is already stretched.
- **Medium-term:** Others suggested that IWDA could work more collaboratively with them to challenge donor rigidity and push back on excessive compliance demands.
- **Long-term:** Several partners raised fundamental questions: *What is IWDA decolonising toward? What is its role in feminist coalitions and movements, given that it is not a grassroots feminist organisation?*

²⁸ From IWDA (2023) Decoloniality Framework and Strategy: “At IWDA, we understand that international development is based on the myth of European superiority...Whether conscious or not, the norms underpinning international development, therefore, include: power-over, unexamined cultural arrogance, race-based discrimination and the erasure of Majority World systems of being, doing, knowing, relating and perceiving.”

²⁹ <https://incite-national.org/beyond-the-non-profit-industrial-complex/> and <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-revolution-will-not-be-funded>

These are not just questions about operations or partnerships—they are existential inquiries, speaking to IWDA's identity, strategy, and future in a transforming feminist and development landscape.

The following partner experience and feedback illustrates how donor requirements are creating tensions with IWDA's (International Women's Development Agency's) decolonial approach to partnership:

IWDA remains one of the great partners among feminist organisations. They are learning and doing at the same time. Standing With and Stepping Back - some people in IWDA are applying really well.

But this is missing in operations - they are not Standing With. In finance, it is more like 'standing in front'. IWDA told us we need to have a separate anti-fraud policy. We said it's covered in our finance policy. They still asked us to make a separate one. They followed up soon after. They didn't seem to understand that it takes time to produce in our local language, for our local context, and for staff to understand the new policy. Another example was the PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) training. We had the training but we didn't have a record. IWDA asked us, did you do it?

– Grantee Partner

It is not necessary to go into the details of this particular example (e.g. IWDA's perspective), but to note the tensions created by the pressures of donor requirements.

For IWDA, its Partnerships Team consistently share that a key part of their role is to help 'absorb the compliance burden' for their partners, so their partners can 'do what they do best' (that is, advance women's rights in their context). It is widely understood this is a key value they bring to help decolonise development as it currently stands. This is shared by IWDA's executive.

We work to make tied funding as 'untied' as much as possible. This is largely possible through a very hard-working partnerships team. – IWDA Executive

We provide as much flexibility as possible with reporting deadlines, often creating time pressure at IWDA's end, but understanding the immense workloads that our partners have to grapple with. – IWDA Partnerships Team member

Yet across IWDA, there is also a keen awareness of the tensions between compliance and decoloniality.

PM/Cs have to do a lot of internal advocacy on behalf of our partners due to IWDA's low risk appetite and high compliance standards. It can feel like our attempts to bring value to our partners directly conflict with our organisational/risk mandates at times. –

IWDA Partnerships Team member

We need to start consider how to shift approaches to compliance in line with our Decolonial Framework and Strategy. – IWDA Partnerships Team member

Internal documentation indicates that IWDA's Partnerships Team has grappled with issues of sustainability and self-care—challenges that have been correlated with high staff turnover.

These tensions, internal and external, raises important considerations about the conditions needed to sustain a feminist and decolonial approach to partnership.

The issue of due diligence and compliance emerged as a consistent theme in IWDA’s 2023–24 Stakeholder Perception Review—and was strongly echoed in our research. Partners offered a range of perspectives on IWDA’s role in navigating the compliance landscape, particularly in relation to:

- **IWDA’s ability to push back on donor requirements**
- **The extent to which IWDA shares or absorbs the compliance burden** in ways that are effective and aligned with decolonial principles
- **IWDA’s role in building partners’ capacity** to meet donor expectations.

Beneath these views lies a broader and unresolved tension: *how much should one adapt to, versus resist, the existing donor-driven system?*

Some partners—particularly those with longer histories of donor engagement—expressed confidence in pushing back against compliance requirements they see as unreasonable or colonial. Others, especially smaller or newer organisations, emphasized the need for capacity-building support to help them meet donor expectations, secure funding, and grow sustainably.

One grantee partner made this valuable point:

“I admire that IWDA wants to take the challenge themselves of the compliance burden from DFAT. But it’s not possible for them to decolonise this by themselves. It doesn’t work anyway because it’s a circle – how can someone get hurt and not throw it to others – you feel pressure for some time then you will leak it to others. If IWDA sees a challenge (in compliance) then they should meet with all partners together, share the strategy, see how it affects partners, what partners can do to mitigate, value the ideas of partners to stop it – for example, through advocacy. We don’t want IWDA to take all the decolonised agenda on themselves. IWDA staff are human. There is support for them, too. We want them to understand we can help them. Our ideas might help them to challenge the colonised ideas.”

This partner made a connection between the compliance burden and staff turnover at IWDA, noting, “staff turnover needs to be reduced at IWDA, needs to be unpacked.”

This diversity of perspectives reflects different relationships to power, risk, and opportunity within the development system. It raises important strategic questions for IWDA about how to balance advocacy, support, and accountability in its partnership approach.

How should IWDA make sense of this?

There is no one-size-fits-all answer. With a vision of vibrant and diverse feminist movements, and a commitment to supporting a wide range of women’s rights organisations, coalitions, and movements, IWDA must respond in context-specific, relational ways. This requires continually holding its broader vision in view while adapting its role and support to the needs and capacities of each partner.

It’s also important to recognise that it’s not only institutional donors that keep IWDA tethered to older models of development. There is also the reality of public fundraising. Many members of the Australian public continue to respond to tangible “impact stories”—narratives that can, at times, slip into colonial tropes. As one stakeholder observed, some elements of IWDA’s fundraising communications still carry traces of the ‘White Saviour’ frame.

These tensions are not easily resolved—but surfacing and naming them is essential to navigating them with integrity.

So, what are we to make of all this?

Given IWDA’s positioning—committed to decolonising development while still operating within and dependent on colonial systems—it is useful to draw on external frameworks that help make sense of such complexity. One such framework is **Peace Direct’s *Nine Roles for Intermediaries***, released in 2023 following its 2021 call to decolonise aid.

