

ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT 2020

WOMEN'S ACTION FOR VOICE AND
EMPOWERMENT (WAVE) PROGRAM

WAVE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

The WAVE program partnered with the following women's rights organisations:

Australia

- International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)

Myanmar

- Akhaya Women (Akhaya)
- Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO)
- Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN)
- Women's League of Burma (WLB)
- Women's Initiative Platform (WIP)

Cambodia

- Banteay Srei (BS)
- Amara
- Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
- United Sisterhood Alliance (Us)

Timor-Leste

- Alola Foundation (Alola)
- Asisténsia Legal Ba Feto no Labarik - Legal Aid for Women and Children (ALFeLa)
- Rede Feto - Women's Rights Network

Papua New Guinea

- Voice for Change (VfC)
- Wide Bay Conversation Association (WBCA)
- Eastern Highlands Family Voice (EHFV)

Solomon Islands

- Women's Rights Action Movement (WRAM)

Note to readers: This report was written to reflect on the WAVE program in the year 2020. At the time of publishing (April 2021), it is acknowledged that the situation and context for each partner and country involved in the WAVE program has shifted. This report seeks to document the program up until the close in December 2020. Please note that due to COVID-19 and restrictions across many partner countries, the ability to deliver programming and collect data on programming was at times disrupted.

Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE)

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), in partnership with 18 women's rights organisations, collaborated to deliver the Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) program in five countries. With powerful support from the Government of the Netherlands, WAVE increased the voice, agency, representation and diversity of women in leadership and movements, striving for gender equality. WAVE's goal was for women to lead transformative, sustainable change towards gender equality through strategic feminist engagement. IWDA is committed to ongoing, long-term partnerships with women's organisations in Asia and the Pacific, and builds on partners' skills and interests to provide capacity strengthening tools, resources and support to build WAVE partners' effectiveness and resilience.

The 2020 annual report demonstrates the collective action, voice and power of diverse women leaders, women's rights organisations and movements in achieving change.

IWDA acknowledges the transformative impact of significant, long-term and flexible funding from the Government of the Netherlands in making the achievements laid out in this report possible.

Key Data for 2020

- **2,638** women in politics networks were supported at local, national and regional levels
- **2,628** women benefited from enhanced leadership skills, capacity, training, mentoring and networks
- **59** young women who participated in the program went on to hold an informal or formal leadership role
- **11** programs that supported **652** young women leaders
- WAVE partners provided essential support services, access to justice to **2915** women experiencing violence
- **6044** community members were engaged in initiatives to prevent violence against women and children
- **52** cases of individual or joint advocacy initiatives to support local, national, regional or international policy change.
- **48** pieces of influencing resources based on research
- **591,320** people reached through media in 5 countries
- **333** downloads of the WAVE 'Plan Your Power' toolkit from organisations looking to increase their advocacy skills.
- **250** downloads of the WAVE Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships research
- Social media related to WAVE's Young Women's Leadership animation viewed over **20,000** times

Introduction

In 2020, the Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment Program (WAVE) entered its final year. Together with women's rights actors across the globe, IWDA and partners faced an unexpected and overwhelming challenge with the onset of COVID-19. In spite of this, the WAVE program achieved a number of remarkable outcomes towards achieving gender equality for women in the Asia and the Pacific.

In addition to the added challenges of COVID-19, WAVE countries continued to face ongoing threats to civil society, the impact of harmful attitudes and behaviours towards women's rights and the brunt of weather pattern changes resulting from climate change. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands faced the hazards of tropical cyclone Harold while at the same time struggling to keep the COVID-19 and its potentially devastating impact in countries with limited capacity in their healthcare facilities to deal with the pandemic. Despite this, opportunities for greater representation of women in leadership continued to present themselves. In Myanmar, democratic elections remained on schedule despite social distancing measures, while in Timor-Leste, a two year parliamentary deadlock was resolved, releasing the flow of much-needed funds to civil society organisations and allowing WAVE partners to resume advocacy on important issues facing women in the country.

Across the Asia and the Pacific and around the globe, COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on women and girls, particularly women of colour, heavily impacting their economic opportunities, safety and security, and access to leadership in decision-making. Social distancing measures used to control the outbreak reduced an already closing space for civil society in countries such as Cambodia; restricted personal freedoms, closed many women-run businesses in informal economies; and affected momentum towards greater representation for women in the lead up to local, and national elections. In spite of these extraordinary challenges, WAVE partners rapidly adjusted to the shifting landscape, developing ways to continue support to women leaders informal and informal settings, coordinate women-led responses to carry out awareness raising, facilitate community safety measures, continue lobbying authorities to address gender based violence and shift towards online spaces to build support for women's access to decision-making.

