

WAVE YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

Through the Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) Program, IWDA works with women's organisations in five countries in the Pacific and Asia to challenge imbalances of power and priority that negatively affect women and girls. WAVE builds demand for, and the individual capabilities of, a feminist movement and women leaders—including young women.

While the development sector recognises that women are not the same the world over, considering differences in historical, environmental, cultural and other experiences, in gender mainstreaming efforts women of all ages are often treated as a homogenous bloc. IWDA has worked with young women across multiple country and program contexts, and recognises the need to articulate and incorporate our learnings about young women's specific barriers and opportunities across our women's empowerment work.

We know that young women face different issues than older women, and that investing in young women is important for inclusive movement building, transition planning and sustainability of organisations and movements. To effectively support women's movements, IWDA must therefore specifically address the ways in which age intersects with women's experiences of empowerment programming. This strategy is intended to support this aim, and guide IWDA's future programming and research work. Given the breadth of this area of concern, it is recommended that IWDA seeks to explore the intergenerational aspects of movement transition planning and sustainability separately at a future date.

DEFINING YOUNG WOMEN

There is no universal definition of 'young women.' Being young is, after all, relative: moving beyond 'young' as an objective category based on age is a vital part of young women's empowerment.

Being a young woman means different things in different contexts, and IWDA appreciates that acknowledging this diversity may enable

Population by Age Bracket ¹²					
Country	0-14 years	15-24 years	25-54 years	55-65 years	65+ years
Cambodia	31.01%	18.36%	40.68%	5.69%	4.25%
Timor-Leste	40.91%	20.32%	29.95%	4.95%	3.87%
Papua New Guinea	33.43%	20.00%	36.89%	5.49%	4.28%
Fiji	27.70%	16.13%	41.08%	8.53%	6.55%
Solomon Islands	35.60%	20.00%	36.50%	4.65%	4.27%
Myanmar	26.85%	17.75%	42.36%	7.52%	5.53%

¹ Central Intelligence Agency 2018

² The age bracketing in this table summarises many of the challenges of research in this area: adolescent women are grouped with adult young women (15-24) and young adult women are grouped with 'non-old' women (25-54).

us to better understand the needs of, and opportunities for, young women across different times and places.³

With these nuances in mind, the focus of this review is on young *adult* women which for this strategy has been defined as 18-30 years old. This strategy also recognises the diversity of young women and that is implicit in the below strategy.

IWDA'S WORK WITH YOUNG WOMEN

Working with young women raises specific opportunities and challenges that need to be considered throughout the program cycle. Young women's empowerment is both a means to a long-term end (gender equality), and an end in itself. It is understood that working with today's young women will have benefits for future generations: for instance, enabling young women to actively participate in the formal economy, control their earnings, and join a savings group creates an opportunity for those young women to grow into economically empowered and independent adults. Validating young women as leaders, who stand up for their rights and work with their peers, is another vital part of advancing gender equality.

IWDA, through WAVE and other programs, currently works with young women through specifically targeted young women's programs, including the Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) and the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF), and through intergenerational learning approaches, including the Women's Rights Action Movement's (WRAM) Mentor Program.

This strategy provides an overview of best practice approaches that have emerged from a review of IWDA's past experiences and relevant literature, with the purpose of supporting IWDA to engage more consistently with young women in our women's empowerment programming.

Five strategic approaches to young women's empowerment work are outlined below. These approaches are informed by best practice from across the sector, which the authors have drawn from internal and external research, and programmatic reports and evaluations.

IWDA uses the Gender at Work framework to visualise, conceptualise, design, implement and monitor/evaluate women's empowerment programs (see Appendix 1). As such, this framework has also informed our analysis of IWDA approaches to young women's empowerment work.

³ Alpízar and Wilson 2005, 3

APPROACH 1. DEVELOP A CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT WORK

WAVE brings together and supports individual women, organisations and movements in the Pacific and Asia to increase the overall representation of women in formal leadership positions. WAVE strives to be an intersectional program, listening for and addressing the needs of women living in diverse social, economic, geographic, religious and ethnic contexts.