These nine roles provide a way to understand the varied and sometimes contradictory positions that intermediaries like IWDA occupy in the development ecosystem.

Based on feedback from partners, we have identified four **additional roles** that better reflect how IWDA is perceived and what is needed in feminist partnership work:

- **Flexible Funder**
- **Donor Buffer**
- **Feminist Sister**
- **Decolonial Ally.**

Together, these 13 roles offer a more nuanced lens through which to consider IWDA’s current and potential contributions to feminist movements and women’s rights organising.

A brief explanation of each role can be found in Annex 5.

Peace Direct’s Nine Roles for Intermediaries



Four Additional Roles Based on Partners’ Feedback on IWDA’s Value



Based on our meta-review and interviews with partners, we believe that IWDA currently plays *all* of the intermediary roles identified—both those in Peace Direct’s framework and the four additional roles—with the exception of Watchdog, which did not emerge strongly in the feedback.

Like Peace Direct, we emphasise that these roles do not necessarily represent IWDA’s place in a future, more decolonial system. Rather, they reflect the *current value* IWDA brings to partners *within* an aid and development system that remains fundamentally colonial in structure.

Taken together, these roles—comprising both the “**How**” and “**What**” of IWDA’s partnership approach, as well as the **intrinsic and extrinsic value** it provides—suggest that IWDA is operating as a **Bridging Innovator**. That is, it works *within* existing systems while demonstrating and advocating for transformative, feminist, and decolonial change. This aligns with IWDA’s 2025 Strategy, which commits to building “feminist and decolonial pathways to a gender equal future for all.”

IWDA is currently positioned at the *Advanced* level of DFAT’s **Locally Led Development Continuum**, yet it goes further—intentionally embedding feminist and decolonial values and principles into practice. In doing so, IWDA is not just adapting to the system; it is actively attempting to *reshape* it from within.

This is clearly reflected in the range of examples and consistent partner feedback highlighting how IWDA’s approach feels different, more respectful, and more aligned with shared values.

At the same time, tensions persist. The challenge of resourcing and sustaining these intermediary roles is real, and IWDA is not always able to meet the diverse and growing needs of partners. These tensions reflect the constraints of operating in a system that has not yet caught up with the values IWDA seeks to live by—and the very real limits of any single organisation’s capacity.

Transitions and Tensions: Opportunities and Risks

Echoing a key question raised in IWDA’s 2023–24 Stakeholder Perception Review—“*IWDA is at a cusp – where to next?*”—our research affirms that the organisation stands at a pivotal moment. There is a palpable sense of transition and tension, both internally and externally, that goes to the heart of IWDA’s value to partners.

This moment carries both **significant opportunity and risk** for IWDA as an INGO striving to more fully embody its feminist and decolonial principles. Partners recognise this as a critical juncture. For IWDA, as highlighted in its 2025 Strategy, this means **deepening its commitment to being not just for the feminist movement, but of it**. As it does so, IWDA must grapple with questions of role, identity, and accountability—as a Minority World-based organisation that is not rooted in the lived realities of the movements it seeks to support.

At the same time, IWDA must navigate the complexities of evolving as a Minority World feminist organisation—one with deep roots in the international development sector, yet actively working to transform both itself and the systems from which it emerged. This will require continuous reflection, ongoing dialogue with feminist partners and collaborators, and careful consideration of staff recruitment and capacity-building to ensure alignment with IWDA’s evolving feminist and decolonial values.

Additional Sources of Tension

So far, we've focused on the central tension of seeking to decolonise development from within colonial systems. However, there are other sources of tension for IWDA—distinct but interrelated—that emerged in conversations with both new and longstanding partners.

These tensions are captured in the following questions raised by partners:

- *What does decolonisation mean for IWDA? What is it decolonising to? What is the immediate and long-term value for partners and feminist movements?*
- *What is IWDA's value and role in feminist movements, both now and in the future, given its historical roots in the international development sector?*
- *How can IWDA be “for and of the feminist movement” when it is not a grassroots feminist organisation focused on advocacy and change within its own community? What steps must IWDA take to bridge this gap?*

As IWDA continues its journey toward being both for and of the feminist movement, it must grapple with questions of role, identity, and accountability—as a Minority World-based organisation that is not rooted in the lived realities of the movements it seeks to support.

IWDA is a sister organisation. This is why I feel a critical stake in holding up a mirror for IWDA.” – Grantee Partner

Diverging Views on IWDA's Role

There is a range of views among partners about the role it should play within feminist movements in the region, both now and in the future. Given the diversity of partners and their varied priorities, this is to be expected.

Some partners feel that IWDA must move away from its current role as a “project partner”—that is, engaging in one-to-one relationships with women's rights organisations to deliver donor-funded projects—if it is to fully embrace its role as a member of feminist, decolonial movements.

Others, however, desire more support from IWDA in its role as a “project partner” to meet donor compliance requirements.

Additionally, some partners question what exactly IWDA is decolonising to, albeit with different conclusions. For example:

- One partner believes that as the holder of institutional grants, IWDA should “Step Up” and take on more decision-making power within coalitions.
- Another believes that IWDA needs to “Step Back,” arguing that it remains too donor-driven and insufficiently locally led.

These diverse perspectives raise the question: *Is IWDA stepping back too much, or not enough?*

“IWDA do this type of review regularly. We appreciate it. It keeps an organisation honest when they can have these partnership reviews. It's a very gutsy move that IWDA engages in - good on them. The question is, where to from here?”

Grantee partner

The complexity and diversity of views of what decolonial, feminist development means - from within feminist movements

Conversations with partners highlighted the complexity and diversity of views of what decolonial, feminist development means - from within feminist movements - on what decolonisation 'should' mean for IWDA.