In 2020, WAVE partners continued their critical work toward creating lasting, sustainable change for gender equality. This annual report outlines the strategies, outcomes and impact of the work of WAVE partners in its final, and most challenging year.

Pillar 1: Individual Women's Leadership

In the final year of the program, WAVE supported 224 individual women leaders and strengthened the foundations to support them on their journeys.

Women experience multiple barriers and enablers on their individual leadership journeys, which in many cases were further exacerbated by COVID-19. Violence against women, the increased burden of care and domestic work for women related to COVID lockdowns, and trends towards closing civil space were just some of the barriers facing women's leadership in 2020.

Women's organisations, activists and leaders pivoted their work to respond to the immediate needs of their communities as the crisis set in, continued their critical work in violence prevention in spite of restrictions to movement, found ways to challenge unequal gender

relations while observing social distancing measures or in the online space, and continued to build the capacity of women leaders to enter leadership spaces.

The program provided capacity building to 2,628 women, including 652 young women.

This support included skills development in leadership, negotiation and public engagement, as well as providing opportunities for peer support, networking and work place experiences for diverse women. At the same time, women’s rights organisations and activists worked with power-holders on institutional reforms that created more equitable environments for women leaders. In line with global trends, WAVE countries saw an increase in violence at an economic, social and political level during COVID-19. WAVE partners continued to work towards the prevention of violence through: **supporting access to justice, building the capacity of power-holders and authorities, and working extensively with male leaders and advocates.**

Supporting women’s individual leadership journeys

WAVE’s [*Public Perceptions of Women as Political Leaders*](#) project highlighted that people may be both supportive of and concerned about interventions to increase women’s participation in political leadership. Women are or may seek to become leaders in many different spheres – both formal and informal – yet will face a number of structural and ‘informal’ barriers. WAVE partners continued to support women in their individual leadership journeys through: challenging harmful norms and attitudes, and amplifying the voices and importance of the role women leaders’ play.

In Myanmar, work undertaken by partners throughout the WAVE program culminated in significant milestones at the national election in November. More women contested the election than at any other time in Myanmar’s political history. **Across the national and state/regional level, there was a 28% increase in the number of women elected¹.**

Following strategic advocacy by SWAN, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) became the first Myanmar political party to implement a 30% gender quota. The SNLD preselected almost 30% women candidates at the 2020 election. Further, by 2020 almost all of the SNLD township level Executive Committees had at least 30% women position holders. In the lead up to the 2020 election, **SWAN provided strategic social media support to 30 women candidates, nine of whom were successful.**

Under the women parliamentarians mentoring program led by Akhaya, eight out of the nine participating MPs who re-contested the election were successfully re-elected. An individual program evaluation was also undertaken in 2020. The evaluation found the Myanmar MPs: achieved increased influence within their political parties; strengthened their practical political skills; gained greater resilience and resolve to achieve their own political objectives; established stronger networks with the Myanmar women’s rights movement and made some progress towards promoting gender equality legislation. The evaluation found the Australian MPs gained cross-cultural communications skills and contributed to stronger political ties between Myanmar and Australia.

In Women’s Initiative Platforms (WIP)’s long-term campaign coaching of 14 participants, **13 were preselected by their political parties to contest the November general election.** A further 20 women from 11 different political parties were provided indirect financial support. As a result of this, women candidates were able to cover transportation costs which was particularly beneficial for those women leaders who did not live in their constituencies. This

¹ This report reflects on the 2020 year. It is acknowledged that women elected in Myanmar lost their elected positions in early 2021, after the devastating coup and ensuing violence, which continues at the time of finalising this report.

critical support connected women leaders to their communities, and allowed them to deliver their campaign messages to their constituencies. **Four candidates supported by WIP were successfully elected.** WIP also experienced an increase in demand from political parties for WIP's women's leadership training programs.

Also in Myanmar, SWAN utilised women's exchanges and its young women's leadership program to increase women leaders' understanding of women's human rights, electoral processes and to build their confidence. SWAN's documentation department conducted a series of interviews with women candidates from SNLD and SNDP, including young women from Shan State to discuss their priorities, in this way connecting emerging women leaders to larger audiences and strengthening their profiles in the lead up to the election. **An unexpected outcome of COVID-19 was closer working relationships between officials and civil society organisations.** Myanmar partners, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) and WIP both reported developing new relationships with key stakeholders as a result of the COVID-19 response. This led to a greater profile for these women's rights organisations and expanded their future networks as they continue to advocate for gender equality.