As age is one aspect of diversity, taking an intersectional approach requires a critical consideration of the ways that gender and age *together* affect how women move in private and public contexts. It is important for this analysis to be context specific, as the concept and consequences of being a 'young woman' varies so widely. We know that these dynamics of power and access are also affected by other aspects of a woman's identity, especially if she belongs to a community that is racialized, economically disadvantaged, or otherwise marginalised.

The social, cultural, economic and political factors that affect a young woman's participation in public life are complex and fluid. With this knowledge, organisations engaged in women's empowerment programming must work with diverse young women to explicitly identify and address the particular barriers and opportunities around them at different points in their life.

CASE STUDY

1a. Young Women's Leadership Program (Papua New Guinea): Working with gatekeepers

The Bougainville Women's Federation (BWF) runs the Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP), working with young women aged 18 to 30 to increase their effectiveness as leaders. The YWLP was founded on research that identified barriers to young women's leadership and public participation in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The young women who participated in the research identified gatekeepers—within their families, including husbands and parents, and community elders—as key to their ability to utilise their knowledge and leadership skills.

In response to this finding, the program engaged male partners of the YWLP participants in male advocates training, and older women to act as mentors for the participants. An evaluation of the program found that these strategies were more effective in mitigating the risk of male partner and community retaliation to the young women's exercise of leadership, as compared to activities aimed at social norm change within the wider community.

The YWLP also found that investing in young women's economic empowerment promoted acceptance of their participation in collective decision-making. Economic self-sufficiency and an ability to contribute financially to their family and community influenced gatekeeper perceptions of what young women are capable of.

APPROACH 2. INTEGRATE SELF-CONFIDENCE AND IDENTITY-BUILDING INTO ALL YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT WORK

Women's empowerment programs promote a wide range of skills and access to resources, from information and communications technology to managing income and savings, formal leadership to human rights education. These skills are valuable, however, we know there are a multitude of structural and social barriers that can operate to undermine a young woman's exercise of autonomy within her home, community and work place. Faced with these additional challenges, successive programs have shown that young women benefit enormously from opportunities to develop and nurture self-confidence as part of a supportive cohort. Feeling connected, supported and powerful are necessary precursors of formal change for women's empowerment.

CASE STUDIES

2a. IWDA partner workshop (Melbourne): Listening to women's stories

In 2017, IWDA, the Monash Gender, Peace and Security Research Centre, and World Young Women's Christian Association co-hosted a three day workshop focused on using short films for empowerment in Melbourne.

"I felt I had been listened to, it was a safe space for me to share my personal experience of leadership and the challenges I face."

Lihoung, United Sisterhood

The theme of the workshop sought to explore approaches to, and the impact of young women's leadership in, Asia and the Pacific. Filmmaking was used as an advocacy medium, and participants were introduced to filmmaking basics, interviewing techniques, emotive storytelling for different audiences, camera skills and pitch development. Participants shared their lived experiences with one another, and created work that represented the issues they experienced in their own words.

Participants produced videos on women's rights, early pregnancy, the importance of Australian support for Women, Peace and Security in Cambodia, and breaking the barrier of gendered silence in the Pacific. IWDA's partners said that, as a result of the workshop, their confidence in public speaking had increased, and that this workshop was *"an invaluable opportunity to...establish and strengthen new and existing relationships with partners from other countries."*

2b. GIRLS Club (Fiji): Confidence, connection and collective advocacy

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) runs an Intergenerational Women's Leadership Program that centres the experiences, needs and contributions of women and girls throughout their lifetimes. GIRLS Club is an alumni program that works with older adolescent girls and young women (aged 14 – 18), and facilitates mentorship relationships between this younger cohort and the Emerging Leaders Forum (ELF), a leadership program to support young women's engagement with formal political spaces (aged 18 – 35).

An integral part of FWRM's approach to intergenerational movement building is ensuring that girls are supported to explore their identities, interests and advocacy together in a safe, brave space. The GIRLS Club program runs activities that support girls to explore their own identity and growth as young feminists, build trusting and supportive relationships with each other, and create collective advocacy campaigns for social, legal and political change.

