

WEAVERS Research Project Evaluation

Nau yu stap long bikpela gaden
Now you are in the big garden

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Executive Summary

The Women's Empowerment for Voice and Equal Rights in Papua New Guinea (WEAVERS) Research Project set out to unravel and understand the ecosystem of rights actors, individuals, groups and networks that comprise the women's movement in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and to strengthen it through a locally owned and implemented research process and actionable research findings. The project was anchored by IWDA's feminist and decolonial frameworks, prioritizing local actor ownership of the research process, findings, and outcomes. Led by an esteemed PNG women's activist and Governance, Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Specialist, Dr. Orovu Sepoe, alongside a geographically and socially diverse Steering Committee of PNG women's rights activists, the research engaged 38 WROs across five research sites. The research was Commissioned by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and funded by the Australian Government through PNG Women Lead.

Evaluation title

The title of this evaluation, *Nau yu stap long bikpela gaden*, is a Tok Pisin proverb which translates to, "Now you are in the big garden." The proverb reflects on the significance of entering a significant phase in life or larger responsibility, requiring greater effort and diligence. Its wisdom resonates strongly with the impact of the WEAVERS Research Project as evidenced by this evaluation. Its use as the title for the evaluation is intended to convey respect for local ways of knowing and appeal to the PNG women's rights actors – whether formally educated or not – who are among the target audience for this report.

In line with the proverb, the evaluation suggests the WEAVERS Research Project has contributed to the PNG women's movement entering the big garden. In this big garden there are new rules, new opportunities, and new demands of effort on the part of the movement, its partners, and funders. In the big garden, PNG women lead research projects, determining research questions and methodologies to ensure the process and findings strengthen the movement as a non-negotiable priority. In the big garden, the PNG women's rights movement celebrates its rich social and geographical diversity and is proactive about forging linkages that build the critical mass required to make transformative changes for women in the country. In the big garden, the movement holds itself and government to account, understanding that both are essential to delivering women's rights at meaningful scale. In the big garden, the movement is creative in seeking resources and partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders in furtherance of collectively identified priorities and is not shy in insisting upon decolonial ways of partnering.

Methodology

A desk review of critical IWDA Frameworks and WEAVERS Research Project documentation, combined with a set of representative Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with project participants and other stakeholders has informed this exploratory and descriptive evaluation. The evaluation method enabled the capture of diverse local perspectives and

context in order to assess the extent to which the project embodied decolonial research approaches and strengthened the PNG women's movement, as well as enablers of these outcomes. Thick description was deployed to enhance the transferability of findings and enable rich, nuanced, contextually sensitive representation in line with the evaluation's decolonial ambitions. The evaluation will support efforts by IWDA, the PNG women's movement, and other international development actors to evolve and expand impactful decolonial research practice.

Overall Findings

The evaluation found that the project's lead actors and the research methodology embodied decolonial approaches to a very high extent. In addition, it found that the research process and findings have meaningfully strengthened the PNG women's movement. Critically, the evaluation determined that the research has catalyzed local energies and processes that look set to further deepen movement strengthening in the months and years to come.

The actors: IWDA, the Lead Researcher, and the WEAVERS Research Team demonstrated exemplary commitment to promoting an inclusive power-with rather than power-over approach to collaboration throughout the project. As individual actors embedded systems of oppression these actors deserve recognition for their staunch effort to combat colonial paradigms. IWDA ostensibly had the most responsibility for being aware of and mitigating coloniality in the project and impressively demonstrated a power-with approach to collaboration with Majority World actors that was characterized by humility in interactions and decision making.

The methodology: The evaluation notes the number one priority expressed by Steering Committee members who made an input into the evaluation's design, was to document their methodology for sharing with a wider audience. This speaks volumes for its local ownership as does the emphatic praise for the methodology communicated by diverse actors at the various report launches. Representative voices were present in the Research Team and amongst the 38 WROs engaged, and contextually relevant questions administered by local data collectors generated a sense among research participants that they were respected and heard. Inclusive data and collective synthesis ensured representation of multiple ways of knowing. A humble, power-with approach was embedded in the methodology, ensuring authentic collective ownership of findings, maximizing uptake.

Process and findings: The research process meaningfully strengthened the PNG women's movement by forging new relationships amongst diverse actors and strengthening capacities for collective action. *The WEAVERS Research Report. The Women's Rights Movement in Papua New Guinea: where we came from, where we are, and where we wish to go.* has been described as "proudly PNG-led" and a "national product" and has contributed to movement strengthening by celebrating, recognizing and validating the PNG women's movement; describing a collective consciousness amongst

PNG women's rights actors; constituting a call to collective action; catalyzing support from government; and opening space for movement-informed action by other stakeholders.

Enablers: Challenges and opportunities reflected upon by participants revealed key enablers of effective decolonial research. Underpinning these is the reality that the very nature of authentic support to local research ownership involves not knowing exactly how the project will unfold at the outset. Building time, budget, and human resource flexibility and buffers into research proposals is essential for enabling local leadership and decision-making and being responsive to local context. Likewise, it is important that intermediary organizations create space in their proposals for local actors to determine research questions to ensure decoloniality from the outset of the research.

Evolving practice at the decolonial research and movement-strengthening nexus

The evaluation proposes two considerations for the PNG women's movement to build upon the research's impact. These involve robust collective documentation of the movement's impact to complement the report's articulation of its size, diversity, and history; and rich and creative collective visioning of what the change they seek looks like as the foundation for a movement strategy. These two processes would further enhance solidarity-building, collective ownership of movement impact, and constitute powerful leverage in their efforts to shift policy, practice and resource flows to benefit PNG women.

For IWDA and other actors working at the decolonial research and movement-strengthening nexus, the evaluation generated key considerations for evolving practice:

- Decolonial research methodologies aren't all equal in terms of advancing movement strengthening. Space must be created for Majority World research teams to evaluate each methodological choice for its decolonial *and* movement strengthening capacity. Movement strengthening methodologies maximize collective dialogue, building linkages amongst movement actors, building their power within and beyond the research project.
- Likewise, operational decisions must be assessed in terms of their ability to strengthen the movement. For example, contracting mechanisms for remunerating research teams should foster collective accountability to the wider local movement, rather than individual accountability to Minority World actors.
- Future funding of select WROs within a movement must not undermine the movement-building advanced by the research. Such projects can incorporate activities such as peer exchange, joint advocacy, and knowledge sharing to ensure meaningful contributions and accountability to the wider movement.
- Movement strengthening and research uptake will be enhanced by ensuring a meaningful pocket of funding for actors to take forward research findings is included in decolonial research proposals. The wider movement needs space to digest the findings and identify roles, responsibilities, and funding for action.
- Lastly, supporters of decolonial research must communicate, in simple and concise writing, the decolonial commitments they will uphold in the research process so that movements can hold them to account and consider demanding the same from other development partners.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Women's Empowerment for Voice and Equal Rights in Papua New Guinea (WEAVERS) Research Project set out to unravel and understand the ecosystem of rights actors, individuals, groups and networks that comprise the women's movement in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and to strengthen the PNG women's rights movement through a locally owned and implemented research process and actionable research findings. The project was anchored by IWDA's commitment to feminist and decolonial research, prioritizing local actor ownership of the research process, findings, and outcomes.

Led by an esteemed PNG women's activist and Governance, Gender Equity & Social Inclusion Specialist, Dr. Orovu Sepoe, alongside a geographically and socially diverse Steering Committee of PNG women's rights activists, the research engaged 38 WROs across five research sites. Locally and collectively determined methodologies were used to undertake a detailed examination of the women's rights movement in PNG, underpinned by three key research questions:

1. What defines the women's rights movement in PNG?
2. Who are the women's rights organizations and networks within PNG, and what are their roles?
3. How are different actors within the women's rights movement connected, and what are the challenges and opportunities for enhancing these connections?

Commissioned by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and funded by the Australian Government through PNG Women Lead, the WEAVERS Research Project was one of three components within the larger WEAVERS Program aimed at driving significant structural and transformational changes in the lives of women and girls across PNG.

1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

In an effort to support IWDA, the PNG women's movement, and the international development community to evolve and expand impactful decolonial, feminist research practice, this evaluation generates evidence for the extent to which the research embodied decolonial research approaches and strengthened the PNG women's rights movement. It assesses internal and external challenges to those outcomes and provides considerations for building upon the project's impact and evolving practice at the nexus of decolonial research and movement building.

Critically, the evaluation complements IWDA's own documentation of the project by:

- providing an independent, third-party assessment of the project;
- harnessing the external expertise of an evaluator with over 15 years' experience supporting women's movements in the Majority World;

- offering a clear demonstration of IWDA's commitment to the use of evidence to inform continuous improvements to its impact and accountability in line with its feminist and decolonial frameworks.

1.3 IWDA's Decolonial Framework and approach to research

The IWDA's decolonial approach to research is anchored by the organization's bold and strikingly honest Decolonial Framework and Strategy which outlines explicit commitments and concrete methods for decolonising its approach to feminism and development. The framework recognizes that international development is based on the myth of European superiority; acknowledges IWDA's responsibility to combat racism, discrimination, and oppression; and sets out five principles to guide its decolonial practice. These principles emphasize the importance of respecting diverse perspectives; recognizing multiple ways of knowing and being; promoting equality and collaboration; balancing rights and responsibilities; and ensuring humility.

