



THEMATIC BRIEF

# TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY

PREPARED BY GENDER AND INCLUSION HUB AS PART  
OF THE FINAL EVALUATION OF THE WOMEN'S ACTION  
FOR VOICE AND EMPOWERMENT (WAVE) PROGRAM.

DECEMBER 2020



# **As women's rights organisations face closing civil spaces and increased backlash against feminist agendas, strategic advocacy which amplifies women's collective voices is more critical than ever.**

This thematic brief shares learnings from the final evaluation of the Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) program implemented from 2016-2020 in Asia and the Pacific. This brief was prepared by Gender and Inclusion Hub consultants, who conducted the final evaluation of the WAVE program.

WAVE's goal was for women to lead transformative, sustainable change towards gender equality, enabled by strategic feminist engagement. Eighteen women's rights organisations in Cambodia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste partnered with IWDA to implement WAVE.

The WAVE final evaluation found that the program, through coordinated and targeted advocacy at the program-level as well as in support of individual partner advocacy priorities, has elevated and amplified women's voices, unleashing the power that is created when women work together and demand change.







Cover Image: International Women's Day Celebration 2019, Dili, Timor-Leste. Photo by: Harjono Djoyobisono.

Image: Keab Ly, member of savings group coordinated by Banteay Srei, Cambodia. Photo by: Harjono Djoyobisono.



# THE IMPACT OF WAVE'S TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY

Across all five countries, advocacy led by WAVE partner organisations has influenced policy and legal reform, and brought about local-level change to concretely improve women's lives. While in many instances the outcomes achieved build on the decades of work undertaken by women's rights organisations in the five countries, the contribution of the WAVE program to these achievements is clear.



## INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In **Timor Leste**, WAVE partner Rede Feto (a national network of women's organisations including WAVE partners Alola Foundation and Asisténsia Legál Ba Feto No Labarik (ALFeLa)), worked with other civil society organisations to successfully advocate for amendment of the Suco (local) law to ensure greater opportunities for women to stand as candidates in village elections. The Law of Sucos was amended in 2016. Also in Timor Leste, WAVE funding and technical support contributed to the 100% I'm Ready campaign, with WAVE partner organisations training women leaders to build their confidence and capacity to stand for election. This saw a 20-fold increase in women candidates, with double the number of women elected as Village Chiefs in the 2016 elections. Building on this experience, Alola are drawing on research about women's leadership in Timor Leste that was supported by WAVE, to inform their advocacy and planning for elections scheduled in 2021 and 2023.

WAVE partners in a number of countries have advocated for Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) to increase representation of women in different levels of government through reserved seats or candidate quotas.

In **Solomon Islands**, Women's Rights Action Movement (WRAM) conducted research

about public perceptions of women as political leaders, with almost 1,000 respondents from across three provinces, finding clear evidence of community support for women's leadership. WRAM used this evidence to spearhead advocacy to increase women's representation in sub-national government, targeting both decision makers and community members to build the case for TSMs. Their advocacy efforts have resulted in six of nine Provincial Government Assemblies committing to TSMs.

In **Papua New Guinea**, WAVE partners developed a joint submission for the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission review of electoral laws advocating for TSMs at both the national and local level. Partners subsequently undertook advocacy about TSMs with local duty bearers and peer organisations in four different provinces.

In **Myanmar**, WAVE partner organisations have strategically engaged with political parties to increase the opportunities for women as party members and political candidates. Advocacy by WAVE partners Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO) and Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) has led to two political parties committing to a minimum of 30% of candidates for preselection being women, as well as committing to quotas for women in leadership positions and on party committees.

Women's political representation in **Solomon Islands**, at both the national and provincial levels, is extremely low. Since the country gained independence in 1978, only four women have been elected as members of the National Parliament and only ten women have been elected to the Provincial Assemblies. WAVE partner organisation WRAM conducted research about public perceptions of women as political leaders in Solomon Islands, finding strong community support for women's leadership. WRAM

used this evidence to lobby for increased representation of women in Provincial Assemblies. WRAM's efforts directly contributed to six of nine Provincial Government Assemblies committing to TSMs. WRAM continue to work with government nationally to petition for reform of the Provincial Government Act to enshrine TSMs in legislation. The endorsement of TSMs on a provincial level is a major step forward in Solomon Islands.

Image: Lway Nyay Nway Zin, focal point of Ta'ang Women's Organisation (TWO)

This photo was taken during the consultation meeting of all focal points with TWO headquarters and branch office staff, Lashio, Myanmar. Photo by: Harjono Djoyobisono

## HOLDING GOVERNMENTS TO ACCOUNT

WAVE supported partner organisations in their efforts to hold governments to account for their responsibilities in relation to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and for other international commitments (such as those in relation to the Beijing Platform for Action (B+25) and the Sustainable Development Goals).