*“My best moment was sharing personal stories. One cannot see their true potential until they've let go of that pain, hurt and built in emotion. It will always bother them. It'll continuously weaken their spirit. **Through the GIRLS Club, I was able to let go of that and now I can see my true potential. What I am capable of, what I can do and what I will do.**”* – GIRLS graduate (18 years old)

One GIRLS graduate shared the impact of her experience: *“This program was life changing to me...it was mind blowing the way [my confidence] elevated from this stage to the next. **Although I am quiet...when there is something wrong or I need to say something it just comes out.**”*

APPROACH 3. SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

Intergenerational leadership has been identified as an important area of focus for young women's empowerment programming.⁴ IWDA understands intergenerational leadership as a process that facilitates collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility between people of different ages, with deliberate attention to the strengths and assets each participants brings. According to Alpízar and Wilson, intergenerational leadership can address tensions within women's organisations and the broader feminist movement because generational and age factors play a significant role in internal power struggles.⁵

Women of all ages feel and perpetuate this tension. Older women have reported feeling that young women do not recognise the battles waged by their elders, or do not have the experience to speak for 'women' or the feminist movement,⁶ while young women report feeling that their older peers are out of touch with the needs and experiences of a younger generation, or that they feel unequal in the movement spaces and organisations they participate in. Women of all ages may also be influenced by pervasive gender norms that devalue young women and girls' leadership qualities.⁷ Intergenerational leadership frameworks—along a spectrum ranging from mentorship programs to praxis-based management circles—can ease these tensions, and foster new understandings of, and appreciation for, the different strengths and tools that diverse women bring to the movement.

⁴ Baric et al. 2009

⁵ Alpízar and Wilson 2005, 2

⁶ Alpízar and Wilson 2005, 3–4

⁷ Baric et al. 2009, 14–15

CASE STUDY

A number of IWDA's partner organisations run mentorship and intergenerational leadership programs, including targeted work to create space for more young women in feminist movements.

3a. Intergenerational Women's Leadership (Fiji): Facilitating alliance

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) is a multiethnic women's rights organisation, and is widely recognised as a leader in intergenerational women's leadership programming.⁸ FWRM advocates for women's rights as human rights; greater representation of women in politics and leadership; promotes equal access to services and opportunities; and advocates for improved policy and legislation on issues affecting women's human rights issues.

Intergenerational leadership is one of FWRM's four pillars of change, and has driven FWRM's support for the convenings of, and collaborations between, the Fiji Women's Forum (FWF) and Fiji Young Women's Forum (FYWF), two national coalitions that organise diverse women to increase their participation in Fiji's democracy.

In 2017, the FWF and FYWF hosted an inaugural National Convention. The Convention was a landmark gathering for several reasons, including its intent to create an intergenerational space for diverse Fijian women to share and organise together. Over 100 women attended, and endorsed a closing statement which included a specific commitment to intergenerational leadership.⁹

"The National Convention brought together representatives of diverse constituencies from across Fiji and upholding the qualities of women's leadership building on the rich tradition of activism of Fijian women throughout our national history.

This includes a commitment to collaborative leadership with young women throughout the country, which can build on the herstory of women's participation in political spaces including social movements."

– Fiji Women's Forum and Fiji Young Women's Forum National Convention Closing Statement

APPROACH 4. CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EXISTING FORUMS AND THROUGH YOUNG WOMEN ONLY SPACES

Ensuring young women have access to the resources they need to fully participate in social, economic and political life is a critical measure for young women's empowerment. Just as the first iterations of the Gender and Development framework identified that the 'add women and stir' approach was an ineffective method for advancing gender equality, so too is the 'add young women and stir' approach counterproductive to fuelling a responsive, powerful women's movement.¹⁰

⁸ Alpízar and Wilson 2005

⁹ FWF and FYWF, 2017

¹⁰ Brisolara, Seigart, and SenGupta 2014, 18; Dharmapuri 2011

It is increasingly recognised that decision-making forums need to be re-made to challenge exclusionary norms and power structures, and that dedicated spaces are a useful resource for marginalised groups engaging in collective forums. IWDA has seen the value of dedicated spaces in which young women can voice their experiences, questions and opinions, and negotiate priorities and advocacy strategies amongst themselves (see case studies below).