It was noted that power sensitivity and sharing is not just something for IWDA to practice. There are power dynamics within the Oceanic Pacific unrelated to IWDA. For example, the Fijian feminist movement is well-established and operates within different socio-cultural contexts to other Pacific women rights' organisations, which can result in different priorities and needs.

One example of the complexities within which IWDA operates, and which goes to what value it can and should bring, was raised by several partners during our interviews. This relates to a coalition that IWDA is a part of and for whom it is the grant holder. One partner expressed very strongly the reasons why IWDA has no decision-making power in that coalition, due to the need to centre Majority World voices. IWDA's role was a facilitator and broker with the donor. By contrast, another partner feels very differently - both about IWDA's voice in coalitions ("they are our sisters - just because they are White doesn't mean they are just there as observers") and its role. This partner noted the need for power sensitivity and sharing within that coalition, among partners other than IWDA - "It's not just IWDA that needs to know when to Stand Back, but others too". When conflict arose and persisted within the coalition, this partner did not feel safe with coalition partners and felt there was a need for IWDA, as the grant holder, to Step Up and help create a safe space. Another interviewee also felt there was a need for IWDA to be clearer, as a facilitator, about how conflict will be addressed in such a coalition: "Recognising the power you hold doesn't mean you Step Back and allow bad practices to occur".

The above example demonstrates the complexities within which IWDA operates and the tensions around what value IWDA can and should bring into feminist movement spaces.

One clear take-away is the need for IWDA to invest in its capabilities to facilitate and engage in complex dialogue, including in collective processes of power sharing and conflict management.

Continued Investment in Complex and Feminist Spaces

These are not new challenges; IWDA has long been in open dialogue with movement partners on these tensions. What remains essential is sustained investment in IWDA's ability to navigate these complex and often contradictory spaces—so it can continue to deliver meaningful value to partners and feminist movements as it evolves.

“It’s very tricky where IWDA is - I respect the ideals they are striving for, to decolonise, but also understand the reality we are in and think that as partners, we need to give them grace, as what they are doing is ambitious and takes time, and it will not be perfect. They deserve our grace, like they do for us.”

Grantee partner

5. Recommendations

To sustain IWDA's value to partners and feminist movements as it continues to evolve, the following recommendations are offered. IWDA has or is already taking action in many of these areas. The report includes more detail based on partner feedback and further critical analysis.

1. Address structural barriers to feminist and decolonial development by creating the conditions for feminist, flexible funding.

This recommendation addresses a core obstacle to IWDA's value for women's rights organisations and feminist movements.

- Continue to advocate for more equitable, feminist, and decolonial approaches to development, particularly equitable South–North partnerships.³⁰
- Collaborate with feminist partners, movements, philanthropy and aligned INGOs³¹ to strengthen advocacy and learning.
- Consider visibility opportunities, such as hosting a side event at Women Deliver, to highlight feminist partnership approaches.
- Engage with DFAT on a systems lens view of its 4Es - and what a feminist, decolonial articulation of value looks like for a gender equal future for all.

2. Enable decolonial practice by renegotiating donor terms and exploring alternative funding models.

This recommendation emerges from partners who cited more flexible funding experiences elsewhere, as well as from the literature highlighting promising alternatives.

- Continue negotiating with DFAT for a more flexible funding partnership, learning from examples such as the Pacific Feminist Fund, UAF-APAC, and Australian Red Cross.
- Explore innovative, decolonial funding models (for example, women's funds, Oxfam GB³²).

³⁰ See Guttenbeil-Likiliki, 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka (2020), Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together, Melbourne: IWDA.

³¹ For example, PeaceDirect and Oxfam, given that as INGOs, they face similar institutional constraints.

³² For example, see Oxfam GB's Partnership Investment Fund, mentioned its Decolonial Partnerships Strategy (2020), p.9: www.oxfam.org.uk/documents/774/Oxfam-GB-Decolonial-Partnerships-Strategy.pdf

3. Centre IWDA's partnerships approach on linking the local, national, regional, and global.

The initial recommendation comes from consultants based on IWDA's strategic potential for movement-building; the remaining points are grounded in partner feedback.

a) Align the Partnership Portfolio with Movement-Building Across Levels

- Review current partnerships to assess alignment with IWDA's goal of connecting local, national, regional, and global feminist movements.
- Identify opportunities to exit or build new partnerships based on strategic fit and movement impact across these levels.
- Explore and test feminist, decolonial approaches to determine IWDA's portfolio of partnerships in the region through representative decision making from Asia and Oceania Pacific:
 - For example, engage external regional advisors in strategic decision-making.
 - Over time, explore transitioning to regional governance structures to guide strategy and ensure relevance to feminist movements as a whole.

b) Support Partners to Engage in Broader Feminist Ecosystems

- Continue investing in partner participation at national and international forums to enhance voice, influence, and connection.
- Promote exchange visits and peer learning among women's rights organisations to deepen solidarity and shared learning.
- Continue amplifying community voices in global spaces.

c) Develop a Strategic Approach to Partnerships with Other Funders/Donors/INGOs

- Collaborate with funders, donors, and INGOs in the region to explore joint partnership models that better support women's rights organisations and movement sustainability.

d) Be Clear and Intentional About IWDA's Role at Every Level

- With partners, define IWDA's role and value-add early in each partnership.
- Be transparent about IWDA's capabilities and limitations to build trust and align expectations.

4. Decolonise compliance processes and work with partners to build organisational sustainability.

These recommendations are based on interviews with partners, IWDA internal insights, and consultant analysis.