These principles are embedded in the organization's approach to research (set forth in its Feminist Research Framework), which is characterized by rigorous self-reflection on privilege and power and a commitment to "stepping back" in recognition that it is for Majority World actors to lead their own processes and produce findings that are locally owned and contextually relevant. This approach is complemented by a commitment to "standing with" these actors by sharing their research throughout IWDA networks; and "stepping up" by putting research directly in the hands of policymakers for targeted use and influence.

1.4 Evaluator positionality

Given the above, the positionality of the evaluation consultant, must be acknowledged upfront. The following statement was prepared by the evaluation consultant and read to each of the evaluation participants ahead of their Key Informant Interview:

As a white, cis-gender, able-bodied female from the Minority World, I sincerely acknowledge my positionality and the potential biases it may bring to this evaluation. I recognize that my background and limited knowledge of Papua New Guinea may influence my perspectives and interpretations.

To mitigate these challenges, I am committed to a reflexive and humble approach to evaluation, recognizing my role as a facilitator – not deliverer – of learning, and as a piece of a larger collective effort to generate insights that enhance meaningful impact for women. I will actively listen, seek to understand, and remain open to feedback throughout this process. My approach is informed by my 15 years of experience living in the Majority World, working with and learning from diverse women's movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. I am dedicated to embodying feminist and decolonial principles as I carry out the evaluation, not only because they are required by IWDA but because they are central to my core beliefs about effective and ethical development practice – and being a thoughtful human being.

In this evaluation I aim to create an open and respectful dialogue where all insights are valued equally. Your perspectives and experiences are crucial, and I will strive to reflect them faithfully in my findings. My goal is to produce a thoughtful independent evaluation report that is actionable and useful to you in your critically important work.

Thank you for your candidness, collaboration, and for trusting me to support this evaluation.

2. Methodology

The approach to this evaluation aligns with IWDA's Feminist Research Framework and Decolonial Framework and Strategy in the following ways:

Table: 1: Ways in which feminist and decolonial principles were upheld in the evaluation

Feminist and decolonial principles	How they were upheld in the evaluation
Collaborative and participatory design	Within the constraints of a very tight evaluation timeframe, the evaluation consultant solicited input into the evaluation focal areas from IWDA, the Lead Researcher, and the WEAVERS Research Team (ie. The Steering Committee plus the data collectors).
Reflexivity	The evaluation consultant reflected upon and communicated the way her own positionality could influence her biases and took steps to mitigate these.
Intersectionality	Limited number of KIIs aimed to be as representative as possible (geographically and socially) with critical input from the Lead Researcher, Dr. Sepoe.
Local relevance and transformative goals	The evaluation took the issue of local relevance and transformation – in terms of PNG movement capacity and influence – as central.
Ethical considerations	Ethical approval from the IWDA Internal Research Advisory Group was secured ahead of the evaluation and feminist and decolonial ethics were mainstreamed in evaluation practice. Informed consent was secured ahead of KIIs and participants were given various options for how to be identified or de-identified; how to submit the consent form; and how to participate that respected their well-being and privacy. KII questions were sent ahead of time to mitigate nerves, challenges with comprehension, and give respondents time to determine how and whether they wished to answer the questions.
Power dynamics	The evaluation consultant sought to both mitigate power imbalances in the evaluation process (by acknowledging her positionality, ensuring representation in KIIs, offering the option for participants to be de-identified, and creating a safe space for discussion with PNG women – ie. Through an informal introduction of herself to KII participants and a warm and humble demeanor) and to explore power dynamics in the research project through intentional KII questions.

Narrative sovereignty	KIIs were designed to maximize narrative sovereignty and opened with a question that gave the interviewee free reign to share what they felt most significant about their experience in the project.
Decolonial impact	The evaluation's aim is to assess and improve practice (in decolonial research and movement strengthening) that shifts power and resources to local actors in the Majority World.
Multiple ways of knowing	The evaluation report incorporates PNG proverbs in respect for local wisdom and ways of knowing and understanding. Proverbs are integrated within the thematic analysis to make it more appealing and accessible to PNG women's rights actors – inclusive of those without formal education.

A brief summary of the evaluation methodology is presented below:

Table 2: Evaluation methodology

Clarification of purpose and Scope of Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant met with IWDA to confirm the evaluation purpose, scope of work, timeline and required background reading. • Evaluation consultant developed an online poll to solicit the input of the WEAVERS Research Team into the evaluation design and to solicit their interest and preferred method for participating. • Evaluation consultant met with the project's Lead Researcher, Dr. Sepoe, to solicit her input into the evaluation design, her support ensuring diverse social and geographic representation amongst Key Informants, and her insights into contextual realities to be mindful of during the evaluation. • Evaluation consultant incorporated WEAVERS Research Team and Dr. Sepoe's insights into the evaluation design.
Desk review of relevant IWDA Frameworks and WEAVERS project documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant reviewed: IWDA Decolonial Framework and Strategy; the IWDA Feminist Research Framework; IWDA Feminist Movement Strengthening Framework; IWDA Knowledge Translation Framework; as well as the WEAVERS Research Report; Dr. Sepoe's research methodology documentation and recommendations; WEAVERS donor proposal and reports; and launch reports.
Evaluation proposal developed for ethics approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant developed an evaluation proposal for submission to IWDA Internal Research Advisory Group. The proposal detailed participants; evaluation scope and purpose; methodology (including KII questions); procedures for managing informed consent, privacy and confidentiality,

	and data management; risk management; and knowledge translation.
Consultations (Key Informant Interviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant shared invitations for KIIs alongside Informed Consent form and the KII questions • Eight Key Informant Interviews were conducted between 24 June and 2 July 2024. Seven interviews were conducted online (with one participant sending written answers ahead of the interview), and one participant chose to submit her answers in writing only. The interviews included: representatives from IWDA (2); the research lead (1); members of the Steering Committee (4) and a government representative who attended the report launch (1).
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant worked with qualitative data from the desk review and KIIs to undertake an exploratory and descriptive evaluation aimed at capturing nuanced perspectives from project actors and context to assess outcomes advancement. • Data was coded in order to populate a simple qualitative data matrix that provided evidence of the extent to which the WEAVERS Research Project advanced PNG women’s movement strengthening and embodied decolonial approaches (and the internal and external challenges associated with advancement of each outcome). • Evaluation of the extent to which the project embodied decolonial research approaches was underpinned by comparing insights from the data with the Principles of Decolonisation in IWDA’s Decolonisation Framework and Strategy. • Triangulation of data gathered from multiple sources contributed to the robustness of the analysis.
Interpretation and synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant proceeded to identify key themes and linked them to PNG proverbs using these to organize a summary reflection on the project’s advancement of the outcomes • Findings and thematic analysis were then reviewed to generate areas for consideration by IWDA, PNG women’s movements, and the international development community in their efforts to continue to evolve and strengthen impactful decolonial, feminist research practice – especially in pursuit of movement strengthening. • Throughout the analysis, “thick description” was deployed to enhance results transferability and enable rich, nuanced, contextually sensitive representation in line with the evaluation’s decolonial ambitions.
Report write-up and reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation consultant devised a report format and style aimed at ensuring it was directly and immediately useful to

	<p>IWDA and the WEAVERS research team - presenting the report in clear, jargon-free English, with succinct analysis and strategic sectioning, bullets, subheadings etc. to enhance digestibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation consultant chose to offer “Considerations for evolving the practice” rather than “recommendations” in recognition of her role as a participant in a collective effort to generate knowledge.• Evaluation consultant took two rounds of written feedback from IWDA and the Lead Researcher to ensure evaluation quality and the mitigation of positionality bias and misunderstanding.
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3. Findings

This section presents evaluation findings assessing, first, the extent and ways in which the project embodied decolonial research approaches as well as challenges and opportunities for decolonial research. Second, it presents evaluation findings assessing the extent to which Steering Committee members feel the research has strengthened their connection to the PNG women's rights movement and the strengthening of the movement as a whole. This is followed by a reflection on challenges and opportunities for movement strengthening in the context of decolonial research.

3.1 Extent and ways in which the research embodied decolonial approaches

To assess the WEAVERS Research Project's embodiment decolonial approaches, data from the desk review and KIIs was used to evidence the extent to which key project actors and the research methodology upheld the following:

1. Ensured multiple, diverse voices were included
2. Embraced multiple ways of knowing, doing, and perceiving
3. Promoted power-with rather than power over
4. Balanced individual rights with collective responsibilities
5. Practiced humility in interactions and decision-making processes

These five approaches align with Principles of Decoloniality set forth in the IWDA Decolonial Framework, while eliminating complex terminology that may be inaccessible to some of the PNG women's rights actors who are among the target audience for this evaluation report.

3.1.1 The actors

The extent of the project's embodiment of decolonial research approaches was determined in large part by three key actors: IWDA, the Research Lead, and the Steering Committee. A summary of findings related to each actor is presented below and is organized under the principles/approaches most strongly evidenced by the evaluation data.