The existence of these spaces does not, however, guarantee that young women will feel free to participate in broader forums in an open or strategic way. In Bougainville, Eves and Koredong found that young women were “crippled by a sense of shame, embarrassment and shyness, which meant that they avoided situations that required them to speak out.”¹¹ IWDA has learned that establishing enabling environments requires more than just a dedicated seat at the proverbial table (see Strategies 2 and 3).

As one participant of the Bougainville Women’s Federation’s Young Women’s Leadership Program identified, change is as much internal as external.

“We now see ourselves as somebody in the community, we learned that we have the right to speak, and we have the confidence to speak out and to older women.” – Young Women’s Leadership Program participant

In the pursuit of meaningful participation, working with the gatekeepers of established forums to encourage young women’s active and strategic participation, and young women themselves to ensure they feel welcome and seen, is equally important. In the context of regional and global forums, IWDA has found accompaniment to be an effective strategy for achieving both these aims. Accompaniment relationships recognise the skills and knowledge that established advocates have developed, value the perspectives and inherent worth of new advocates’ participation, and nurture intergenerational peer relationships that have lasting benefit beyond a single event.

CASE STUDIES

4a. Young Women’s Leadership Program (Papua New Guinea): Dedicated spaces and collective ownership of local change

As part of the Young Women’s Leadership Program (YWLP), Bougainville Women’s Federation (BWF) established Young Women’s Associations (YWAs) in four districts across Bougainville, to develop localised support networks for young women’s leadership. An evaluation of the program found that the YWAs were an effective structure that facilitated young women’s trainings and efforts to fundraise, and also acted as a safe space in which young women could develop a shared vision, work together, strengthen their networking skills, and implement local-level livelihood initiatives that in turn directed income to provide further training opportunities for young women.

¹¹ IWDA, Eves, and Koredong 2015

Young Women's Leadership Forums were also held to create space for young women to share and learn from one another, build networks and solidarity across Bougainville and beyond, create advocacy campaigns, and develop sustainability plans for the YWAs beyond the end of the program. Feedback from both young and older women suggested that showcasing young women's achievements through the Forums had a positive influence on older women's perceptions of young women leaders.

4b. WAVE and We Rise (regional and global): Resourcing young women's representation through sponsorship and accompaniment

IWDA supports the participation of young women in decision-making spaces, in their local communities and in regional and global political forums.

For several years, experienced staff from IWDA and our partner organisations have accompanied new participants at the annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In 2020, WAVE will sponsor a small cohort of young women leaders from across the Pacific and Asia to represent their organisations and priorities through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 year (Beijing +25) review process.

WAVE sponsorship for this cohort will draw on IWDA's past experience accompanying young leaders. To ensure that participants are fully supported and resourced to contribute during influencing and negotiating opportunities, funding to attend forums will be complemented by co-designed and peer-led training program, and opportunities for the cohort to connect with each other and more experienced women already organising within the forums.

'I wanted to attend this forum because I can see the importance of young women participating, I attended the Fiji [Pacific preparatory meeting] and I can see that the inter-generational gap is really there...'

'It is important to have young women in spaces like this because some of our voices and the issues that we face, don't really capture it in some of the policies that our government come up with.'

– WAVE sponsored participant,
UNESCAP Asia-Pacific Forum,
November 2019

APPROACH 5. ENSURE THAT EXPLICIT RECOGNITION, TARGETING AND RESOURCING OF YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IS EMBEDDED IN GRANT MECHANISMS AND THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM CYCLE

While young women participate in women's empowerment programming, they are not often given visibility or resourcing as a distinct group. The disability inclusion movement has championed the saying 'nothing about us, without us,' and this is equally true for work that affects young women. Young women must be consulted at all stages of the program cycle, from concept development to proposal design, data collection to final report writing.

IWDA has found that direct consultations with young women allows particular age-bound challenges, priorities and opportunities to be identified, and supports more effective, intergenerational women's empowerment programming. Young women should also be targeted as a specific group in participatory program monitoring and evaluation processes. As a starting point, a contextual definition of 'young women' should be agreed on with program participants, and financial and human resources should be dedicated to specific data collection and evaluation spaces designed for this group.