- Engage partners in shaping how due diligence and compliance processes can be decolonised.
- Partners expressed interest in supporting collective strategies to resist donor requirements and share solutions.
- Learn from women’s funds with simplified reporting models (e.g. Women’s Fund Asia, Women Strong International).
- Review and streamline IWDA’s delegation processes to ease pressure on the Partnerships Team.
- Review and adapt IWDA’s finance support to better reflect feminist partnership practices and invest in resourcing finance accompaniment for partners.
- Participate in communities of practice to exchange knowledge on compliance innovation and donor negotiations.
- Co-create and document robust exit strategies with partners and invest in IWDA’s capacity to support these (e.g. auditing, technical capacity-building, budget allocation).
- Provide targeted accompaniment for partners’ business development and resource mobilisation, potentially resourced through donor-funded mechanisms.³³
- Continue documenting and sharing learnings (e.g. Decolonial Framework).

5. Sustain and strengthen IWDA’s partnerships team through planning, resourcing, and role clarity.

These recommendations respond to findings about unsustainable workloads and high staff turnover within the Partnerships Team.

- Continue to untie “tied funding” where feasible, acting as a buffer between partners and donors and maintain the role of a ‘critical friend’ and ‘sidekick’.
 - Continue to ensure accompaniment is flexible and tailored to partner needs.
- Yet establish clear boundaries to protect team. Minimise reactive accompaniment in favour of planned, resourced support.
 - Set clear expectations early in the partnership regarding time and budget for accompaniment and agree with partners on best use of resources, in light of compliance requirements.
 - Build in contingency allowances for unplanned needs.
- Continue evolving staff roles from program managers to contract/grant/donor managers. This recommendation reflects the reality that program management functions primarily reside within the women’s rights organisations that partner with IWDA, rather than within IWDA itself. One of IWDA’s key contributions is the provision of strong grant and contract management expertise.
 - Continue to build capacity in donor management to maximise the extrinsic value provided to partners.
 - Facilitate cross-NGO learning on donor engagement and compliance.

³³ Some government departments and philanthropists contract a third party to help support applicants with EOIs.

6. Invest in Professional Development and Shared Learning for IWDA and Partners

The first sub-recommendation stems from the finding that IWDA operates in increasingly complex and evolving contexts, where linear and hierarchical decision-making models are often insufficient. These environments demand new capacities—such as facilitating collective decision-making and navigating shared power dynamics. This recommendation also responds to findings about confusion and tension around roles and sensitivities to power when working in decolonial ways, including differing views on when IWDA should Step Up or Step Back. Addressing these dynamics requires not only technical skills and knowledge but also intentional shared learning—both within IWDA and among its women’s rights partners. The remaining sub-recommendations are drawn directly from partner contributions to this research

- Create opportunities for staff and partners to build capacity in feminist, decolonial collaboration (e.g., collective leadership, systems thinking, feminist governance, partnership brokering).
- Where possible, coordinate travel with partners, even if more costly, to foster shared learning.
- Continue efforts to reduce language barriers and decentre English.
- Continue to support partners, on request, in filling personnel gaps for donor reporting through volunteers or consultants.

7. Deepen IWDA’s Role as “For and Of the Feminist Movement”

Most of these recommendations came directly from partners, except for the sub-recommendation on Canberra-based capacity, which comes from the consultants.

- Continue to support for partners’ whole-of-organisation strategies through flexible, core funding.
- Embed the practice of *Nurturing the Vā* and valuing relationships throughout the organisation.
 - Prioritise time, reciprocity, and relational depth as critical elements of feminist partnerships.
- Strengthen political awareness and analysis of feminist movements across IWDA.
 - Step Up and Stand With partners in advocacy (e.g. climate justice in the Oceanic Pacific).
 - Step Up on cross-border solidarity, including actively share political intelligence.
- Continue to leverage IWDA’s influence in Australia to advance feminist movement goals.
 - Consider investing more in government engagement, including the potential benefits of more Canberra-based capacity.
- Step in and spend more time in co-created feminist coalitions, particularly those where IWDA is not central.
 - Include challenging or domestic spaces to enhance IWDA’s credibility and alignment with feminist movements.
- Recruit and retain staff with lived experience in grassroots movements and feminist partnerships. Build internal capacity across all teams to act as part of feminist movements.
- Clarify and communicate IWDA’s identity and focus—whether as an INGO, women’s fund, or another model.
- Conduct an evaluation of how IWDA has implemented recommendations from past reviews and define next steps.

8. Resource IWDA's Decolonial Framework as Strategy and Practice

Half of these recommendations come from partners and half come from the consultants. They respond to the finding that IWDA's decolonial approach is creating some confusion externally and internally, which is to be expected as it is an emerging practice. The recommendations draw on what other organisations who are seeking to decolonise are doing to build their skills and capacity to engage in shared leadership and power.

1. Knowledge, Expertise, and Domestic Credibility

- Explore what it means for IWDA to apply its 4S framework to feminist movements within Australia, including First Nations. .
- Define the current outer limits of how far IWDA can pursue decolonial pathways – i.e., what this looks like in practical terms for now.

2. Skills

- Decolonial ways of working and decision-making (e.g., feminist coalitions) are still emerging. Invest in developing skills for decolonial ways of working, such as allyship and shared leadership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- In cases where IWDA is “stepping back” from previous roles of control, consider resourcing external facilitators to support collaborative governance.

3. Recruitment

- Continue recruiting regionally diverse staff with the skills and experience needed for feminist movement building.

4. Learn, Test, Document, Communicate, and Share

- Maintain open dialogue with partners about the meaning, risks, and tensions of decolonisation.
- Recognise that these courageous conversations require highly skilled facilitation, which IWDA needs to resource, either internally or externally.
- Continue to articulate and evolve IWDA's decolonial partnership approach.

5. Influencing and Advocacy

- Join and contribute to coalitions advocating for feminist and decolonial development approaches to influence institutional donors.