- **IWDA**

The evaluation data provides ample evidence that IWDA – most notably through the steadfast leadership of Dr. Liz Gill-Atkinson – worked to intentionally and diligently apply decolonial research and development principles and approaches throughout the project. Emphatic praise for Liz's decolonial approach and genuine kindness was unanimous among KII respondents. The data suggest that the most prominent ways IWDA embodied decolonial principles within the project were through the promotion of a power-with approach and the practice of humility in interactions and decision-making.

i. Promoted power-with rather than power over

The evidence suggests IWDA upheld its commitment to collaboration with local actors (power with) rather than dominating the terms and nature of the engagement (power over) to a very high extent. From the outset, the organization prioritized recruiting a local Lead Researcher to steer the design and execution of the research project and explicitly transferred decision-making power to Dr. Sepoe once she was appointed. IWDA's prior experience with “North-South” research taught them that simply hiring a local researcher wasn't enough to combat the power imbalance of a donor-funded research project¹ leading them to provide for a local Steering Committee to work alongside Dr. Sepoe. This local alliance of actors was intended to provide a stronger counterbalance to the power held by IWDA.

As IWDA's main point person for the project, Liz reflected that from the outset she saw her role as working to enable from the background and letting the local team run the show. She reflects that this wasn't as easy as simply taking a step back, but involved constant socialization in the first six months to ensure the Steering Committee – few of whom had been given such autonomy in a research project before– truly understood that they were in charge and should not defer to her on decisions related to what would be researched and how.² This was corroborated by a research team member who reflected that it took time to understand “IWDA wasn't researching us.”³

Ultimately, IWDA settled into the role Liz envisaged, with one research team member stating that, “IWDA, though very present, was always behind the scene.”⁴ The Lead Researcher, Dr. Sepoe, summarizes the decolonial impact of this as follows, “If IWDA had stepped over or stepped upfront of the Lead Researcher and the Steering Committee, this would have had an adverse impact on the smooth running of the research process, and reinforce the prevailing unequal power relations between funders and recipients.”⁵

IWDA expressed discomfort with the power that came from holding the budget. Liz reflected that in all other areas she told the local team not to defer to her, but when it came to budget she felt she was holding power over them – insisting the policies and paperwork mandated by IWDA to process payments be upheld.⁶ She went on, however, to provide an example of how the local team pushed back on the system for paying honoraria for data collection by insisting they could not meet the cash upfront demands of the agreement. The project was paused and Liz and the IWDA finance department negotiated a new agreement that would meet the needs of the contextual realities facing local data collectors. This negotiated solution is the very essence of a power-with relationship. Other instances of push back linked to accommodation, carer support, and

¹ Ridge. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

² Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

³ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁴ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁵ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.3

⁶ Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

the transport needs of research team members were resolved in equally respectful ways by IWDA, through Liz (who took guidance from Dr. Sepoe at all times).⁷

ii. Practiced humility in interactions and decision-making processes

Throughout the research project, Liz consistently reiterated that decision-making lived with Dr. Sepoe who noted that her WhatsApp was “going mad” during the project with Liz asking her to take decisions. I wondered whether this ever felt like a burden, but Dr. Sepoe said she “appreciated it so much” and that it was “so empowering.”⁸ The mutual respect between Liz and Dr. Sepoe was abundantly clear from the KII. Liz’s line manager, Alice Ridge, corroborated Liz’s approach to decision-making, praising her acute awareness for power dynamics and consistent demonstration of decolonial ways of working.⁹ Alice noted that Liz would even push back on her and their team director Jo Pradela when they were making suggestions linked to the project’s execution – insisting the decision would be taken locally.¹⁰ Not only was Liz’s ability to protect the space for local decision-making crucial, but Alice’s celebration of this push-back hints at institutionalized decoloniality at IWDA.

Despite being highly qualified and experienced researchers, the IWDA staff did not seek to influence the shape of the research process, methodologies, or final report. Ultimately, Dr. Sepoe concludes, “The research process was locally led and driven, through genuine partnership with IWDA, and amongst the research team members.”¹¹ Insightfully, she defines “genuine partnership” as “valuing and embracing diversity of voices and for donors/INGOs to give ample opportunity and autonomy to local actors to define, shape and drive the research project or other development projects/programs.”¹² In terms of the research report, she notes, “The process of compiling the report was a delightful experience, as I led and wrote the report without any significant influence from IWDA. The WEAVERS Research Report is authentically locally produced.”¹³

A last reflection on IWDA humility in decision making related to the subnational report launches. IWDA recognized local actors knew best how to design these most impactfully and shifted power to the Steering Committee members from various regions to plan and budget for these events.

• The Lead Researcher

When Dr. Sepoe, with over two decades of research and professional interest in PNG women’s movements and collective action, applied to lead the WEAVERS Research Project, the IWDA team were elated. Indeed, the evaluation evidence suggests Dr. Sepoe

⁷ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁸ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁹ Ridge. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.2

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p.7

was the personification of feminist and decolonial research approaches. As was the case for Liz, KII respondents emphatically and unanimously praised Dr. Sepoe's approach, most notably the way she: ensured diverse voices were heard; promoted power-with rather than power over; and practiced humility in interactions and decision-making. One Steering Committee member, who has worked with Dr. Sepoe in the women's rights space for close to 30 years, said, "she has always maintained this leadership style."¹⁴ It is not a given that local researchers will embody decolonial approaches, especially when contracted by Minority World organizations and Dr. Sepoe's example must be celebrated. As noted by one Steering Committee member, "Her ability to bring Pacific Island values to the process made all the difference to the local team."¹⁵

i. Ensured multiple and diverse voices were included

From the very outset when constituting the Steering Committee, Dr. Sepoe urged her peers to question, "Is there anyone missing at this roundtable?"¹⁶ It was this question that prompted the expansion of the Steering Committee to include men and representatives of the LGBTQI+, sex worker, and persons living with HIV networks. Ensuring the Steering Committee was representative of the women's movement's rich diversity was a critical first step in ensuring a broad range of voices were included in the research and that it would be widely owned and embraced.

With a representative Committee in place, Dr. Sepoe stated that her role as the research lead was, "to facilitate and manage the diversity of perspectives and experiences amongst different rights actors and allow for all voices to be heard."¹⁷ At the launch of the report she noted, "One thing that has held up the movement is that women have sat in their chairs for too long. Because of this, my approach with leading this research was to change the seating arrangement so that there is no head of the table. We are all equal, and so we had to play this out in practice as per the words."¹⁸ KII respondents had high praise for this roundtable methodology with Liz noting that Dr. Sepoe, "recognized and elevated the intrinsic value of each and ensured their voices were heard."¹⁹ This sentiment was powerfully corroborated by a Steering Committee member whose lack of formal education made them doubt their value on the Steering Committee. The member said, "I was not confident in my qualifications, but Dr. Sepoe made me feel comfortable."²⁰

Making the less confident feel comfortable and included required constant effort. Dr. Sepoe reflected on the continuous necessity of ensuring the quiet were encouraged to speak and the dominant delicately encouraged to listen.²¹ In this way, the less senior and less experienced in the Steering Committee felt safe. "Her leadership made it welcoming

¹⁴ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

¹⁵ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

¹⁶ Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

¹⁷ Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p. 22

¹⁸ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

²¹ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

for every member to have his or her view and experience shared, we were also not forced to accept any approaches or points of view we disagreed with.”²²

ii. Promoted power-with rather than power over

It was noted Dr. Sepoe did not place herself at the center of the Steering Committee but shifted power amongst the team and thereby built cohesion amongst its members.²³ In upholding power-with approaches, Dr. Sepoe build on rich existing relations with and respect for veteran “trailblazers” on the Committee and played a very intentional mentorship role with younger members. Spoken like a true community organizer, she reflects on her effort to, “spend time with all members of the team during and after sessions, not so much as ‘the leader’ but as one of them.”²⁴ She notes that she applied flexibility and sensitivity to the multiple identities of team members; allowing space for personal/family circumstances, whilst managing contextual challenges of time constraints and power dynamics amongst team members.²⁵ Her ability to extend empathy and build relationships with her team is exemplary feminist, decolonial, and movement-building best practice and was described by one Steering Committee member as, “the PNG-way of doing things.”²⁶

iii. Practiced humility in interactions and decision-making processes

In constituting the Steering Committee Dr. Sepoe’s introductory remarks set the tone for the way the research project would be managed: clearly leading by example in terms of humility and preparing the ground for collective decision-making by the Committee. She sums up her introductory remarks as, “a few key messages around respect for each other; valuing each other and working collaboratively; breaking down hierarchies, etc. The key aim was to respect and embrace diversity and inclusion - our differences- and work in partnership to complete the research project and to achieve the WEAVERS research objectives. The research process was underpinned by the need to recognize that the rights space is a shared space for all of us.”²⁷ Throughout the research process, her speech matched her actions, as she herself sought the guidance of members, celebrated their expertise, and delegated tasks to instill ownership and build confidence.²⁸ As noted by one member, “she trusted our networks and experience and put us in lead”²⁹

• The Steering Committee

As a result of Dr. Sepoe’s leadership and Liz’s deliberate effort to hold space for local leadership and ownership, the Steering Committee as a whole embodied decolonial research approaches. The data suggest that the most prominent ways the Steering

²² Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

²³ Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

²⁴ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.8

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

²⁷ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.3

²⁸ Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

²⁹ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

Committee embodied decolonial principles within the project were through ensuring diverse voices were heard; embracing multiple ways of knowing, doing, and perceiving; and practicing humility in interactions and decision-making.