In a year of unprecedented challenges, **WAVE partners rapidly adjusted their strategies to ensure that momentum and outcomes for women's individual leadership were achieved in 2020.** For some partners, there were unexpected outcomes with the onset of the pandemic with WAVE partner Women's Rights and Action Movement (WRAM) in the Solomon Islands gaining further support for their Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) advocacy campaign at a provincial and national level. With many face-to-face activities suspended due to restrictions brought about by COVID-19, WRAM doubled their efforts towards solidifying support for TSMs at the Provincial Government level. **By the end of 2020, WRAM had secured the support of six out of nine Provincial Assembly governments** and gained critical support from the Minister for Women, Youth, Children & Family Affairs (MWYCFA), including senior government officials within the Prime Minister's Office to further the case for TSMs at Caucus and Cabinet level. By December 2020, WRAM's submission for TSM changes to the Provincial Act was scheduled to be taken to the floor of Caucus in 2021 for further discussions as a first step. **As the program drew to a close, this outcome highlighted the impact of providing sustained, long-term support to women's rights movements.** Through support from the WAVE program, WRAM was able to secure another step towards greater participation of women leaders future women leaders in the Solomon Islands.

Women making change in diverse leadership spaces

The WAVE program recognises women's leadership potential in formal and informal spheres. While some partners worked intensely at national governance levels to support women's leadership, other WAVE partners continued to strengthen and elevate women's leadership at the grassroots and community level.

In Papua New Guinea's Local Level Government (LLG) elections, WAVE partners Eastern Highlands Family Voice (EHFV) and Wide Bay Conservation Association (WBCA) provided intensive support to existing and aspiring women leaders at the grassroots 'ward' level. With the support of WAVE partners, **33 women were active ward committee members in 2020 with nine women holding executive positions.** WBCA and EHFV continued to provide skills and support to women who gained these positions, building their skills and confidence in raising gender equality issues within their committees.

In Timor-Leste, partners drew on WAVE research to begin their advocacy planning for increasing women's representation in the Municipal elections scheduled for 2021 and

National elections in 2023. With the support of Alola, women leaders led at the community level COVID-19 emergency assistance to 440 households, using distribution as an opportunity to raise awareness on violence against women during the pandemic. **Women leaders were supported to broadcast radio programs in local dialects on COVID-19 prevention and violence response referral information.**

Cambodian partner Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) worked at the sub-national level to continue building the capacity of women commune council leaders to push for accountability, monitor local efforts towards gender equality and to critical issues affecting women in their constituencies - especially domestic violence.

Also in Cambodia, WAVE partners worked with women leaders at the grassroots level to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised groups. **United Sisterhood Alliance worked with its membership base made up of garment workers, sex workers, farmers and youth to carry out a joint study on the impacts of COVID-19 on each of these groups.** At the launch event, representatives from each of group participated in a question and answer session with high level government officials and NGO stakeholders. Convening spaces is a key strategy of the WAVE program. The launch event provided an opportunity to amplify the voices of women's rights activists and human rights defenders occupying informal leadership positions, engage power-holders and put forth recommendations based on the diverse needs of their communities.

Focus on young women leaders

The WAVE program continued its focus on supporting emerging leaders with a particular focus on young women. Young women have different needs in their leadership journey and WAVE partners continued to work with young women this year to provide targeted support through skills training, building their confidence and providing platforms for young women's voices to be heard and valued. In Cambodia, Banteay Srei worked towards social norms change with community leaders and men to recognise women in leadership roles and value the contribution of young women leaders. As a result, **three young women leaders were elected as village authorities in 2020.**

In the Solomon Islands, WRAM continued its mentoring program with mentors and mentees gaining more skills and confidence and breaking down intergenerational barriers between older and younger women activists.

In PNG, **40 young women completed Vfc's Young Women's Leadership program** which equipped them with the skills and confidence to take on leadership positions. A further 17 young women alumnae from the pilot program were provided with small grants to support their continued studies or small businesses. These young women also led this year's *16 days of Activism* campaign as well as COVID-19 awareness in their communities, bringing greater visibility in their communities of the leadership potential of young women. **Seven of these young women were appointed to local level government committees and several now have the confidence and community support to contend the 2022 elections.**

The Young Women's Leadership (YWL) Empowerment Strategy continued to inform WAVE's programming and advocacy aims. The strategy aims to amplify the voices and experiences of young women from Asia and the Pacific to lead in global efforts for gender equality, even in times of crisis. WAVE virtually convened a cohort of young women leaders to create an animation about young women's experiences during COVID-19 to share their leadership efforts and advocate for their participation in decision making in line with the findings from the YWL Strategy. With technical support from WAVE, the Young Women's

cohort collected data and created an [animation](#) and accompanying [webpage](#) that speaks to young women's experiences.