6. Conclusion

This review, grounded in the insights and experiences of women’s rights organisations who partner with IWDA and complemented by critical analysis, affirms that IWDA’s approach creates deep value—relationally, operationally, and systemically—while navigating the complex tensions of working within traditional, donor-driven development systems. Partners consistently described IWDA as a trusted and principled ‘sister organisation’, recognised for its commitment to power-sharing, mutual learning, reciprocity, and decolonial values and practices. They highlighted how IWDA’s approach to partnership—both the *how* and the *what*—delivers intrinsic and extrinsic value to their organisations and to feminist movements more broadly. These dimensions of value reinforce each other, contributing to stronger organisations, increased resilience, sustainable growth, and deeper movement-building. At the same time, the review identifies some missed opportunities and areas for growth, underscoring the need for continued reflection and responsiveness.

Tensions persist between IWDA’s decolonial aspirations and the practical realities of funding dependencies, compliance demands, and systemic constraints. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to partnership, as women’s rights organisations hold diverse priorities, contexts, and expectations. Guided by a vision of vibrant and diverse feminist movements, and committed to supporting a broad spectrum of organisations, coalitions, and movements, IWDA must continue to respond in ways that are relational, adaptive, and context-specific—holding its broader vision in focus while tailoring its support to the unique needs of each partner.

IWDA is also at a critical juncture. As it continues its journey toward being both for and of the feminist movement, it must grapple with ongoing questions of role, identity, and accountability—as a Minority World-based organisation not embedded in the lived realities of the movements it seeks to support. This calls for sustained reflection, deeper engagement with feminist partners, and intentional investment in staff capacity and organisational alignment with its values and aspirations.

These are not new challenges; IWDA has long been in open dialogue with movement partners about these tensions. What remains essential is continued and deliberate investment in IWDA’s ability to navigate these complex and often contradictory spaces—so it can keep delivering meaningful value to its partners and to feminist movements as a whole. Going forward, IWDA’s capacity to strengthen its role as a bridging innovator—operating within existing systems while modelling transformative feminist and decolonial alternatives—will require bold, values-driven strategies. This review affirms that while the path ahead is challenging, it is also possible—and profoundly necessary.

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Annex 1:

IWDA Decoloniality Framework and Strategy - Five Principles of Decoloniality³⁴

PRINCIPLE 1 Perspective, framing and diversity matter.

We inhabit a planet with an incredible diversity of humans and other life forms. Where we are emplaced – geographically, geopolitically, culturally, and in a myriad of other intersecting ways – shapes the way we interact with the world. Respecting diversity necessarily means that we respect historical and cultural variation. On a planet as diverse as ours, one cannot generate sustainable or ethical solutions without multiple diverse voices framing the issues that matter and how they should be addressed.

PRINCIPLE 2 Pluri-verse not uni-verse.

A decolonial approach rejects the idea of a “uni-verse” or “uni-versal” approaches, which imply a single way of being, knowing, doing, relating and perceiving. A decolonial approach embraces the idea of a “pluri-verse”, meaning that we understand there are multiple, different and equal ways of being, knowing and doing, relating and perceiving.

PRINCIPLE 3 Power with. Anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, anti-oppression.

Power with(in) is a feature of decoloniality, power over is a feature of modernity/coloniality and power to achieve certain goals or outcomes is a feature of both. Power with(in) necessitates a constant negotiation between parties and the structures to support it must be institutionalised via both procedural and substantive measures, that is through both legal frameworks and social engagements to challenge and change norms.

A decolonial approach rejects racism, discrimination and the use of ‘power-over’ others (although soft indirect forms of influence and persuasion remain possible). It pro-actively works to oppose systems of subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic and political benefit of the more powerful social group.

PRINCIPLE 4 Rights and responsibilities are equally important.

This relationship between rights and responsibilities is blurred in the Minority World where personhood is defined in the context of competitive individualism – the individual is given prominence over collective and relational wellbeing and the economic system of neo-liberal capitalism is made possible by, and in turn, promotes accumulation, exploitation and oppression. A decolonial approach recognises that our collective wellbeing is linked to the relational responsibilities or obligations we have towards each other and other life forms.

PRINCIPLE 5 Humility matters.

In a pluriverse of multiple ways of being, knowing, doing, relating and perceiving, no one individual or group has all the answers to human well-being or cultivating the flourishing of life, more generally. A decolonial approach, therefore, encourages us to ‘sit with’ issues, situations, problems, engagements or decisions when it is not clear what the best course of action is, at this point in time.

³⁴ IWDA (2023) Decolonial Framework and Strategy

Annex 2:

Terms of Reference

Title

Consultancy, Review of IWDA's partnership approach

Time commitment

The Consultant(s) must commence the Services no later than 17 February and complete the Services by 16 May 2025

Budget

Up to AUD24,400 (including any reimbursables)

Location

Home-based

Reporting to

Senior Program Quality Manager

Background

The International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) is an Australia-based organisation, working with and resourcing diverse women's rights and feminist organisations in Asia and the Pacific, and contributing to global feminist movements to advance our vision of gender equality for all. We exist to defend and advance the rights of diverse women and girls.

IWDA's approach represents a third way between the models of women's funds and international development NGOs: we resource the work of diverse women's rights organisations, enable them to be more effective by providing support that goes beyond money, and we make our own contributions to feminist movements through advocacy, knowledge creation and translation.

IWDA currently manages a portfolio of 15 multi-year programs with 22 partners across 8 countries with a total value of approximately \$32 million.

IWDA's work since our inception has been characterised by long-term partnerships with Majority World³⁴ organisations. We consistently reflect on what it means to work in partnerships and how we can best deliver our optimal contribution to the partnerships. Our focus on these questions has sharpened with actions taken to decolonise our approach to feminism and development, contained in our current Decolonial Framework and Strategic Plan to 2025, and are informed by the research on creating equitable South-North partnerships conducted in 2020 by Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki³⁵.

³⁴ IWDA chooses to use the term 'Majority World' in place of 'global south', 'developing world' or 'third world', and 'Minority World' in place of 'global north', 'developed world' or 'first world'. This is a political choice, as using this language demonstrates that 'global south' populations and cultures are in the global majority, thereby challenging the problematic hierarchies implied by other commonly utilised terminology.