i. Ensured multiple and diverse voices were included

The Steering Committee took up Dr. Sepoe’s challenge to identify missing persons from the Committee and maximize representation amongst its ranks. Ultimately the Committee comprised ten women and one man and was inclusive of emerging and professional actors working across disability inclusion and rights, faith-based groups, and groups representing vulnerable populations (including PLWHIV, LGBTQI+ and sex worker network) drawn from across all regions of PNG. The broader research team included another seven diverse representatives of the movement who supported data collection. Critically, the Steering Committee was adamant that the data collectors were considered equals in the project. Throughout the project, the members – some highly qualified in the professional and/or academic sense and others highly qualified by their grassroots work – came to appreciate and find ways of working that integrated the value their respective lived experiences brought to the research.³⁰ As one Steering Committee member noted, “We were all members in respective active women’s rights movements in PNG, including the male participants ... In my opinion, this was our *“qualification”*.”³¹

ii. Embraced multiple ways of knowing, doing, and perceiving

As their confidence to steer the research process and methodologies grew, the Steering Committee collaboratively designed and tested thoughtful data collection questions and methods (to be reflected on further below). One Steering Committee member reflects that, “We were so thoughtful about our research questions as we didn’t want to be seen as being manipulated from the outside.”³² Questions were designed to be understandable and relatable to women’s movement actors in diverse settings and respectful of their different ways of knowing and relating. “We were decolonising the process as we went” remarked one Steering Committee member.³³

The Steering Committee agreed to the use of the locally developed Meri Bung Tok (MBT) tool for data collection. The tool, developed by Steering Committee member Sarah Garap in her work with rural women, embodies qualitative, participatory, informal and contextually informed conversations and can be seen as a contextually appropriate version of Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The tool is applied on-site where women’s rights organizations or stakeholders are situated, and where the data collectors also live and work. In her words, “My community entry point has always been through Meri Bung Tok – literally translated as a women’s gathering or meeting. The purpose is to provide space for women to talk about issues affecting them or to raise community concerns, and to understand who is doing what in their village so that they can draw support and work

³⁰ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

³¹ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

³² Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

³³ Ibid.

together as women. For me, as a grassroots development worker, women organizing is important to promote women’s engagement and participation and to support lasting solutions to the concerns of women or the community.”³⁴

iii. Practiced humility in interactions and decision-making processes

At the urging of Dr. Sepoe, Steering Committee members committed themselves to breaking down hierarchies, creating a platform for shared decision-making, and ensuring consensus-based approaches to reach collectively agreed goals. Steering Committee members interviewed emphasized that decision-making was collective, with one respondent noting, “Our discussions continued to our WhatsApp group, so I feel every Steering Committee member was well informed. If a decision was to be made, we would sort of know the outcome.”³⁵ Dr. Sepoe notes that this approach extended from the research methodologies right up to decisions related to report production. “Even decisions relating to the graphic designs and typesetting of the report were based on a consultative process”³⁶ It is worth noting that the outcome of this collaboration into the report design produced an invaluable contribution to visually exhibiting the findings using local iconography (bilums) that, in itself, conveyed local relevance and ownership and supported knowledge transfer and reflection in contextually relevant ways (as reflected by Steering Committee members following the report launch).³⁷

• The Actors: In sum

In sum, evaluation evidence suggests the three lead actors: IWDA, the Lead Researcher, and the Steering Committee embodied decolonial principles and approaches in the execution of their duties to a very high extent, thereby infusing the project as a whole with these values. As individual actors embedded – as summarized in IWDA’s Decolonial Framework and Strategy – in “systems of oppression that seek to limit our ability to think, feel and act outside of dominant paradigms”³⁸ the project actors deserve recognition and praise for their honesty, reflexivity, and commitment to combatting colonial paradigms in the execution of the WEAVERS Research Project. Special credit must be extended to Dr. Liz Gill-Atkinson who, in her role as IWDA’s lead point person on the project, ostensibly had the most responsibility for being aware of and mitigating coloniality in the project. Likewise, the IWDA team backstopping her efforts and supporting her push back in support of local decision-making are also to be applauded.

3.1.2 The methodology

The research methodology was co-developed by the Lead Researcher and Steering Committee. “From start to finish, the research process was characterized by inclusive round-table discussions and collectively agreed goals at every stage and throughout the

³⁴ Quoted in: Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p.17

³⁵ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

³⁶ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.7

³⁷ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

³⁸ IWDA (2024) Decolonial Framework and Strategy. p.12

research process; to ensure all voices were heard and accounted for.”³⁹ When asked about the impact of supporting local actors to collectively determine methodologies, Dr. Sepoe remarked, “this put a stamp on the legitimacy of the research and ensured its local ownership.”⁴⁰ Data collection by local actors was, she noted, “the very essence of decolonial research approach where local actors with lived experience and knowledge of the regional contexts played a key role in fieldwork for their respective localities.”⁴¹ In contrast to dominant extractive research practices in PNG and the Majority World more broadly, it was noted that the methods were “embraced by those being researched ... including Women With Disability (WWD) who felt for the first time people actually listened and allowed time for them to reflect.”⁴²

Indeed, it is critical to note that the number one priority expressed by Steering Committee members who made an input into this evaluation’s design, was to document their methodology for sharing with a wider audience. They remarked that the research was the “first of its kind”; a “pioneering experience”; “the first time we’re seeing a local women-led process”; “homegrown”; “inspiring, motivating, powerful and amazing”; and that it will “will shape the way forward.”⁴³ This speaks volumes for their ownership over and pride in the project’s methodology and embodiment of decolonial research principles. In a context where foreign-led, externally motivated research has been the norm, the WEAVERS Research Project captured the energies and excitement of many inside and outside of the Steering Committee by placing PNG women’s rights actors in the driver’s seat throughout.

The table below summarizes key elements of the WEAVERS Research Project methodology (as requested by Steering Committee members) and summarizes the key ways the evaluation evidence suggests they embodied decolonial principles and approaches.

Table 3. The WEAVERS Research Project methodology’s embodiment of decolonial approaches

Research phase	Methods	Decolonial approaches
Research design	Framing and Pilot Testing Data Collection Questions: Specific data collection questions were jointly devised by Steering Committee members and pilot tested in Port Moresby for relevance and clarity. This process ensured the questions were	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasized inclusion and local expertise in formulating questions. Collective vetting relied on local knowledge and experience and ensured consensus.

³⁹ Sepoe (2024) “WEAVERS Research Methodology from Start to Finish.” p.3

⁴⁰ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁴¹ Quoted in: Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p. 23

⁴² Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁴³ Including: Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024; Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024; Panta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024; Natara. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

	<p>contextually relevant and culturally appropriate.</p> <p>Selection of Research Sites and Vetting of Organizations to be Surveyed: The Steering Committee members selected geographically representative sites and collectively vetted hundreds of women’s rights organizations based on key criteria of diversity and representation.</p> <p>Selecting Data Collection Methods: Key Informant Interviews (KII) and locally-developed Meri Bung Tok (MBT) focus groups were chosen as primary methods, emphasizing cultural appropriateness and sensitivity.</p> <p>Establishment of a WhatsApp Group for the Research Team: Constant dialogue for collective decision making and solidarity amongst the Research Team (and IWDA support staff) was operationalized through a highly active WhatsApp group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured culturally appropriate and contextually relevant data collection methods. • Humble and inclusive decision-making through constant dialogue.
Ethics Review	<p>Conducting Ethics Review: An internal ethics review was conducted by IWDA due to no viable local authority. The review ensured the study adhered to ethical standards while reflecting sensitivity to local contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensured ethical considerations were respected, reflecting sensitivity to local contexts and capacities.
Fieldwork	<p>Data Collection by Locals Over Two Stages: The fieldwork was conducted in two stages over two months to accommodate challenges such as participant availability and communication issues. This phased approach allowed flexibility and comprehensive data collection.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapted to local realities and constraints, showing flexibility and empathy towards participants' life situations. • Ensured local knowledge and appreciation of context

	<p>Leveraging Local Knowledge and Relationships: Data collectors were drawn from the region where data was to be gathered and utilized their relationships with local actors to facilitate participation and gather insights.</p>	<p>was at the heart of data collection and an appreciation for research purpose.</p>
Data Validation and Analysis	<p>Collaborative Data Sense-Check Workshops: Validation workshops with Steering Committee members and data collectors ensured the integrity and relevance of collected data through collective discussions.</p> <p>Thematic Analysis Based on Local Insights: Preliminary analysis was conducted under key thematic areas, grounded in the lived experiences and insights of local participants, ensuring diverse perspectives were included.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective validation ensured diverse perspectives were included and finding collectively owned. • Grounded analysis in local contexts and lived experiences.
Report Writing and Finalization	<p>Collaborative Feedback and Decision-Making: Draft findings and recommendations were shared with the IWDA team for feedback. The Lead Researcher incorporated relevant feedback, ensuring the final report reflected collective insights.</p> <p>Local Authorship and Ownership: The final report emphasized local authorship and collaborative decision-making, promoting authenticity and resonating with local contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasized local authorship and ownership of the research report. • Promoted shared decision-making and collaborative power-with processes.
Report dissemination and launches	<p>Locally-planned and Implemented Report Launches: The report was launched by Research Team representatives in the capital and various regions to support translation of research to action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasized local relevance and research commitment to local transformation. • Reinforced and celebrated the value of

	<p>Research Team-led Dissemination to High- Level Decision-makers Members took it upon themselves to share findings and the report to influential people in their networks.</p>	<p>local authorship and ownership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership by the research team spurred strategic dissemination for local influence.
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- **The methodology: In sum**

In sum, the evaluation evidence suggests that the WEAVERS Research Project methodology embodied decolonial principles and approaches to a very high extent. Multiple, diverse voices were included in both the Research Team and amongst the 38 WROs engaged in Meri Bung Tok (MBT) discussions and KIIs. Contextually relevant questions and data collection and synthesis techniques ensured multiple ways of knowing, doing, and perceiving were respected. Within the Research Team and amongst those engaged in the research, a humble, power-with approach was embedded in the methodology, ensuring authentic local ownership and a sense among research participants that they were respected, valued, and that the research would be of benefit to them. The methodology ensured inclusive data informed collective agreement on findings, increasing the likelihood of research uptake by the Steering Committee and the wider movement. The method ensures research uptake by the Steering Committee is more than a project activity but becomes intrinsic to their activism.