Tackling gender equality in women's pathways to leadership

In 2020, violence against women increased during COVID-19 resulting in what is now termed the 'shadow pandemic'.

This year, WAVE partners in all countries continued providing essential support and services to survivors of violence. **In Cambodia, WAVE partners BS, GADC and Amara worked with male leaders and male advocates to address violence against women and promote women's leadership, reaching 150 men.** GADC continued its support to core men's groups who together with the women's core groups address domestic violence cases in their communities, working with police to address victim-blaming and support perpetrators to be brought to justice. Amara worked with 197 male leaders to provide training on gender equality and positive masculinity.

In PNG, VFC continued to provide access to justice for 502 survivors of violence despite the difficulties of COVID-19. Similarly, in Timor-Leste, ALFeLa provided legal assistance to 470 new cases of gender based violence (a substantial rise in figures since 2019 and reflective of the pandemic) and supported survivors in court. In Myanmar, WAVE partner WIP expanded their mandate to include responding to violence against women and partnered with police in recognition of the increased need during COVID-19.

Pillar 2 Systemic Change

With the onset of COVID-19, WAVE partners adjusted their strategies to ensure that women were present and visible when their needs and priorities were considered in decision-making. Women leaders, activists and organizations continued to organise remotely and where social distancing measures allowed, to advocate publicly for gender responsive laws, policies and institutions.

Around the world, COVID-19 shut down entire economies and societies. As countries worked to prevent and contain the spread of the virus, global attention shifted away from international efforts towards gender equality. Governments turned their gaze to domestic efforts to deal with the crisis and many donors focused on the global health imperative. In many WAVE countries, repressive governments took the opportunity of containment measures to introduce further violations of civic space.

As part of the movement for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific region, **WAVE partners lobbied power-holders and institutions to ensure political and governance systems worked for women. In 2020, WAVE partners forged new relationships and devised strategies to engage power-holders and institutions.**

As COVID-19 restrictions eased in Papua New Guinea, VFC held an event with 100 decision makers and service providers to launch their strategic plan, and share stories of change. EHFV delivered a **petition to national MPs, signed by over 1,000 community members and a coalition of CSOs, calling for greater action to address GBV and support women's political participation in the context of Covid-19.** WBCA secured representation of women in key institutions with the power to protect matrilineal land rights. In Timor-Leste, partners came together to undertake a gender responsive budgeting analysis and advocated to the government to make further provisions in the state budget that addressed gender equality. Rede Feto, Alola and ALFeLa all advocated for specific funding

for more sex education in secondary schools (considered primary prevention against unplanned pregnancies and a driver of infanticide) and increased funding to civil society to provide support. As a result, the State Budget allocated specific funding towards sexual education in secondary schools and increased funding for civil society to provide support. **ALFeLa also successfully advocated for increased funding for services for survivors of violence with the government and GMPTL, a cross-party women’s caucus making a commitment to SEI for GBV prevention and response.**

In 2016, WAVE supported the formation of Myanmar’s CEDAW Alliance. This was the first time that four women’s rights organisations, including WAVE partner WLB, had come together to jointly advocate the Government of Myanmar to progress a gender equality agenda in the newly formed democracy². This year, the CEDAW Alliance continued to strengthen its engagement with political actors to meet their obligations under the Convention. WLB continued to work in collaboration with other members to strengthen and advocate the passing of a more comprehensive Prevention of Violence Against Women law (POVAW), to ensure the Myanmar Government’s compliance with CEDAW.

WAVE plays a critical role in connecting and convening spaces for women to access power-holders and institutions. In Cambodia, the United Sisterhood Alliance (US) provided technical support to garment workers from the Evergreen factory as they lobbied for compensation for wages lost as a result of the factory’s closure. With the support of the Alliance, workers were successful in securing an agreement on an amount and process for compensation from Cambodia’s Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training and the Garment Manufacturing Association of Cambodia (GMAC).