In **Myanmar**, WAVE supported the formation of the ground-breaking CEDAW Alliance in 2016. This is the first mechanism in Myanmar to formally unite the country's four national women's rights networks for joint policy advocacy, including WAVE partner the Women's League of Burma (WLB). In an environment of shrinking space for advocacy in Myanmar, this is a remarkable achievement. The Alliance continues to undertake advocacy about Myanmar's CEDAW commitments across the country's regions. WAVE partner Akhaya played a central role in advocating to the Myanmar Government for amendments to the Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women Bill to ensure its compliance with CEDAW.

In **Cambodia**, WAVE joined with other organisations to provide technical support for partner organisations Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), United Sisterhood Alliance, and Banteay Srei to undertake joint advocacy at the international level, and to present their priorities for action at the 74th Session of the CEDAW Committee in Geneva. During the WAVE Evaluation this was described as "an example of where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It was the WAVE partners who collectively did that". Peer organisations note that the CEDAW work has increased the Government's recognition of WAVE partners, and has meant that the women they work with have a better understanding of their rights and increased confidence to speak out about them in national forums.

In 2019, WAVE partners in **Papua New Guinea** came together to use the CEDAW as an advocacy tool, engaging with key stakeholders to strengthen the country's engagement with CEDAW processes and to ensure that (in particular) rural women's voices and experiences are heard.

In 2019, WAVE partners GADC, United Sisterhood Alliance and Banteay Srei contributed to and submitted four NGO shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee and attended the 74th Session of the Committee in Geneva.

Prior to the Session of the Committee, partners worked with their constituents to ensure they understood the CEDAW process and could identify their priorities which could then be shared with the committee. Partners presented these to the Committee, sharing key advocacy messages from diverse Cambodian women,

including about women's leadership, gender responsive budgeting, the labour violations, exploitation and violence experienced by garment workers and sex workers, and about the impact of predatory loans on rural women.

Together, WAVE partners and allies called on the Committee to hold the Royal Government of Cambodia accountable for its gender equality commitments. There was clear alignment between the Committee's Concluding Observations and the shadow reports submitted.

## IMPROVING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF WOMEN'S LIVES

WAVE partners' advocacy in response to their specific priorities has led to material changes in women's lives in a range of areas. In **Cambodia**, United Sisterhood Alliance's work with garment workers has led factory owners and local governments to redress breaches of women workers' rights. This has been achieved through strategically developing the strong relationships with local authorities necessary to advocate for women workers and increase their safety. In addition, Gender and Development Network (GADNet), convened by GADC with 40 national women's rights and civil society groups, engaged with the Ministry of Women's Affairs on the new National Gender Equality Policy. In the latest draft, all of GADNet's 23 recommendations were accepted, including 18 word-for-word. GADC felt the most significant of these was the inclusion of gender responsive budgeting across Ministries for the first time.

In **Papua New Guinea**, WAVE partner organisation Voice for Change (VfC) advocated to provincial and local governments to more effectively respond to the very high levels of violence against women in Jiwaka Province. VfC successfully advocated for the establishment of area-based family safety committees, with key service providers working together to support women and children. VfC collaborated with communities to develop local good governance, economic empowerment, women's leadership, human rights defenders, peace building and community engagement. VfC worked closely with government representatives, such as police, courts and health services to ensure that survivors of violence access social, legal and economic support. Communities have developed their own by-laws outlawing violence against women, which police and community

leaders are expected to support and uphold. Through their significant work Jiwaka were selected as one of the provinces to have a Police Family and Sexual Violence Unit. This model of service provision was shared at regional and global levels.

In **Timor Leste**, WAVE partners were instrumental to the passing of the Law on Prevention and Fight against Trafficking in Persons in 2017, and Alola and ALFeLA continue to collaborate in joint advocacy for a national action plan for implementation of the law to be developed and resourced.

In **Solomon Islands**, WAVE partner WRAM engaged Provincial Assembly level women's forums to profile the priority issues of women and girls. These forums directly informed development of two Provincial Assembly Women's Policies.

## PIVOTING TO COVID-19 ADVOCACY

COVID-19 and the measures taken in response to the pandemic have caused enormous damage to local communities across Asia and the Pacific, with existing social inequalities, particularly violence against women, being greatly exacerbated. In response, WAVE partners have used their advocacy skills and networks to pivot their collective voice and message to raise duty-bearer awareness on the gendered impacts of the pandemic. In **Myanmar**, WAVE partners have strategically engaged with local authorities to increase ethnic minority and rural women's ability to protect their health and sustain livelihoods. In **Papua New Guinea**, WAVE partners and IWDA prepared a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women detailing how the pandemic has led to an increase in violence against women in their communities, and reduced women's ability to seek help.



