Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation

Evaluation Report

Prepared by the Evaluation Division (PRA)
Global Affairs Canada
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Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADM	Assistant deputy minister	**Geos**	Geographic branches	**OECD**	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	**INGOs**	International non-governmental organizations	**OGM**	Asia-Pacific Branch
CFO	Chief financial officer	**IPs**	Implementing partners	**oMINE**	Office of the Minister of International Development
CRAWN	Community Advocacy and Awareness Trust	**IT**	Information technology	**PIP**	Project implementation plan
CSOs	Civil society organizations	**KFM**	Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch	**PRA**	Evaluation Division
DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the OECD	**LCA**	Development Communications Division	**PRD**	Evaluation and Results Bureau
DG	Director general	**LBTQI+**	Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons	**PTLs**	Project team leaders
DIMI	Department-initiated multiple invitations mechanism	**MEL**	Monitoring, evaluation and learning	**REFEDEF**	Reseau des Femmes Pour la Protection des Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme)
DME	Deputy minister of international development	**MGD**	Social Development Bureau	**SCM**	Corporate Planning, Finance and Information Technology Branch
DPD	International Assistance Operations Bureau	**MGS**	Gender Equality Division	**SGA**	Grants and Contributions Financial Advisory Services Division
DPI	International Assistance Programming Process and Coordination Division	**MJF**	Manusher Jonno Foundation	**SGD**	Grants and Contributions Management Bureau
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	**MWDT**	Muslim Women Development Trust	**SGF**	Fiduciary Risk, Compliance and Fraud Division
EGM	Europe, Arctic, Middle East and Maghreb Branch	**NGM**	Americas Branch	**SGS**	Grant and Contributions Program Services Division
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy	**NGOs**	Non-governmental organizations	**WGM**	Sub Saharan Africa Branch
FRET	Fiduciary risk evaluation tool	**OCDI**	Olive Community Development Initiative	**WROs**	Women's rights organizations
GAC	Global Affairs Canada	**ODA**	Official Development Assistance	**WVL**	Women's Voice and Leadership
GE	Gender equality	**oDME**	Office of the Deputy Minister of International Development	**WWD**	West and Central Africa Bureau

Executive Summary

The formative evaluation of the Women's Voice Leadership (WVL) Program covered the period from its announcement in June 2017 to March 2021. The evaluation had three objectives: to determine if and to what extent Global Affairs Canada was "fit for purpose" to support WVL as a feminist program; to determine if WVL's design features and implementation modalities were relevant and appropriate to address the needs of women's rights organizations (WROs); and to determine WVL's progress toward results.

The evaluation found that **WVL's ambitious program approach was successful in making WVL's feminist vision a reality** and in ensuring the cohesiveness of a highly decentralized initiative. The divisions responsible for coordinating WVL were able to set up the "scaffolding" needed to deliver the program and several solutions and adaptations to corporate processes and tools were developed for WVL to realize its innovative aspects. WVL's program approach was, however, hard to implement for all actors involved, and in particular for the Gender Equality Division (MGS), which, for WVL, took on a new role, with only marginal adjustments to structures, resources and capacities.

The evaluation also found that, when WVL was launched, **departmental processes and systems were not sufficiently "fit for purpose"** for feminist programming and direct support to local WROs. The department's overall approach to risk management did not change significantly for WVL, despite the increased risk appetite needed to support local WROs. Corporate requirements for contracting, due diligence and reporting were particularly challenging for new partners, especially for local organizations, and selection processes did not fully succeed in modelling feminist principles of inclusivity and transparency. In addition, there was inadequate consideration of how to build the capacity of new, local partners to implement Canadian-funded projects.

The evaluation showed that WVL was **highly relevant to local WROs' needs** in diverse contexts, contributing to filling both funding and capacity gaps and allowing sufficient flexibility to participating WROs to focus on what mattered most to their communities. WVL projects were able to reach a wide diversity of WROs but struggled to reach informal organizations and in some contexts, LBTQI+ organizations.

Despite a limited timeframe for project implementation (most projects only started in fiscal year 2019-20) and significant disruptions due to COVID-19, the evaluation showed **evidence of early positive results**. The majority of WVL projects made early progress toward strengthening the organizational capacity of supported WROs and their programming effectiveness, including in response to COVID-19. Whether these early results will lead to more financially sustainable WROs remains unclear. Also, consolidating these results, while applying feminist approaches, takes time, and the current WVL timeframe is a challenge from this perspective.

Summary of recommendations

1. Ensure appropriate mandates, roles, responsibilities, capacities and resources for MGS to implement WVL and appropriate departmental roles, responsibilities, structures, resources and capacities for WVL 2.0.
2. Document, share and promote effective strategies and best practices to support and foster WROs sustainability in WVL and WVL 2.0.
3. Strengthen capacity of local organizations and organizations from developing countries as implementing partners of WVL 2.0.
4. Explore more adapted corporate processes and tools for direct support to local organizations, including programming processes and risk management approach for grants and contributions.
5. Develop a consistent and streamlined approach to approving extensions for WVL projects.
6. Leverage the guidance, tools and learning products developed to date to strengthen a common understanding and shared ownership of WVL's feminist approach.