WAVE has supported partners to build their advocacy skills, conduct power analysis and identify strategies to influence decision-makers. **The Plan Your Power toolkit is a ground-breaking resource developed by the WAVE program together with Womankind international in 2018-2019 and launched [online](#) this year.** The toolkit itself is in strong demand, with over 300+ global downloads to date and WAVE partners in all five countries applying principles and strategies from the toolkit to support their domestic advocacy efforts this year. Originally intended to launch at CSW64, WAVE turned its attention to developing the toolkit into an online, self-paced course. This pivot widens the availability of the resource to women’s rights organisations and activists around the globe.

In 2020, WAVE continued to provide research to action support for WAVE partners to meet their advocacy aims. **In February 2020, WAVE brought together partners from five countries to analyse the findings of the Women’s Pathways to Leadership develop joint advocacy aims.** WAVE provided technical support to partners with a suite of advocacy materials that communicate the findings of the research in a simple way. An exciting campaigning product is a **snakes and ladders board game which facilitates exploration of how women experience various pathways to positions of leadership.** The flexibility of the game ensures that partners have tools to talk about gender inequality that can be used beyond the end of WAVE or the research project. **To further support research to action in individual partners’ contexts, the research was translated for all five WAVE countries.** By the end of 2020, several partners in the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and PNG were supported to have in-country launches where the results of the research were presented to key decision-makers and used to strengthen arguments for TSMs, changing community attitudes towards women’s leadership and addressing structural barriers to women’s leadership.

² This report reflects on the 2020 year. It is acknowledged that in early 2021, there has been a devastating coup and violence, with significant disruption for civil society.

With the cancellation of international events due to travel restrictions, WAVE partners doubled their local advocacy efforts to strengthen progress for women's rights in their countries and hold decision-makers and institutions accountable to their obligations under international human rights frameworks. In 2020, WAVE provided technical and communications support to partners maintain their advocacy for gender responsive laws, policies and institutions. **WAVE provided assistance for 52 individual or joint advocacy efforts.**

Pillar 3 Women's Movements and Civil Society Organisations

WAVE brings together diverse women to foster collective action, facilitate feminist movements and strengthen women's rights organisations to lead work in transformative change for gender equality. Each of WAVE's partners has their own advocacy priorities and targets informed by their local contexts and strengths. This may be led by one or more WAVE partners or it may be driven by a coalition or networks consisting of WAVE partners and other civil society organisations. Their work covers many jurisdictions, targeting local, sub-national and national leaders and policy-makers, regional and international arenas and processes, as well as raising public awareness to help shift negative gendered perceptions and stereotypes.

In the lead up to 2020, women's rights organisations around the globe were preparing for the opportunities to advocate for greater commitments to gender equality on the international stage as part of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Through WAVE's accompaniment strategies, partners were preparing to attend major international events, including the 64th Status on the Commission for Women in March 2020, the 25th anniversary commemoration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020 with Generation Equality events, and the 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals. With onset of the pandemic, all events were cancelled or postponed, dealing a blow to women's rights organisations around the world and in particular for women's rights activists and Pacific region. Pacific representation at global events is often low, and in response, the WAVE accompaniment approach had planned support for Pacific activists to attend international events and other convening spaces, including a cohort of young women from Asia and the Pacific in preparation for these events.

In a context of restrictions on moving and gathering, and the additional challenges to gender equality presented by the pandemic, women's rights organisations and leaders demonstrated their immense skillsets, and highlighted the dynamism that characterises successful feminist movements. In all five WAVE countries, partners regrouped and strengthened their domestic and regional collaborations. Identifying opportunities, engaging new stakeholders and working together to build influence led to some substantial outcomes for transformative change for women's rights this year.

Women's Movements and Civil Society Organisations

Bringing women together to build collective agency has been a key strategy of WAVE partners over the program. National women's forums have been powerful platforms for jointly developing strategies and action plans to influence decision-makers and build collective power. **While social distancing measures affected many partners' ability to hold national forums in 2020, WAVE partners found other ways to build collective power.**

In Papua New Guinea, WAVE partners continued to build on the joint aims of women's rights organisations to address the high rates of gender based violence in the country. In 2020, the PNG National Parliament appointed a Special Committee on Gender Based Violence. **UN**

agencies and other stakeholders organised a national GBV summit in November 2020 to coincide with the establishment of the parliamentary committee. Jean Jano from EHFV joined other frontline provincial CSOs at this event. This was an important step to bring voices from rural areas to urban spaces where decisions regarding women's rights at a national level are often made. The Parliamentary Committee and National Summit reflect growing momentum and political will to address GBV – in large part due to the sustained efforts women's rights organisations, including WAVE partners in PNG over many years.