# WHAT WORKS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY?





IWDA and partner organisations shared their perspectives on ‘what works’ for transformative advocacy. A number of factors emerged as being key to WAVE’s advocacy success:

### FLEXIBLE FUNDING IS KEY

All WAVE partners highlighted the importance of planning for advocacy, and that this planning should include identifying in advance potential entry points and opportunities for responsive engagement with duty bearers. It should also include contingency funds for opportunistic pursuit of advocacy in response to emergent issues and local events.

Partners emphasised that IWDA supported their advocacy efforts through flexible funding, recognising that the timing and nature of advocacy-related activities have an unpredictable element. Therefore, flexible funding is key. Partners also emphasised that funders need to be responsive as funds for advocacy work will often be required with little notice.

“When things roll, it’s very fast, especially when the political will is there, so we are required to move at a faster rate”

WAVE PARTNER

### RESOURCE AND INTEGRATE PLANNING FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ADVOCACY FROM THE OUTSET

A key pillar of the WAVE design involved ensuring that power holders and institutions were responsive to and accountable for women’s rights and status. Investment in advocacy strategy as a tool grew substantially in the second half of the WAVE program. The increased resources for supporting partners’ advocacy efforts contributed to some of the program’s successes, however, there was not always time to build the momentum required to realise advocacy outcomes.

“That’s a really important learning of this program around being able to build in surge capacity from the beginning, the flexibility to support responsiveness to partners”

IWDA STAFF

## ADVOCACY TOOLS ARE MOST USEFUL WHEN ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

WAVE partners emphasised that they appreciated the advocacy tools they had access to through WAVE (many of which are now collated in the Plan Your Power resource – a toolkit and online set of modules to support women's rights advocacy planning). Partners described how they used these tools internally, and in their work with communities and partner organisations. They highlighted that it is important that tools be adapted to local contexts, and that local women's rights organisations are best placed to advise funders and external technical advisors as to how this should be done.

**“We discuss about it and find a way, what strategy we can do and we plan: we have a plan A, Plan B. If we are not satisfied, if our plan is not successful, we can follow our plan B, but we have to take a long time and not a short time ... our organisation can't [bring] change by ourselves and we have to cooperate with the community, the women and youth at the local level”**

**WAVE PARTNER**

## RESOURCE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Partners emphasised the importance of engagement and the building and maintenance of relationships with duty bearers and other stakeholders at all stages – both as being key to effectiveness in their setting, but also to ensure the safety of staff and the viability of organisations operating in authoritarian settings. Partners spoke of not just going to duty bearers with their requests, but also of listening to duty bearers about what their needs were. They emphasised that local women's rights organisations are already highly skilled at building the strategic relationships they need.

In addition to building strategic relationships with duty bearers, the experience of WAVE partners highlights the importance of outreach to and engagement with the wider community in order to generate momentum and build a political case in support of their advocacy goals.

Partners valued WAVE's resourcing of this community level work, noting it was the kind of activity that was often not supported by international donors. Partners emphasised that the increased consciousness, capacity, and 'ownership' of community members of their efforts towards gender transformative change was likely to be one of the most sustained outcomes from WAVE.



## **PARTNERS' EXISTING EXPERTISE IN ADVOCACY SHOULD SHAPE THE DESIGN OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT**

Some WAVE partners had very extensive experience of effective advocacy in their local context, with advocacy a central part of their mandate. In this instance, the key to effective partnership is building on this expertise to support partner-led advocacy. Other WAVE partners worked in contexts where addressing women's overwhelming needs, including for safety and protection, meant that it was difficult to stretch organisational resources to undertake advocacy. Nonetheless, many of these partner organisations were engaged in vital local level advocacy to bring about concrete changes in women's lives.

All partners had experience in locally effective advocacy, noting that they would adapt their approach depending on the specific context.

**“When you look at how advocacy and lobbying [actually] happens, we are so used to doing things at every different level. So, it's kind of messy, but that's our kind of lobbying”**

**WAVE PARTNER**

## **WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS GENERATING EVIDENCE TO INFORM THEIR OWN ADVOCACY IS POWERFUL**

WAVE supported partners to undertake research which generated high quality evidence, used in advocacy planning and strategies. Partners described their participation in research as a lot of work, but that the process had given them skills, confidence, critical consciousness, and had learnt credibility to their advocacy work.

Several partners have since used their new skills and confidence to lead their own local feminist participatory research projects. The evidence about women's leadership that has been generated by WAVE is a meaningful contribution to women's rights organisations in the five WAVE countries that will last well beyond the life of the program, highlighting the benefits of fully resourcing research work as key component of effective advocacy.

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