Program background

Photo credit: Civil Society Learning and Training Center (Centro de Aprendizagem e Capacitação da Sociedade Civil) – WVL Mozambique
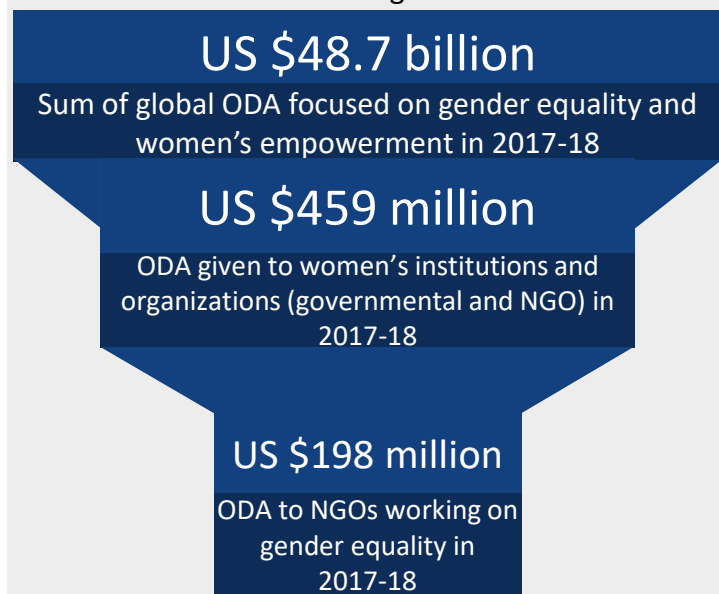
Background

Women's rights organizations - Funding and capacity gaps

Despite increasing donor funding for gender equality in recent years, very little reaches women's rights organizations,[1] and even less goes to organizations based in developing countries.[2]

Donors often perceive WROs to be risky and lacking organizational capacity given their limited experience managing large amounts of funding. Where WROs have attracted donor funding, it is often short-term and project-based, limiting longer-term investments in their organizations.[3]

US $48.7 billion
Sum of global ODA focused on gender equality and women's empowerment in 2017-18

US $459 million
ODA given to women's institutions and organizations (governmental and NGO) in 2017-18

US $198 million
ODA to NGOs working on gender equality in 2017-18

[1] Aid Focussed on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, OECD/DAC, 2020
[2] Donor support to southern women's rights organizations, OECD/DAC, 2016
[3] Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change. AWID and Mama Cash, 2020

Program background and characteristics

The Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) Program was officially announced in June 2017 as a flagship initiative of Canada's then newly announced Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). WVL was announced as an initial **five-year**, **$150-million** commitment, running from 2018 to 2023 and to be implemented by Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

WVL encompasses **30 bilateral projects in 28 countries**, in addition to **three regional projects** in the Caribbean, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, (see map in Annex 1). As a signature initiative under the FIAP, the WVL Program applies a **feminist approach** to programming grounded in three principles: participation, inclusion and empowerment.

WVL responds to the significant funding and capacity gaps facing women's rights organizations (WROs) in developing countries. WVL is intended to build the organizational capacity and sustainability of WROs, enhance their programming and advocacy activities and increase the effectiveness of networks and movements to advocate for change. WVL projects are intended to do so by providing **direct funding and capacity-building support to local WROs** and movements that advance the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people. WVL was also expected to explore opportunities to select local organizations as implementing partners.

Program set-up

To operationalize its feminist vision, WVL implemented a **program approach** that comprises: i) common design features across projects (see next page); ii) a program-level monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) architecture; iii) common technical and operational guidance; and iv) coordination and governance structures.

At the same time, because WVL did not have dedicated programming funding, WVL projects were identified, funded and managed by the geographic branches. From this point of view, WVL is **a collection of bilateral projects** under a common "umbrella." Each project has a dedicated project officer, called a project team leader (PTL), who is responsible for project management and liaising with the implementing partner.

Until February 2021, the International Assistance Operations Bureau (DPD) and the Social Development Bureau (MGD) acted as co-leads for WVL. Specifically, the International Assistance Coordination Division (DPI) and the Gender Equality Division (MGS) shared responsibility for overall program coordination, direction and guidance. This responsibility was fully transferred to MGS in February 2021. MGS was also responsible for program-level MEL. Other parts of the department provided support to WVL, including in relation to grants and contributions management (SGA, SGS, SGF), evaluation (PRD) and development communications (LCA).

Background

Common design features in WVL projects

While each WVL project was adapted to the local context and priorities, they all shared common characteristics.

All WVL projects had a common **theory of change** (see Annex 2), expected results under three pillars and standard performance indicators.