In the Solomon Islands, the National Women's Forums have brought together the main women's organisations in the Solomon Islands to jointly decide their priorities for the future. In 2020, COVID-19 prevented women from the provinces travelling to the capital for the planning the annual National Women's Forum. **Instead, three smaller gatherings were held in three provinces. Taking the forum to women, rather than requiring travel meant that there were more attendees than if there had been one central forum, with 90 participants attending three events.** Bringing women from the same region together had the further benefit of many women feeling more comfortable to discuss issues surrounded by people that were known to them, in familiar surrounds and drawing out issues specific to each of the provinces.

Timor-Leste partner Rede Feto prepared the 4th periodic CEDAW shadow report which covered thematic areas including rural women and social inclusion, gender based violence and women's participation in political and public life.

This year, United Sisterhood Alliance (Us) continued to draw attention to human rights abuses faced by marginalised groups in Cambodia. Us members brought attention to the impact of global trade agreements on garment workers; provided strategic input into open calls on global leaders to halt the renegotiation of trade and investment treaties during the COVID-19 outbreak; and campaigned for the better access to medical supplies during the pandemic. Also in Cambodia, **GADC continued its coordination of the Gender and Development Network (GADNET), made up of 44 women's rights and civil society organizations. After sustained advocacy, GADNET successfully influenced the drafting of the National Gender Equality policy to include more gender responsive budget and a commitment from the Ministry of Women's Affairs to institute compulsory gender equality training across government.**

In Myanmar, Akhaya brought together several organisations to provide financial and technical support to nine women candidates as they embarked on their election campaigns. A strategy was developed to increase the candidates' profiles and support them communicate their campaign messages effectively to voters. This collaboration strengthened relationships between different local organizations in Myanmar and built working relationships between local and ethnic women's organizations.

Strong organisations, strong movements

WAVE's theory of change argues that strong feminist movements require strong women's organizations and in 2020, WAVE continued to support partners to come together where – in person where possible, and online – to strengthen organisational capacity.

In Timor-Leste, WAVE supported an all partner reflection workshop focused on feminist movement-building and contributing to an ongoing process of consciousness raising, held in person in January 2020. A follow-up workshop was held for all Timor-Leste partners with other civil society organisations on Communications for Advocacy during which advocacy plans and key messages were developed for key advocacy issues.

IWDA worked with partners to strengthen their safeguarding policies and reporting standards in their organisations to protect the rights of vulnerable adults and children.

Collective awareness raising for gender equality

The WAVE program has supported partners to build awareness of women's rights issues in their countries and change public attitudes to better support women in leadership. As social distancing measures came into play globally, partners were forced to reassess their public campaigning strategies, with many moving their efforts to the online space.

In Myanmar, SWAN's Information and Documentation Department reached a bigger audience than previous years. The department developed visual, audio and printed materials to raise awareness about the pandemic and other social issues such as domestic violence and child abuse. Information sharing was delivered through radio and social media. SWAN received 254,166 views, 6,600 likes and 7,300 shares on the topic of COVID-19 symptoms and prevention. Similar results were seen in Timor-Leste with the use of community radio to spread prevention of COVID-19 messages in local dialects and raise awareness of gender based violence during the pandemic. In the Solomon Islands, WRAM organised radio and television appearances to launch the *Women's Leadership Pathways* and *Public Perceptions of Women as Leaders* research to garner public support for their TSM campaign. Collectively, **WAVE partners reached over 3,160 individuals through public awareness raising.**

The WAVE program works to ensure diverse women's needs and voices are heard. In Timor-Leste, Rede Feto has doubled its membership base since the start of the WAVE program, increasing its collaboration with disability and LGBTQI organisations and other WAVE partners, and finalising their disability and social inclusion policies.

Despite the effects of COVID-19, WAVE partners implemented a range of activities for significant international days related to gender equality this year, with *16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence* and *International Women's Day*. **In Timor-Leste, ALFeLa collaborated with LGBTQI organisation CODIVA to organise a march attended by 500 people in the capital Dili with the message: Justice for all, justice for women.** In a second event, a 'dance for equality', the event was held in support of gender equality and ending violence against women and other vulnerable groups.