CASE STUDIES

5a. Young Women's Leadership Program (Papua New Guinea): Disaggregated data enables targeted findings and stronger programming

The Bougainville Women's Federation Young Women's Leadership Program (YWLP) collected participant data disaggregated by multiple characteristics—including age, gender, location and disability—across multiple trainings throughout the program.¹² This data allowed the program team to develop insights into the multiple differences between young women, including how other aspects of their lived realities affect the barriers and opportunities they experience, and how leadership programming needs to adapt to address these differences.

For example, a program evaluation highlighted the importance of planning for and resourcing support to overcome the barriers that rural participants face. A broad recruitment process for the YWLP allowed young women from all areas in the target districts to participate. However, women in rural areas are generally more dispersed, have poorer access to services, less reliable communication and transportation, and are often in more conservative communities. These additional barriers were not adequately recognised or resourced in the program, which meant that rural participants often needed the most support after training, but received the least.

To avoid further marginalising already disadvantaged participants, future programming must ensure that diverse participants have access to an appropriate level of additional resourcing to overcome barriers and facilitate equal outcomes.

¹² IWDA 2019, 4–5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT WORK

This document has sought to articulate specific strategies that IWDA has used, and should continue to use, in our women's empowerment programming. IWDA sometimes works with young women directly, including sponsorship and accompaniment to regional and global forums, and continues to be involved in women's leadership and economic empowerment programs led by our partners across the Pacific and Asia. As the women's movement continues to fight against increasingly regressive state policies that are threatening the future of people and our planet, it is imperative that IWDA and our partners take a critical and curious lens to our past work and forward planning.

IWDA and our partners will continue to leverage resourcing and networks between the global north and south, to support critical, bold and responsive gender justice and equality campaigns and programming. To maximise the impact of young women's participation in this work, it is recommended that IWDA:

1. **Support research and evaluations that seek to understand the particular lived experiences of young women in all their diversities**, and prioritise the implementation of findings in future program designs
2. **Ensure that women's empowerment programs are designed and resourced at all stages to respond to the barriers to participation that diverse young women face**, recognising the many and compounding layers of marginalisation that people experience
3. **Resource dedicated spaces for young women** within broader movement spaces and decision-making forums
4. **Resource accompaniment, mentoring and praxis-based learning initiatives** that foster constructive relationships between established and emerging advocates within the women's rights movement
5. **Prioritise young women's voices in our advocacy materials**—including communications and negotiation materials, and in program proposals—to help sensitise our partners and advocacy targets to young women's leadership

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Appendix 1. Gender at Work matrix

IWDA programs, including WAVE and We Rise, use the Gender at Work framework to visualise the interconnectedness of all aspects of empowerment and gender equality.

The below matrix provides some examples of how individuals, society, informal and formal systems can change to specifically support the empowerment of young women.

Gender at Work Framework: Young Women's Empowerment Examples

CONSCIOUSNESS AND AWARENESS:

Changes must occur in women's and men's consciousness, capacities and behaviours

- Increasing young women's understanding of their own rights
- Providing information to young women about available services and opportunities (i.e. SRHR, education, training)
- Raising awareness among older women about importance of supporting young women
- Increasing men's awareness of rights of young women

ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Changes that occur in terms of access to resources, services and opportunities

- Creating on-going financial training programs for young women
- Increasing young women's access to and full participation in the education system
- Creating enabling environments to allow young women to fully participate in convenings (i.e. at village level or at global level, like CSW)
- Increase young women's access to the job market

INFORMAL CULTURAL NORMS AND DEEP STRUCTURES

Changes in deep structures and the implicit norms and social values that underpin the ways institutions operate, albeit often in invisible ways

- Division of domestic labour to reduce burden on young women
- Changing norms around marriage and childbearing
- Increasing acceptance of young women as formal leaders
- Promote notion that young women are autonomous and their bodies are their own

FORMAL POLICIES, LAWS AND INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT:

Formal rules and policies that must be in place to protect against gender discrimination

- Advocating for better maternity leave policies
- Advocating for better childcare policies
- Removing laws that prevent young women from working in certain industries
- Increasing regulations in industries where young women work
- Removing policies and legislation that restricts young women's access to reproductive health services