3.1.4 Challenges and opportunities for enabling decolonial research

The evidence is clear that the WEAVERS Research Project exhibited very strong embodiment of decolonial research approaches. Challenges identified by project participants speak to ways decolonial approaches could have been further strengthened, rather than significant impediments to the outcomes listed above.

i. Time

The challenge cited most often by respondents was linked to time. Though IWDA did well to broker the relationship with DFAT and negotiate project extensions as necessary, there was still a sense that more time would support enhanced embodiment of decolonial approaches – supporting more robust initial awareness and consultation to improve representativeness; more responsiveness to local context (which involved serious internet, electricity, and petrol disruptions and complex sociopolitical dynamics); and more space to consult with the initial target of 50 WROs. Dr. Sepoe notes that managing deadlines required a lot of patience and it was a delicate balancing act to reconcile process with timelines, but ultimately she concluded, “you can’t have it your way all the time.”⁴⁴ While flexibility in the timeline for deliverables is essential and thoughtful planning

⁴⁴ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

that honors the time taken for authentic collective ownership and contextual responsiveness is a must, projects must also be mindful of the need to produce findings in a timeframe that is meaningful to research participants and respects the time commitment requested from Lead Researchers and Steering Committees.

ii. Budget

As mentioned, the power imbalance resulting from IWDA's holding of the budget concerned Liz, but it was not raised as a concern by the Steering Committee in the course of the evaluation. While it certainly represents a source of power, the negotiations made on the part of IWDA in key instances of push back from the Steering Committee demonstrated an awareness for this power and a willingness to respond to local needs and concerns. There was also a sense that IWDA was able to negotiate well with DFAT to adapt the budget where necessary and an appreciation for the space this gave the local actors to focus on what was important. While Liz feared IWDA financial paperwork was a burden to the local partners, ultimately the PNG women leaders expressed contentment with the reciprocity that characterized the relationship with IWDA on this and many other issues. One Steering Committee member noted that even when she was unable to submit receipts for expenditure on time, "Liz always managed these issues with great adeptness and positivity."⁴⁵

While questioning the value-add of intermediary organizations like IWDA holding the budget at all, Liz reflected that an intermediary solution might be to ensure a larger portion of the budget be managed in-country.⁴⁶ Alice noted that in many DFAT projects she has been involved in, local partners have expressed mixed feelings about being funded directly⁴⁷ and ultimately the arrangement needs to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, in response to local organizational capacities and preferences while always prioritizing advancement of local ownership and influence.

iii. Retrofitting and adaptability

A critical insight that speaks to the challenge of supporting decolonial, locally-led research and locally-led development more broadly, is that the very nature of authentic support involves not knowing exactly how the project will unfold at the outset. Rigid specification of activities, timeframes, and participant roles at the proposal stage (especially when that proposal is developed by an intermediary organization, sometimes without consulting local partners), often truncates or makes a mockery of local leadership and decision-making. In the case of the WEAVERS Research Project, decolonial outcomes were not undermined, but Liz spoke of the real challenge posed by the need to constantly adapt and retrofit IWDA's support to the project.⁴⁸ Over and above time and budget wrangling, the project significantly underestimated the resourcing required by IWDA/Liz. To do the job well and in alignment with decolonial approaches and values,

⁴⁵ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁴⁶ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

⁴⁷ Ridge. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁴⁸ Gill-Atkinson. Key Informant Interview (KII), 27 June 2024

time for relationship-building and round the clock informal communications was essential, though certainly not factored into the proposal or budget. The role demanded flexibility in working hours/days which was hard to accommodate in the context of a part time role holder. Building in the space for adaptation to timelines, budgets, and human resource demands is extremely challenging in the existing development sector paradigm. Larger organizations with long-standing relationships with funders have a better time negotiating these buffers (sometimes for legitimate reasons and at other times due to colonial assumptions about superior capacities in Minority World organizations), which can be one advantage of having a Minority World intermediary. Hopefully evaluations such as these offer evidence for the value and impact of such buffers and contribute to the trust-building required for enhanced flexibility from funders.

iv. Donor-instigated

The project was initially commissioned by DFAT and then onward commissioned by IWDA. The three anchor research questions were framed by IWDA in their proposal to the funder. While this most certainly contradicts decolonial best practice, the local Steering Committee were adamant that they devised the research questions. This is because they devised the data collection questions that were used to engage the 38 WROs consulted. The Steering Committee confidence in their ownership of the research questions speaks to the facilitation of Dr. Sepoe and the way she crafted space within the broad scope of the predefined research questions for the local team to determine the shape of the data collected in accordance with their priorities. Ultimately it is a negotiated power arrangement that produced a strong decolonial process and product, but there is most definitely scope for consultation with local actors during proposal writing or the creation of space within the proposal for local determination of anchor research questions in the project's inception. IWDA's deep experience in PNG likely contributed to its formulation of research questions that aligned with local women's priorities (and indeed, it was noted that Dr. Sepoe decided to apply for the Lead Researcher role because she agreed with the questions and later advocated for their importance to the Steering Committee), but there is tremendous decolonial (and movement strengthening) value in giving local actors the space to craft these for themselves from the outset.

3.2 The extent to which Steering Committee members feel the research has strengthened their connection to the PNG women's rights movement, and strengthened the movement as a whole

The evaluation evidence suggests the WEAVERS Research Project process and findings made a genuine contribution to Steering Committee member connection to the movement and have strong potential for strengthening the movement more broadly. While the impact of the process can be fairly comprehensively assessed now, the impact of the findings is ongoing given the report was only launched in April 2024.

3.2.1 Research process

The evaluation evidence suggests the research process, as a consequence of the decolonial methodology and exemplary leadership described above, made a meaningful contribution to Steering Committee member connection to the movement and movement strengthening. One Steering Committee member exclaimed, “I recommend the approach 1000%!”⁴⁹ The evaluation suggests the research process strengthened the movement in two key ways:

i. Forging new relationships amongst diverse actors

The research project process fostered new relationships among diverse actors by embracing diversity and intersectionality, and implementing a consensus-based, shared-decision-making process that rejected existing hierarchies amongst women’s rights actors. Dr. Sepoe notes that this approach allowed new relationships to be built – across generations, regions, and interest areas – and existing relationships to be strengthened.⁵⁰ Dr. Sepoe’s assessment was corroborated by Steering Committee members who reflected that younger participants felt privileged to work with and learn from pre-independence activists and to connect with those from outside their region for the first time.⁵¹ By bringing seasoned and highly influential women’s activists together with up and coming leaders, the research process created an exciting and dynamic environment for collaboration and mutual learning.⁵² Critically, the intergenerational collaboration was sensitive to local culture and values, which was a testament to local leadership of the process.⁵³ Through self-reflection and the sharing of insights and information, the research process opened avenues for future opportunities and linkages, with one member reflecting on the diverse skills found amongst WROs in their region and concluding there are so many ways WROs can support each other without outside support.⁵⁴

Reflections, summarized by Liz, from Steering Committee members presents at the Port Moresby report launch are poignant, “the WEAVERS research process has woven together all of our experiences, expertise and lived realities as Steering Committee members and data collectors to create the research and generate the findings ... it has woven together the voices of the women’s rights actors who were interviewed and participated in focus groups and their needs and priorities. It almost became a mantra for the team “We’re the WEAVERS – we’re weaving this together as we go”.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁵⁰ Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p. 22

⁵¹ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁵² Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁵³ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁵⁴ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁵⁵ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

ii. **Strengthening capacities for collective action and empowerment**

The research process has strengthened collective and individual Steering Committee member capacities for inclusive research and collective action: by demonstrating methods for inclusive research, their value and impact. For the less experienced or formally trained, the research process empowered them to see their value in producing knowledge and taught them skills they can carry into other endeavors.⁵⁶ One Steering Committee member, for instance, said, “after this Research experience, I have changed the way that I’m working, going forward. I have more confidence than ever before to participate with large groups of women’s organizations at community level and also to communicate with elected local level officials and public service personnel.”⁵⁷ For the more experienced researchers, they learned the value of slowing things down to ensure no one was left behind. One formally trained academic reflected that the process was very long and that sometimes the knee-jerk thought was to wish for it to speed up. But, she noted, there was great wisdom in Dr. Sepoe’s approach to ensuring the process was intentional about leaving no one behind.⁵⁸ This critical movement-building learning will hopefully inspire future research to ensure their processes inclusively strengthen PNG women’s movement actors. By putting PNG women at the center and in the lead, the WEAVERS Research Project process set a powerful example to inspire others in the movement, while its geographic and social representativeness has empowered a wide swathe of WROs (and other rights actors) to reflect on how their own processes may be strengthened.⁵⁹