In PNG, young women leaders in VFC's young women's leadership program took the lead in organising events, giving visibility to the place of young women in building and sustaining movements. In Cambodia, Amara and GADC raised awareness of *16 days'* history, bringing together community members to spread awareness of the legal frameworks to prevent violence against women. **As part of the 16 days events, WAVE partners reached 14,536 people with their messages.**

Pillar 4: Research, Evidence and Learning

WAVE's research projects have taken a participatory feminist approach to design and implementation, informed by IWDA's *Feminist Research Framework*. A feminist approach to research aims to capture the diversity of women's experiences, explore intersecting manifestations of power and oppression, and interrogate the operation of gender norms.

In the final year of the program, WAVE finalised several important pieces of research which captured the diverse experiences of women's leadership journeys through the life of the program and gave attention to broader power dynamics between Global South Women's movements and Global North actors. It is anticipated that the findings of WAVE's research over the five years of the program will produce an important evidence base which illustrates the dynamics of women's rights activism in the Asia-Pacific region by highlighting individual women's journeys towards leadership, the role of civil society and the importance of equitable South-North relationships in fostering successful women's movements in the region.

Involving women's rights actors in the design and implementation as co-researchers builds ongoing organisational capacity and gives direct access to knowledge to women's rights organisations. WAVE partners and other civil society organisations have utilised research findings to support their programming and advocacy, and WAVE's research has provided critical evidence to support campaign and lobbying efforts for political reforms for gender equality. Gaining research skills has significantly supported the work of WAVE partners.

In 2020, partners used their newly acquired skills in Feminist Participatory Action research to conduct their own action research. For example in **Cambodia partner GADC conducted action research into unpaid care. In the Solomon Islands, WRAM has become a leader in gender research with the findings from the *Perceptions* research enabling WRAM to change the way they implemented their TSM campaign in a more tactical manner. In Timor-Leste, Alola utilised the data analysis skills gained through an advocacy and communications session at the final Women's Leadership Pathways workshop to strengthen their own data management and analysis approaches.**

Public Perceptions of Women as Political Leaders

In 2020, WAVE finalised the *Public Perceptions of Women as Political Leaders* research project. The research was carried out in three countries: Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and Cambodia. Each country study had its own report produced, alongside a synthesis report across the countries. Together, these [findings](#) provide a strong platform to inform programming and advocacy aiming to increase women's representation in leadership. In the Solomon Islands, *Perceptions* research has been used to support WRAM's work towards TSM adoption, while in Timor-Leste findings have been used to begin advocacy in the lead up to the inaugural municipal elections scheduled for 2021 and local level elections in 2023. Cambodia's research has informed partners' programming strategy and informed lobbying on gender policy undertaken by partners.

Women's Pathways to Leadership

The *Women's Pathways to Leadership: Our Pathways, Our Voice* was led by partners across all five WAVE countries, investigating how and why women become leaders despite and because of the barriers they face on their leadership journeys. The three year project strengthened WAVE partner capacity in feminist research while collecting data that valued women's voices and priorities.

Overall, **WAVE partners conducted 95 interviews, 20 focus group discussions and collected 121 survey responses.** In a sense-making workshop held in Bangkok in

February 2020, partners gathered in their roles as co-researchers to identify themes and findings from the collected data. Over five days, partners brought together qualitative and quantitative data to identify the enablers and challenges on women's leadership journeys and develop advocacy aims to support the research findings into action. A suite of materials was developed with the support of IWDA, including the full research report translated into six languages, advocacy briefs to support dissemination of research findings to stakeholders, and an innovative snakes and ladders board games to communicate the core research messages in an accessible form to grassroots audiences.

Feminist Futures

As the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the patriarchal, capitalist and racist underpinnings in many societies, the stark inequalities across the globe were made more apparent than ever. Drawing on Arundhati Roy's piece, the *Pandemic is a Portal*, **WAVE supported the development of *Imagining Feminist Futures After Covid-19***. Feminist Futures aims to support feminist movements to think through the ways in which the COVID-19 crisis is changing future trajectories – both positive and negative – for feminist social change. Feminist Futures developed a workshop guide for women's rights organisations to host with their networks to explore feminist futures to 2030 using online technology developed together with Changeist. With the support of the WAVE program, IWDA is collecting the imaginings, including from WAVE partners and other civil society organisations in the Asia-Pacific region, to help build a diverse, vibrant and multifaceted picture of possible feminist futures in 2020.

'Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Va and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together'

WAVE undertook groundbreaking research in its final year to understand experiences of women's rights actors and feminist movements in the Global South in their engagement with Global North institutions and actors. Titled '[Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean together](#)', the research engaged with 35 Pacific Island women's rights activists' insightful working knowledge and intimate lived experience of engaging with the Global North. The research navigates through this knowledge and experience by capturing, amplifying and representing their voices as they share their perspectives on the role of Global North organisations and the interactions they have had with them over the last 30 years.