³⁵ Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean together (<https://iwda.org.au/resource/creating-equitable-south-north-partnerships/>).

We believe that a feminist approach to partnership in international development must deeply engage with the unequal power dynamics in these relationships. We know that as an international non-government organisation (INGO) based in the Minority world, working with and funding organisations in the Majority World, IWDA has power and privilege that our partners do not have access to. IWDA can leverage this locational power for the benefit of our partners. However, without a critical lens, IWDA risks reproducing oppressive systems of power, in so doing, taking resources, space, leadership and agency away from the groups we propose to serve. For this reason, our partnership approach is based on clear feminist principles and adopts a feminist decolonising solidarity lens.

IWDA's International Programs Partnerships Principles are intended to define a safe space between partner organisations and IWDA to ensure healthy sustainable partnerships. For the purposes of this consultancy, we see these principles as defining what it means to be an effective partner. The principles are:

- **Equality** - This is a core value of both feminism and partnership. We seek to start, develop, and conclude partnerships in equal voice, power, and agency.
- **Power-sensitivity** - We are active in identifying and acknowledging the multiple sources of power that exist in our relationships. These include but are not limited to the following dimensions of power: resources, knowledge, expert, geographical location, race, and sexuality. We seek to remain sensitive to power relationships and build partnerships that exercise 'power with' and 'power to'. We seek to be cautious and sensitive in all spaces where women operate, recognising power dynamics in these spaces and how gender identities interact with other identities to limit access to power.
- **Integrity** - We will model and encourage partnerships with integrity. We will be accountable, transparent and consistent in what we ask of ourselves and our partners.
- **'Do no harm'** - We will do no harm. We will respect our partner's political, social, economic and cultural situations. We will seek to avoid detrimental impacts on partners, by showing sensitivity and a commitment to learning (and where necessary, unlearning) and understanding contexts and partnerships.
- **Inclusivity** - The phrase 'nothing about me without me' encapsulates the rights of all people affected by a situation to be included in the decision-making processes that determine outcomes. We will embrace the strength of diversity to enhance social cohesion and harmony by cultivating greater understanding, empathy, and appreciation for the unique cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives that exist within communities.
- **Reflexivity** - We will be reflective and mindful of our position and values and how they affect our partnership relations. We will support our partners as we engage in mutually transformative learning journeys, including engaging in self-care. We will stay open to each other especially when feedback is difficult to hear.

We seek to understand and leverage our locational power so that we know when to:

- **Step up** and use our power to leverage resources and access for women's rights organisations, and make our own contribution to feminist movements;
- **Stand with** feminist movements in solidarity and amplify the work of global south actors;
- **Step back** when others are better placed to take the lead;
- **Sit with** uncertainty, embrace communal learning and deep listening, and accept that time is needed to collectively discern the best course of action.

IWDA provides partner organisations with a variety of organisational strengthening support as requested. In recognition of the core knowledge and skills our partners possess, we deliberately call this ‘accompaniment’ including Feminist Organisational Capacity Strengthening (FOCS) and Plan Your Power (PYP) toolkits which adapts mainstream advocacy planning processes to incorporate a deeper understanding of gendered, and other intersecting, power relations to strengthen our movements for gender equality and ensure that allies incorporate the priorities of diverse women in their future advocacy. These are partner initiated and led opportunities, identified through due diligence reviews and annual planning processes, and include financial management, due diligence requirements, risk management and donor reporting. IWDA understands accompaniment should be time-bound to avoid risk of dependence and/or IWDA overstepping our role.

IWDA conducts partnership health checks with each partners every two years. For the past four years IWDA has also undertaken an annual Stakeholder Perceptions Review to understand stakeholders’ perceptions of the effectiveness and relevance of IWDA’s work, the extent to which we live our values, and how IWDA has supported partner organisations.

Purpose

In line with our feminist and decolonial values and approaches, the purpose of this consultancy is to improve IWDA’s understanding of:

- whether our approach to partnership aligns to partners’ understanding of locally led development and decolonial approaches;
- whether our approach to partnership is delivering the anticipated impacts for our partners; and
- the most effective ways to partner with women’s rights organisations.

It will do this by documenting with concrete examples and case studies, the ways, and the extent to which, IWDA’s approach to partnership and accompaniment has contributed to the operations, programming, governance and sustainability of their organisations. It will also identify where and how IWDA can improve our approaches to partnership and accompaniment support.

Findings from the consultancy will support IWDA to:

- Identify how our approach to partnership has evolved and opportunities to continue to strengthen the ways in which we work;
- Demonstrate accountability to our partners and our donors by detailing how our resources have been utilised to add value to our partners;
- Advocate for appropriate level of resourcing for the costs of a feminist / decolonial partnership approaches to donors, to the benefit of both IWDA and partners.
- Communicate our ways of working to other INGOs and Women’s Funds;
- Contribute to the discussion on effective approaches to locally led development and decolonising international development.

Consultancy scope of services

i. Evaluation questions

Final evaluation questions will be agreed between IWDA and the consultant(s) in consultation with involved partners, and tailored as necessary to the agreed methodology.