3.2.2 **Research findings**

Complementing the research process, the findings and the final report have also made a palpable contribution to strengthening the PNG women’s movement. The report has been described as “a national product”, “proudly PNG-led”, and, by an attendee at the Upper Highlands Launch, as “a bible for the women’s moment.”⁶⁰ The key ways the evaluation evidence suggests the report has contributed to the strengthening of the women’s movement are presented below.

i. **Celebration, recognition, validation**

First and foremost, the research findings celebrate, recognize, and validate the women's rights movement and actors in PNG in all their diversity. The benefits of this to movement strengthening are hard to overstate. One Steering Committee member reflected that the launch events were particularly poignant for “the mothers who have been part of the movement since their youth” stating “they expressed joy in having their journeys documented.”⁶¹ As Dr. Sepoe noted, many women reacted to the findings with a sense

⁵⁶ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁵⁷ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁵⁸ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁵⁹ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁶⁰ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024; Upper Highlands Region Launch, 23 May 2024

⁶¹ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

of affirmation, saying, "This is what we've been saying all along."⁶² The design and translation of the report further reinforced this validation. "The team's strong reaction to the vibrant design and highlighted participant quotes underscored the importance of visually appealing and accessible research outputs. [...] excitement about the Motu version of the report exemplifies the sense of ownership and pride among the team members, who appreciated having the research available in their own languages. [One team member] described the translated executive summary as 'sacred' and said that it will be easier to share this with her networks."⁶³ This translation, produced by a high-profile church council member, elevated the report's status and fostered greater buy-in.⁶⁴

As mentioned above, the bilum design elements resonated powerfully with the movement. "The bilum design on the front cover, symbolizing the interconnectedness of PNG women, was particularly impactful. [One member of the Steering Committee observed] that the blank bilum represented the opportunity for PNG women to chart their own path, which resonated deeply, suggesting that the research findings not only document the past and present but also inspire future directions for the movement. This metaphor, understandable by all women regardless of literacy or educational background, provides a powerful tool for communicating the key messages of the research across diverse audiences."⁶⁵ Far from being a tangential element of the research, the collectively identified visual represents powerful respect for indigenous ways of knowing with potent movement-strengthening potential.

ii. Collective consciousness amongst PNG women's rights actors

"So, these (findings) are the voice of women rights actors?"⁶⁶ This incredible quote from a Steering Committee member highlighted in the WEAVERS Report is a striking testament to the real-time dawning of a collective consciousness amongst one member of the PNG women's movement. The sentiment was shared by others in the Steering Committee, who, when reflecting on the findings that most resonated with them, concluded it was the revelation that there is a collective consciousness amongst PNG WROs as this is the basis for collective action and a shared responsibility to hold both government and women's rights actors to account.⁶⁷ Indeed, the findings reveal that despite the range of actors, geographies and thematic areas represented in the movement (and power hierarchies among them), the shared driver of their efforts is fertile ground for increased solidarity and collaboration.

iii. Call to collective action for women's rights actors

The report findings serve as a powerful call to action for PNG women's rights actors, emphasizing the need for continued consolidation and collaboration at both sub-national

⁶² Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁶³ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p. 44

⁶⁷ Gill-Atkinson, Liz. Reflections on final workshop and launch, April 2024

and national levels. As one Steering Committee member noted, “the research provided an awareness of who is who. We need to take ownership of what we can do.”⁶⁸ Indeed, Dr. Sepoe noted that the regional launches have already spurred the creation of new sub-national coalitions,⁶⁹ something corroborated by the various report launch write-ups documenting resolutions taken to establish reference and working groups to steer collective actions inspired by the report findings.

The report has also prompted self-reflection among WROs, who expressed recognition for the gaps in their own approaches and operations and the need for improvement in terms of succession planning and inclusion.⁷⁰ At the Upper Highlands launch, for instance, attendees reflected on the report’s recommendation to involve more young women, a challenging yet essential step in ensuring the movement’s relevance and continuity, while others reflected critically on the lack of attention they have paid to holding government accountable.⁷¹ Some WROs, it was noted, claimed the report itself would be a tool for advancing accountability. “We have a tool. We’re gonna use this!” was the consensus expressed at one launch.⁷²

The report was also a powerful call to action on the issue of inclusion. One Steering Committee respondent highlighted the report’s illumination of the nexus between disability and gender, concluding not only that disability advocates need more visibility in the women’s movement, but that women need more visibility in the disability movement.⁷³ Indeed, the report’s inclusivity touched many launch attendees: with disability representatives, men, and academics expressing a sense of belonging and solidarity with the movement and its vision as laid out in the report.⁷⁴

iv. Catalyzing support for the movement from government

Though the report was only launched in April 2024, clear indications that its recommendations are being embraced by decision-makers is evident. Dr. Sepoe notes that funding recommendations are gaining attention and traction, with the National Department of Community Development reportedly expressing an intention to incorporate some of the report’s recommendations into national policy and budget frameworks⁷⁵ and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister requesting copies of the report.⁷⁶ In her own region, Dr. Sepoe’s network has used the report as an input to policy submissions calling for a separate budget line for women at the sub-national level.

Natasha Panta, Member of the Provincial Assembly, Milne Bay Province, gave a powerful testimony to the role the report will have in strengthening the hand of government officials

⁶⁸ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁶⁹ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁷⁰ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁷¹ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁷² Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁷³ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁷⁴ Eastern Highlands Province, 11 June 2024

⁷⁵ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁷⁶ Port Moresby Launch, 8-9 April 2024

seeking to support the women’s movement. She highlighted the report’s role in filling critical information gaps on the nature, scale, and priorities of the PNG women’s movement, constituting the evidence she needs to mainstream WROs in government systems – an especially timely endeavor given women’s breakthrough recognition as a sector in the Medium-Term Development Plan IV (MTDP).⁷⁷ “The report gives me ammunition. It gives me leverage. I can say, ‘the report said so’” she reflected.⁷⁸

By using the report as a reference in policy and budget submissions, Natasha and other women’s rights champions in government can exert greater influence and advocate more effectively for PNG women’s movement causes. In a context where PNG women’s rights work has been predominantly funded (and shaped) by foreign donors, the report’s potential role in catalyzing more government support is significant. Indeed, Dr. Sepoe notes that it is critical that PNG women and government take the lead, with donors supporting their joint efforts to advance women’s rights.⁷⁹ Though that reality seems some ways off, any shift in that direction is encouraging as it is the necessary anchor to sustained and transformative change for PNG women.

v. Opens space for movement-informed action by others

Strengthening the advancement of the PNG women’s rights movement agenda demands that agenda be clearly and collectively formulated. The report represents a truly groundbreaking step in this direction. Not only does a shared agenda support more coherent action and advocacy within the movement, but it allows other committed actors to respond to the movement’s priorities and act in accordance with its stated ambitions.

At the Annual Learning Workshop of PNG Women Lead in September, for instance, the report will be shared and will – in the words of a Steering Committee member working for the program – “better inform how we are looking at the women’s movement.”⁸⁰ The report will also be shared on the PNG Women Lead online platform to ensure the women’s voices captured in the report are widely heard.⁸¹ Another Steering Committee member, soon to pursue further studies at Australia National University (ANU), has shared the report and her praise for its locally-led methodology with her peers there. She indicated there was tremendous interest in the report and mused that there may be potential for follow up research to be undertaken – potentially informed by this evaluation.⁸² One veteran activist on the Steering Committee said, “I’m already using the Research Report to strengthen my ongoing work and with every opportunity that I get or have to meet influential leaders or people who, in my opinion, need to know about the research, findings and recommendations.”⁸³ It was observed by another Steering Committee member that a lot of additional papers could come from the research,⁸⁴ something the evaluation

⁷⁷ Panta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sepoe. Key Informant Interview (KII), 24 June 2024

⁸⁰ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁸³ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁸⁴ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

wholeheartedly concurs with given the wealth of data collected that did not feature strongly in the findings.

On the part of IWDA, which has committed to sharing the research amongst its networks and putting it in the hands of policy makers, the report strengthens its ability to stand with and step up in support of locally-led initiative – amplifying the movement’s voice rather than speaking on its behalf. Indeed, the regional launches were attended by many IWDA partners, who engaged with the report and now have concrete insights into the nature and ambitions of the PNG women’s movement to inform their own work. Future proposals by these actors should be built around the priorities of the movement as stipulated in the report and formulated in consultation with the diverse network of actors highlighted therein.