Led by Oceanic feminist researcher and storyteller 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, this research charts a voyage towards the genuine creation of equitable partnerships and empowered relationships.

The results of the research generated substantial interest in the region with women's rights activists, organisations and leaders from the Global South and North. IWDA is also engaging with the research findings and recommendations to reflect on its own work.

Endline evaluation

In the final year of the program, WAVE undertook a large-scale endline evaluation of the program's work from 2016-2020. With the challenges of COVID-19, the evaluation consultant team successfully engaged with IWDA staff, WAVE partners in all five countries and undertook a deep dive analysis in two countries (Cambodia and Solomon Islands) to understand the impact of the WAVE program across the four pillars in the theory of change. The results of the endline evaluation showed substantial impact in supporting feminist

movements and consciousness building, also highlighting the success impact of WAVE's advocacy support to partners locally, regionally and internationally.

Overcoming challenges and lessons learned

WAVE partners continued to demonstrate their resilience, adaptability and creativity during a difficult final year of the program. COVID-19 had a significant impact in all partner operations, affecting 2020 annual work plans and requiring all partners to resubmit annual plans and budgets in mid-2020. With the program drawing to a close in December 2020, partners also needed to shift their focus to sourcing funds to continue their important work into the future. Needless to say, this proved to be a challenging year with a short time frame to implement revised work plans and this has had some impact on the targets achieved in the final year.

In 2020, Cambodia's civic space continued to experience repression from the Cambodian government. Crackdowns on civil society have been worsening over the years with many civil society organisations forced to halt or change their ways of working. 2020 was no exception with the Cambodian Government declaring a State of Emergency to address COVID-19 and banning gatherings of any kind. While these measures were in line with other government responses around the globe, Cambodian civil society feared that social distancing measures would be used to further silence dissent and the freedom of speech of NGOs and human rights activists. To overcome these challenges, partners have become more selective on which issues they are able to publically bring attention to and have moved towards working in coalition to avoid the targeting of any one organization.

In PNG, COVID-19 continues to spread. In efforts to contain the virus, inter-province travel was banned for most of 2020, significantly affecting partners' work. WAVE partners recorded significant social and economic impacts from the lockdown measures including increases in reports of violence against women. Similar to other WAVE country contexts, PNG partners continued to monitor the impacts locally in their areas and responded with outreach support, adjusting their ways of working to comply with social distancing.

In Myanmar, despite COVID-19, scheduled national elections occurred in November 2020. This was a significant year for WAVE partners, who had spent previous years undertaking essential groundwork to support women candidate's leadership at the community level and to garner support for TSMs by political parties, including ethnic minority parties. Tensions remained high in Myanmar, with partners working with ethnic minorities reporting the ongoing monitoring of civil society organizations' activities from the Myanmar military and government.

In the Solomon Islands, WRAM implemented a diverse set of activities despite the challenges of COVID-19 and its impact on their work. As in many other instances, the pandemic drew attention and resources of the Government away from matters not related to health and prevented women's rights groups from convening as they had in the past. Despite this, WRAM continued to make great gains in their TSM campaign, mostly as a result of a strong advocacy strategy, the nurturing of networks and utilizing strategic opportunities to engage stakeholders.

In 2020, Timor-Leste remained relatively COVID free in comparison to many other states in the region. However, the government remained cautious and instituted a state of emergency early in the pandemic. Politically, the two year political impasse in Parliament ended and the State budget passed. This led to civil society including WAVE partners being allocated civil

society funding that had been frozen due to political strife. With parliament resuming, partners were able to resume their advocacy with key government ministries.

As the WAVE program draws to a close, partners turned their attention to their financial sustainability. IWDA supported this process through training in the Feminist Organisational Capacity Strengthening module on resource mobilisation, technical input into proposals from program management staff and providing partners with access to donor networks.

Conclusion

With the close of the WAVE program, partners seek to continue their work in their local contexts. While the loss of flexible, long-term funding poses a challenge to program partners, many of them have expressed their commitment and passion to continue working for more gender equal societies in their local contexts. The WAVE program provided partners with much needed resources, networks and connections to local and regional actors, however it was partners who brought the skills and expertise of their local contexts and years of experience to the program. The program's remarkable results over five years are testament to partners' ongoing adaptability, commitment and expertise.