We anticipate that evaluation questions will address the following areas:

1. In what ways, and to what extent, has IWDA's approach to partnership influenced the operations, governance, sustainability and programming of our grantee partners?
2. How does IWDA's approach
 - reflect IWDA's decolonial principles: (i) Perspective, framing and diversity matter; (ii) Pluri-verse not uni-verse; (iii) Power with – Anti-racist, anti-discriminatory, anti-oppression; (iv) Rights and responsibilities are equally important; and (v) Humility matters, which ensure that IWDA is challenging coloniality and applying decolonial principles to our work no matter whether we are stepping up, standing with, stepping back or sitting with³⁶; and
 - align with partners' understanding of locally-led development, i.e., giving ownership of development activities and outcomes to local actors who are best placed to understand and respond to the needs of their communities³⁷?
3. Are there unique or different approaches that IWDA is using?
 - How is IWDA's approach different from other INGOs? What are the strengths and the challenges within this?
 - How, and to what extent, has IWDA effectively adapted our approach to respond to changing partner needs/preferences?
4. What have been the unexpected outcomes for IWDA's partners?
5. Is there a value for money for partners in partnering with IWDA? (Using 4Es framework, which include: i) Economy: Does partnering with IWDA help to get the best value inputs? (ii) Efficiency: Does partnering with IWDA help to maximise the outputs for the level of inputs? (iii) Effectiveness: Does partnering with IWDA help the outputs deliver the desired outcomes and goals? (iv) Does partnering with IWDA help the benefits to be distributed fairly?

ii. Activities and deliverables

The evaluation will include a meta evaluation, supported by case studies of individual partners and recommendations for further improvement to IWDA's partnerships. This will be conducted through:

- a desk review of documented reflections on IWDA's contributions in partnership, and a limited number of interviews with current IWDA staff;
- consultations with organisations that have chosen to partner with IWDA, providing an opportunity for representatives from these organisations to provide confidential feedback and insights.

³⁶ IWDA Decolonial Framework and Strategy (<https://iwda.org.au/resource/iwda-decolonial-framework-and-strategy/>)

³⁷ Australian Council for International Development (ACFID): <https://acfid.asn.au/our-focus/enable-quality-locally-led-development-and-humanitarian-action/>

The consultant(s) are expected to:

- Work closely with IWDA Senior Program Quality Manager to develop the methodology, including data collection tools, to ensure that the outputs of the consultancy will respond to IWDA's information needs;
- Submit a proposed methodology for ethics review, either to IWDA's internal review board or another relevant ethics review board. The methodology should include draft data collection tools and an analysis plan;
- Complete a desk review of selected program evaluations, previous consultations and strategic reviews with partners and IWDA reflections on our role in partnership, including the 4S Framework developed by IWDA on the basis of our work in partnership;
- Organise and conduct interviews with representatives from up to 7 organisations that currently partner with IWDA. Suggested list of partner organisations will be provided to selected consultant(s).
- The consultant(s) need to cultivate trust and mutual understanding throughout stakeholder engagement and interview process, to enable people to feel confident in sharing feedback;
- Organise and conduct interviews with up to 10 current or former IWDA staff members;
- Prepare a concise draft report that clearly responds to the evaluation questions in the approved methodology and provides supporting data (e.g. de-identified quotes, descriptive, quantitative figures). The draft report should clearly describe methods used for data collection and analysis, and indicate the strength of evidence supporting each finding. The draft report should be shared with interviewees for their approval before it is submitted to IWDA;
- The report should include an executive summary of key value-add and recommendations for further improvement;
- Participate in a one-hour oral briefing and discussion with IWDA Executive Leader Team, Systemic Change and Partnerships Team and Senior Program Quality Manager to discuss findings and key themes, and identify any areas where the report could provide further detail or clarification; and
- Submit a final report.

No travel is anticipated as part of this consultancy. All interviews can be conducted remotely.

The consultant(s) may consider using a case study approach to support rich analysis and understanding of diversity across partnerships. For example, this could include inviting representatives from Majority World partner organisations to reflect on two case studies to discuss during the interview.

iii. Team composition

IWDA has a commitment that consultations with partner organisations will be undertaken by a consultant from, and based in, a Majority World country in Asia or the Pacific.

We are open to receiving applications from an individual consultant, or a team of two that includes consultants from and/or based in the Pacific or Asia or elsewhere, including Minority World countries.

Proposals from a team must clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the two consultants, including who has responsibility for submitting draft and final reports.

iv. Support from IWDA

IWDA will engage with the consultant(s) to finalise the evaluation questions and discuss the draft methodology. We will support the consultant(s) through the ethics review process.

We will share all relevant documents to be included in the desk review, including IWDA's Partner Perceptions Reviews for FY2020/21 and FY2021/22, and IWDA's Stakeholder Perceptions Review for FY2022/23.

We will provide the consultant(s) with a list of potential interviewees, including contact details, and advise these potential interviewees that they may be contacted by the consultant(s). Consultant(s) are required to follow up with participants and arrange interviews, to provide participants with the opportunity to provide confidential feedback.

On request, we will arrange the translation of interview questions, consent forms, and participant information sheets, for the consultant(s) to share with participants in advance of the interview. This should be discussed with IWDA well in advance to ensure we can arrange quality translation.

We will provide timely (5 business days) feedback on deliverables submitted for approval.

IWDA will arrange for the final report to be published, including design and printing.

Deliverables to be provided

Deliverable	Timeframe or date	Audience	Milestone payment
Methodology submitted for ethics review	Three weeks after contract signed	IWDA	30%
Draft report	25 April 2025	Interviewees, IWDA	30%
Oral briefing with IWDA Senior Program Quality Manager, and other relevant IWDA staff	Within one week after draft report submitted	IWDA	-
Final report	16 May 2025	IWDA, interviewees, public release	40%

Requirements

The consultant, or team of consultants, should be able to demonstrate the skills and experience listed below:

Essential

- Substantial experience in cross-cultural communication;
- Understanding of INGO landscape;
- Experience conducting interviews, including remote interviews;
- Experience in gender analysis and/or stakeholder analysis;
- Deep understanding of feminist and decolonial research principles and partnerships; and
- At least one consultant from, and based in, a Majority World country in Asia or the Pacific.

Desirable

- Tertiary qualifications in a relevant discipline, such as social science or international development.

Safeguarding

This consultancy is not anticipated to result in contact with children.

Specific issues may emerge during stakeholder engagement that relate to child protection, the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and other Reportable Conduct. The consultant(s) will be required to review, sign and adhere to relevant IWDA policies and procedures including the IWDA Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct, IWDA Whistleblower Policy and Procedure, and IWDA Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedure.