3.2.3 Challenges and opportunities for enabling movement strengthening

The evidence is clear that the WEAVERS Research Project process and findings have made a strong contribution to strengthening the PNG women’s movement and that the impact is almost certain to grow as more actors are exposed to the findings and have time to use these to inform action on multiples fronts. As above, the challenges identified by project participants speak mainly to ways movement strengthening could be further strengthened, rather than significant impediments to outcome advancement in the project.

i. Scope

To strengthen the report’s impact on PNG women’s movement strengthening, respondents indicate it should be shared more widely and that there should be more local engagement in the provinces.⁸⁵ Indeed, the panel discussions held at some of the report launches show tremendous promise for meaningfully socializing the report findings; forging a sense of solidarity amongst diverse actors; and inspiring collective action. One Steering Committee said there is a need “to take the research down to community level and share the information with women and various community leaders and open up on-going communication and dialogue.”⁸⁶ The Steering Committee notes that geographical spread to all PNG provinces during the project was constrained by funding.⁸⁷ It was suggested by one Steering Committee member that if there was more funding, movement strengthening could have been enhanced by the research being decentralized, ie. “teams assigned to [the] local level with the [Research Lead] working with them on location.”⁸⁸ Indeed the natural topography and associated high transportation costs in PNG present challenges for the geographical scope of research, research dissemination, and in-person inter-provincial movement strengthening. Potential strategies for mitigating these challenges in the dissemination phase include the use of radio and social media, as well as use of the ubiquitous WhatsApp platform. In addition to expanded geographical scope, one Steering Committee member noted that greater consultation with individual women’s

⁸⁵ Masta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024; Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁸⁶ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁸⁷ Powaseu. Key Informant Interview (KII), 28 June 2024

⁸⁸ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

rights actors, rather than just organizations would have enhanced movement-building impact.⁸⁹

ii. Sustaining momentum without funding

Following on from the above, a challenge to the report's capacity to meaningfully strengthen the movement surrounds the need for greater funding to forge linkages, develop shared strategies, and engage in collective action. Key movement strengthening recommendations in the report, namely: forums, peer-to-peer exchanges, spaces for youth engagement, mobilizing around shared issues, and capacity-building often come with resource implications. Deferral of responsibility for much of this work to the long-dysfunctional National Women's Council was difficult for the evaluation consultant to understand and almost certainly reflects a lack of sufficient awareness for local context. Without getting into the detail, it is worth noting that the PNG women's movement has multiple avenues for soliciting support for their alliance-building work and these should be voraciously pursued as it continues (if desired) to wait for NWC reforms to restore the body's functionality. Given the unyielding challenges facing PNG women and the NCW's long-standing "white elephant" status⁹⁰, it is hard to argue with a report launch attendee's sentiments that, "If the National Council of Women is not working, we must work and be functional."⁹¹

As report-informed advocacy by WROs, government allies, and partners such as IWDA continue to push for core and other funding from government, intermediary steps are required to keep movement strengthening momentum going. To this end, one member of the Steering Committee noted that in the rural setting, women's rights actors are working from the bottom-up and often without funding – noting that capacity building can be done between local actors in free venues such as churches.⁹² These pragmatic insights reflect a wise understanding for what it takes to build and sustain a movement and the role of such grassroots organizing should be illuminated and celebrated by those pursuing change at higher levels.

iii. Additional information on government support

Natasha Patha, women's representative Member of the Provincial Assembly, suggested the report's capacity to strengthen the movement could have been enhanced by a situational analysis on the agencies, policies, programs, and funding supporting women's empowerment in PNG. She noted that there's a "general lack of knowledge by women on government processes for women's inclusion in provincial planning and budget formulation and submissions."⁹³ One Steering Committee member concurred, stating there is a need to do additional research on "existing laws that have provisions for women and to assess whether these are implemented through proper and appropriate budgetary

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Panta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁹¹ Upper Highlands Region report launch, 23 May 2024

⁹² Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

⁹³ Panta. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

allocations.”⁹⁴ On her part, Natasha believes many in the movement are overwhelmed by the lack of government support and such analysis could benefit their efforts tremendously. When prompted to reflect on who could take this idea further, she reflected that she could champion this as a mouthpiece in government and could task the National Department of Community Development to take it up.⁹⁵ Indeed, as a complementary piece of work, such analysis could strengthen the movement’s calls for government support and increased funding, by offering a more targeted and specific ask. Putting a government agency in charge of the analysis would be a meaningful contribution to enhanced partnership and reciprocity between government and the movement.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ A reviewer of a draft version of this evaluation noted that an analysis of government funding/support was undertaken through a DFAT funded Pilot GESI study of three provinces. The study is, as yet, unpublished.

4. Thematic Analysis

In many parts of the Majority World, proverbs carry powerful insights into local wisdom and ways of knowing. Their use in collective strategic planning and evaluation amongst grassroots and indigenous groups and movements is often highly enriching. Upon reflection with Dr. Sepoe, it was confirmed that proverbs have strong resonance in PNG culture and though the evaluation timeframe and structure did not permit their use in data gathering, they are used in this thematic analysis to convey respect for local knowledge and hopefully make the report more engaging to PNG women's rights actors, whether formally educated or not.

4.1 Mumu I stap long liklik paia

The feast is on a small fire

This proverb teaches that great outcomes can come from modest beginnings. At the Port Moresby report launch Dr. Sepoe reflected, "What we have here, the research report, is not perfect. It is not 100%, but it is something to build on and a good starting point."⁹⁷ Indeed, the evaluation evidence suggests the report – authentically PNG-led and owned as a consequence of the project's commitment to decolonial research approaches – truly has the potential to catalyze great outcomes and a new era for the women's movement in PNG. Both the report process and findings have lit a fire under PNG women activists, a fire with the potential to cook something truly transformative in terms of enhanced collective action, increased resourcing to scale impact, and a critical mass of women's rights actors with the power to shape policy, practice, and resource flows to benefit PNG women.

4.2 Bikipela diwai I no inap bruk kwiktaim

A big tree does not break quickly

This proverb teaches us that strong established things are resilient and not easily overcome. The WEAVERS Research Project, through its unique documentation and celebration of the history of the women's movement in PNG, supports women's rights activists and organizations in PNG to see the strong roots of their movement, something they can take pride in and draw strength and learnings from. By bringing young and seasoned women's rights actors together in the Steering Committee, the project was able to support the inter-generational transfer of knowledge and begin to build unity between these actors. In addition to the history, the project supported the Steering Committee and movement to appreciate the geographical and social diversity of the movement, building an understanding of the powerful root network that feeds and anchors it. A large, diverse movement with a long, rich history is a powerful thing to belong to and will serve as inspiration and leverage for women's rights actors throughout the country.

⁹⁷ Port Moresby Launch, 8-9 April 2024

4.3 Bilum I gat planti hap

A bilum has many sections

This proverb teaches that things are made up of many parts, emphasizing recognition for complexity and interconnectedness. The WEAVERS Research Project was intentional about ensuring representation, diversity, and inclusion in both the research team and the findings. The result is a report that has resonated deeply and inspired diverse social and geographical sections of the movement as evidenced by the responses documented at the various report launches. Recognizing strength in diversity is a central tenant in decolonial research and movement-building. By demonstrating methods for collective action by diverse women’s rights actors, the WEAVERS Research Project sets the bar for future efforts by the movement, its partners, and funders.

4.4 Wanpela diwai I no inap mekim wanpela bikpela bus

One tree cannot make a big forest

This proverb teaches us that collaboration and collective effort are necessary to achieve important outcomes. The research reveals a collective consciousness amongst movement actors about women’s rights and why they do the work they do. Many of these rights are denied because of systems that are unlikely to shift through the actions of one or two women’s rights actors. Instead, a critical mass of women’s rights actors – a movement – is required to apply sustained and strategic pressure on decision makers at different levels. While the report captures a mass of women’s rights actors in PNG, there is work to be done to ensure it is an organized and influential *critical* mass with the capacity to effect sustained and substantial change for the nation’s women. This will involve building on the insights of one Steering Committee member, that some actors in the movement are working to build the movement from the bottom-up, while others are working from the top-down.⁹⁸ Harnessing and coordinating the efforts of both sets of actors is key to the big forest.

4.5 Bilum i no inap pulap sapos yu no putim samting long en

A bilum cannot fill up if you do not put things in it

This proverb teaches us about the value of continuous effort and contribution to achieve success or fullness. The report has already catalyzed efforts that will continue to fill the women’s movement bilum: sub-national alliances are strengthening and planning collective actions; local women’s rights actors are committing to share information and skills amongst each other; government actors are taking note of recommendations and using findings to inform policy and budget submissions; Steering Committee members and government champions are contemplating further research to augment the report’s findings and strengthen the hand of the movement; and IWDA is planning to share the report widely in order to amplify the voices and priorities of the movement amongst international partners, funders, and government stakeholders. These efforts must be complemented by additional convenings of the women’s rights movement to continue

⁹⁸ Kaman. Key Informant Interview (KII), 25 June 2024

building consensus on their identity, vision, and strategy in order to defend its position as a stakeholder in PNG development, rather than a simply a beneficiary or vehicle for the delivery of donor or government projects.

4.6 Nau yu stap long bikpela gaden.

Now you are in the big garden.

This proverb means that someone has entered a significant phase in life or a larger responsibility, requiring greater effort and diligence. The evaluation suggests the WEAVERS Research Project has contributed to the PNG women's movement entering the big garden. In this big garden there are new rules, new opportunities, and new demands of effort on the part of the movement, its partners, and funders. In the big garden, PNG women lead research projects; determining research questions and methodologies to ensure the process and findings strengthen the movement as a non-negotiable priority. In the big garden, the PNG women's rights movement celebrates its rich social and geographical diversity and is proactive about forging linkages that build the critical mass required to make transformative changes for women in the country. In the big garden, the movement holds itself and government to account, understanding that both are essential to delivering women's rights at meaningful scale. In the big garden, the movement is creative in seeking resources and partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders in furtherance of collectively identified priorities and is not shy in insisting upon decolonial ways of partnering.

5. In the big garden ... considerations for evolving the practice

In conclusion, this section presents one set of considerations for building on the impact made – since it is critically important that this learning not solely be used to strengthen future projects but supports increased impact for the women who participated in this evaluation; and a second set of considerations for evolving a practice of decolonial research in the context of women’s and/or feminist movement-building more broadly.

5.1 Considerations for building on the WEAVERS Research Project impact

Over and above the reflections and suggestions of project participants presented above, the evaluation suggests two key ways the PNG women’s movement could deepen the WEAVERS Research Project’s impact on movement strengthening.

i. Impact ownership

The report powerfully galvanizes the movement around a collective consciousness but is somewhat silent on collective impact. A question on impact was administered to WROs during data gathering, so a certain amount of data may already be available to ground further research. Too often women’s movements in the Majority World fail to take ownership for their impact, which is claimed by the funders and NGOs who produce the reports and showcase the change made by local actors. A critical element of decolonial practice and movement-building is ensuring local actors claim ownership over the impact they make. It is absolutely essential that movements see themselves as more than the sum of their parts and as more than implementers of others’ projects. The women’s movement in PNG would no doubt be floored to see the impact their diverse constituents have made, and it would serve as tremendous leverage in their policy negotiations and resource mobilization efforts. As a strategic complement to the WEAVERS Research Report’s narration of the movement’s history and diversity, a collectively-led effort to document its impact on the lives of PNG women would be a powerful source of pride, solidarity, and inspiration for the movement.

ii. Shared vision

The WEAVERS Research Report introduces the reader to where the movement wishes to go, but the movement may benefit from greater collective reflection on “the why” behind their proposed future directions. Why does the movement seek core, flexible funding? Why does the movement seek more national forums? Why does the movement need a separate ministry for women? Why does the movement want to support more collective action? The answers to these questions should drill down on the impact it will allow the women’s movement to make on the lives of PNG women. A movement vision of where it seeks to go that is anchored by a compelling “why” will stand a far higher chance of catalyzing the partnerships and resources required to scale impact. For Majority World movements, a beautiful decolonial approach can be to facilitate processes for visioning

the change they wish to see in as much detail as they can muster. This can be done through story, art, proverbs, song, forums, and all manner of other approaches. The regional momentum generated by the WEAVERS Research Report could feed this visioning sub nationally and these visions could be shared amongst other regions and with a national working group to start plotting a national PNG women’s movement vision. Seeing the overlap between the regional visions will build upon the WEAVERS Research Report’s beautiful illumination of the “invisible thread that lies beneath all of [the women’s rights actors] concerns and needs.”⁹⁹ Ultimately this vision should anchor a women’s movement strategy and the terms upon which it engages other stakeholders – ensuring their voices are not drowned out by donors and NGOs. Core support – the holy grail of movement funding – is unlikely without this clearly articulated vision and strategy for impact.

5.2 Considerations for strengthening the decolonial research and movement building nexus

IWDA’s hopes for this evaluation included receiving recommendations for ways to evolve decolonial research practice. As evidenced above, its approach was very strong in this project, with few recommendations coming from project participants. These final evaluation insights aim to push the envelope a little further by delving deeper into the decolonial research and movement-building/strengthening nexus, given the latter is a primary focus of the organization.

i. Not all decolonial research methodologies are equal

In the design and support of decolonial research approaches intended to strengthen Majority World movements, methodological choices must answer two questions: how does this advance a decolonial agenda within the project? And, how will it strengthen the Majority World movement’s power beyond the project? It struck the evaluator that in the WEAVERS Research Project, there may have been an assumption that decolonial approaches automatically strengthen the movement. In many cases they do, but they certainly aren’t all equal in terms of advancing movement strengthening. Space must be created for Majority World research teams to evaluate each methodological choice for its decolonial *and* movement strengthening capacity. For instance, while locally determined data collection questions and locally-informed adaptations to FGDs show tremendous decolonial respect for local context and ownership, they may not push the envelope in terms of maximizing collective dialogue, building linkages amongst movement actors, and advancing consensus-building the way a community forum for women’s rights actors could. This is a hypothetical example to inspire reflection (rather than a recommendation) aimed at illuminating the fact that working at the nexus of decolonial research and movement-building may push us to be more creative about selecting methodologies that simultaneously build movement power within and beyond the research project.

In addition to research methodologies, it is absolutely critical that research questions be determined in accordance with the same prompts. How will answering this question build

⁹⁹ Sepoe (2024). The WEAVERS Research Report. p.19

the power of the movement? Who would need to take action and are they a party to the research? Building in time for the very meaty discussions required to select the right research questions at the local level is an important role for intermediary organizations like IWDA working at the nexus of decolonial research and movement strengthening. In alignment with the power-with approach, IWDA can pose questions that support local actors to reflect on and strategize ways to advance movement-building in every step of the project.

ii. Could this undermine the movement?

For IWDA, another critical question to ask itself in designing and resourcing such research projects is, “could this decision undermine the movement?” To reference one of the proverbs above, could it unwittingly serve to remove items from the bilum? Let’s consider the contracting arrangement with Steering Committee members. While employing local researchers as consultants advances a decolonial agenda in terms of placing Majority World actors in research leadership positions, elevating individuals as consultants who are ultimately answerable to the foreign organization that hired them, presents potential challenges to movement strengthening with distinct power implications on multiple levels. The power of the WEAVERS Research Project was that Steering Committee representatives were members of the women’s rights movement and no matter the instrument used to remunerate them for their services, efforts should be made to reinforce this language and not describe them as “local consultants”. In more formally constituted movement’s Steering Committee representatives would have been selected by the governance structures of the movement, ensuring accountability to the collective and responsibility for ensuring uptake of findings on the movement’s behalf. In the absence of formal structures in the PNG women’s movement, this was not possible, but other contracting arrangements with stronger movement-strengthening benefits could be explored in future. Perhaps there is potential to renumerate the Steering Committee as a collective in order to promote accountability to each other and to reinforce the fact they are being recruited on behalf of the movement, not on behalf of an external NGO.

The WEAVERS Research Report notes that good governance and leadership challenges need attention within the PNG women’s movement and sometimes donor funding practices unwittingly feed into these challenges by elevating certain actors and shifting accountability to external actors. While the WEAVERS Steering Committee members were obviously selected for their strong ethical commitment to the movement and demonstrated a staunch commitment to local accountability, it’s worth reflecting upon these dynamics in future projects.

Another way Minority World funders can undermine movement strengthening – and the ambitions set forth in the WEAVERS Research Project – is that despite the findings they continue to fund pieces of the movement and escalate competition and the tendency for actors to work in silos. While IWDA cannot fund the entire movement, it can reflect thoughtfully on how support to select WROs can be organized to also contribute to the wider movement-strengthening effort. For instance, peer-to-peer exchanges between funded organizations and non-funded organizations can share learning and build

linkages; knowledge products and impact reports can be shared widely amongst diverse WROs for learning, awareness and accountability; and policy negotiations can include priorities from non-funded groups. Demonstrating that such projects have wider movement-strengthening ambitions in line with the WEAVERS Research Project findings would go a long way in extending IWDA's credibility in the space and set an example for others.

iii. Action research – fund the action!

A tragic trope in international development is that funders fund the research and the policy development, but not the action and implementation to convert words to action. To the extent possible, IWDA should include a meaningful pocket of funding for actors to take forward research findings in their decolonial research proposals. This could include funding a strategic workshop at which key actors come together and chart roles and responsibilities for taking forth key recommendations and identifying the resources available (where necessary) and where additional resources are required and a plan for accessing them. This would enhance the impact of IWDA's funding and demonstrate its commitment to transferring power to local actors beyond the scope of the project.

iv. Accountability to decolonial ways of working

As mentioned, IWDA has an exceptional Decolonial Framework and Strategy, which has effectively steered the project's execution and been upheld with the greatest commitment by Liz. The framework has thus held the organization and its staff to account, but upward accountability represents a fraction of its potential. Ultimately, the organization needs to be held to account by Majority World actors – inclusive of women's movements (formally educated and otherwise) whose members would likely find the highly technical language in the document inaccessible. Equipping movements involved in decolonial research with the tools to demand power-with arrangements from IWDA and other development stakeholders beyond the project, requires these concepts be expressed far more simply. The irony of Minority World actors teaching Majority World actors about decolonial approaches is almost unbearable, but IWDA's experience creating simple tools could be used to plainly communicate what Majority World actors should expect from IWDA in their partnership and make it clear that their pushback when IWDA is not fulfilling these expectations is encouraged. Though out of scope of this evaluation, it is understood that this is a practice led by IWDA's Partnerships team. Alternatively, IWDA could commission Majority World partners to summarize these expectations in a tool and call upon their peers to hold Minority World actors to account. It is worth noting that one Steering Committee member – a veteran PNG women activist – indicated there is local demand for such, stating, "Decolonisation is a newly emerging concept which we now understand from our experience in the research and which needs more awareness and usage."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Natera. Key Informant Interview (KII), 2 July 2024

6. Conclusion

In sum, the evaluation commends the efforts of IWDA for ensuring the embodiment of decolonial principles within the WEAVERS Research Project. The Lead Researcher and Steering Committee deserve equal recognition for upholding a decolonial approach within a context dominated by Minority World research leadership and development decision-making. The decolonial research process and locally-owned findings have contributed to meaningful strengthening of the PNG women's movement and have catalyzed energies and processes that look set to deepen that impact in the months and years to come. This deepening will not be automatic and will demand continued effort by women's rights actors and development partners committed to authentic support for the decolonial research and movement-building nexus and to the sustainable, scalable, and tangible advancement of PNG women's rights.

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