Expression of interest

Candidates are invited to submit expressions of interest providing the following:

- A cover letter that addresses the criteria as set out in the Requirements above (maximum 1 page);
- CV (maximum 2 pages per person);
- An outline of the proposed process and timeline to complete all outputs (maximum 1 page), including explanation of how the proposed process aligns with decolonial and feminist principles;
- Proposals from a team must clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the consultants, and how the consultants will navigate power dynamics within the team (maximum 0.5 pages); and
- Daily rate and an outline of anticipated additional costs, to a maximum total of AUD24,400 (excluding GST for Australia-based consultants). The budget does not need to include translation costs.

Expressions of interest that do not cover these requirements will not be considered.

Expressions of interest are required by 16 December 2024 and should be sent to tluu@iwda.org.au with the subject 'EOI – Consultancy, Review of IWDA's partnership approach'.

Annex 3:

Interview questions

What we're exploring

1. What is IWDA's partnership approach?

- In theory
- In practice
- How is this different to other minority world organisations/ingos?

2. What value does iwda's partnership approach create for women's rights organisations LIKE YOURS? Why? How?

At the level of:

- Personal / relational
- Project / program
- Organisational
- Community
- Movement

3. How could IWDA's partnership approach create more value for YOU (next 3 years)?

At the level of:

- Personal / relational
- Project / program
- Organisational
- Community
- Movement

Annex 4:

DFAT's Locally Led Development Continuum

Dimensions of Local Agency ⁷	Emerging Local actors consulted	Partial Local actors co-responsible	Advanced Local actors primarily responsible
Ideation, planning, concept and design	Consultation with partner government and diverse local stakeholders at DPP, strategy and design stages	DPPs and intermediary-led designs codesigned with local partners; local reference groups and quality assurance processes; local members on design teams.	Partner-led strategies and designs, including local partners determining outcomes, priorities, logics, governance, MEL, resourcing; alignment with local plans, budgets and systems
Implementation and delivery approach	Local organisations used for logistics and program administration	Local stakeholders have significant roles in program governance, with partial adoption of local systems	Local partners lead in key areas, including priority setting, work planning, governance, management, MEL, reporting
Decision-making and responsibility	Decision making mostly resides with donors and implementing agents; limited consultation with partner government and local stakeholders	Local actors have increased autonomy over selected components	Local actors have a high degree of responsibility for programs, including determining priorities, managing resources, and making decisions
Resource distribution	Local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies receive donor funds with a narrow scope and limited timeframe; parallel systems	Local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies receive funds with greater flexibility in scope and multi-year timeframe; partial use of local systems	Resources provided as directly as possible to local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies, aligned with own plans and budgets; partners have autonomy in expensing funds in line with program objectives; use of partner systems
Partnership approach	Limited partnership with government and local suppliers; local stakeholders involved are often members of an elite or have well-established relationships with donors	Partnership through specific instruments, including joint steering committees, subsidiary arrangements; some partnerships with local suppliers; diverse local stakeholders involved	Equitable partnership with respectful policy dialogue, resource allocation, program co-design, co-evaluation and shared risk management, using local governance mechanisms; diverse local stakeholders empowered to drive change
Staff profile & procurement	Limited national personnel in senior positions where appropriate skills and experience can be found; limited use of local suppliers	National personnel hired by implementing partners in management roles, staffing strategies support local leadership; mix of local and international suppliers	Mostly local program team including in senior positions; junior staff mentored and supported; international staff managed by local teams; enabling HR and procurement policies; majority use of local suppliers
Technical advisers	International technical advisers/firms are substituting local capacity or international firms are delivering an end-to-end technical package	International technical advisers/firms are substituting some capacity but also playing a capability development role	If present, internationally sourced technical advisers/firms play a supporting or complementary role; majority local advisers.
MEL approach and Accountability for results	MEL system mostly designed for donor accountability and reporting, parallel indicators and data collection, with limited tailoring to local data sets	Local knowledge and expertise used to adapt and tailor systems for the local context; MEL system designed to balance a mixture of local learning with accountability; some supplementation of local systems with additional data sets.	Locally tailored MEL systems developed, aligned with local plans, using longitudinal local data sets, drawing on local expertise; donors adopt local MEL systems and harmonised reporting for shared accountability purposes; can influence international best practice.
Role of intermediaries	International project management services with limited tailoring, both capacity supplementation and substitution	Capacity and capability development; hybrid systems for planning, budgets, governance, decision making	Support and facilitation role; ongoing capacity assessment and handover, majority use of local systems for planning, budgeting, governance, decision making

Source: DFAT (2024). Guidance note: Locally Led Development. Canberra: DFAT. Available at: [<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development.pdf>]. Accessed 13 June 2025.

Annex 5: Nine (plus Four) Roles of Intermediaries



1. Interpreter: interpret donors' policies and requirements
2. Knowledge broker and producer: bridging knowledge nationally, regionally, globally
3. Trainer, coach and co-learner: e.g. reporting, compliance, advocacy, campaigning
4. Convenor: provide spaces for actors to reflect, plan and learn together
5. Connector and eco-system builder: help link different actors across the system
6. Advocate and amplifier: help elevate your advocacy and voices
7. Watchdog: monitor trends in policies and practices
8. Critical friend: advice and guidance when asked, listen and share
9. Sidekick: support partners in whatever they need, but doesn't overstep
10. Flexible funder: long-term, flexible and core funding
11. Donor buffer: help negotiate and communicate with donors, push back, absorb demands
12. Feminist sister: for and of the feminist movement
13. Decolonial ally: Step Up, Stand With, Step Back, Sit With

Source: Peace Direct (2023). *The nine roles that intermediaries can play in international cooperation*. London: Peace Direct. Available here: [<https://www.peacedirect.org/the-nine-roles-that-intermediaries-can-play-in-international-cooperation/>]. Accessed 13 June 2025.