All projects included **four types of support** to participating women's rights organizations: i) **multi-year core grants**; ii) **fast, flexible, and responsive grants**; iii) **organizational capacity-building support**; and iv) **network and alliance strengthening**.[1]

Like the WVL program overall, all projects were expected to integrate **feminist principles** of inclusion, participation and empowerment in their design, implementation and MEL.

Specific **budget requirements** applied to all WVL projects to ensure that as much funding as possible would flow to local organizations. Specifically, each project had to transfer at least 50 percent of project funds to local WROs and had a 37 percent cap on management costs.

All WVL projects were coded as **GE-03**, meaning they were intended to achieve gender transformative results.

Innovation was integrated as a component of the projects in West and Central Africa, with specific activities geared toward catalyzing, supporting and measuring innovations. Some projects in other regions also integrated activities to support innovation.

[1] In Tanzania, the geographic program chose to fund two WVL projects, each with a different implementing partner. In this case, the different components were split between the two projects, only one of which was providing grants to WROs.

Background

WVL's implementing partners

WVL projects are implemented by different types of organizations: Canadian NGOs, international NGOs, local NGOs in the countries of implementation, and women's funds. **The majority of WVL's projects are implemented by Canadian partners, with more than 50% of the total WVL budget allocated to them.**

54.2% **Canadian NGOs**
18 projects

18.4% NGOs based in the partner country
6 projects

16.6% International NGOs
5 projects

10.8% Women's Funds
4 projects
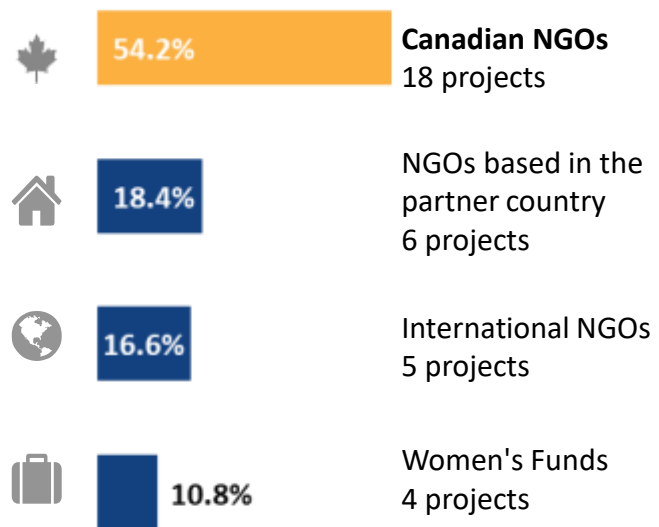
% of total WVL commitment by type of implementing partner, based on projects' budgeted value

Resources and disbursements

The total value of currently approved WVL projects is approximately $179 million.[1] All four geographic branches are implementing WVL projects: the Americas Branch (NGM), the Asia-Pacific Branch (OGM), the Europe, Arctic, Maghreb and Middle East Branch (EGM) and the Sub-Saharan Africa Branch (WGM). Most funds (52 percent) have been allocated to the Sub-Saharan Africa Branch, in keeping with the targets set out in the Feminist International Assistance Policy.
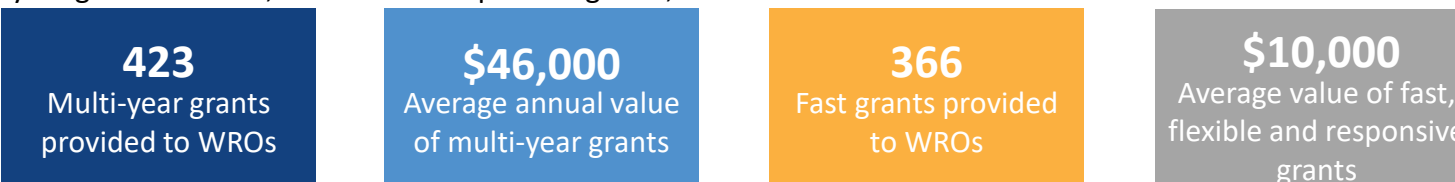
*Budgeted

WGM $94M	NGM $30.5M	OGM $38M	EGM $16.5M

WVL projects range in value from $2 million (Guatemala) to $10 million (Nigeria). Seven projects received top-ups for COVID-19 response activities, primarily used to fund additional fast, flexible and responsive grants. These amounted to approximately $3 million .

Most projects had completed less than two years of implementation at the time of this evaluation. Most projects (77 percent) signed their contribution agreements in 2019 and began implementation in late 2019 and early 2020. All WVL projects experienced delays. Some countries experienced lengthy approval phases or extensive negotiations around the project implementation plan (PIP). The COVID-19 pandemic led to further delays in implementation across WVL projects.

According to available data, **33 percent** or $59 million of the total amount budgeted for WVL projects was disbursed by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2020-21. The average WVL project disbursed 32 percent of its budget, though there were significant variations. At the end of FY 2020-21, only two projects (Bangladesh and South Africa) had disbursed more than 50 percent of their budget.

By the end of FY 2020-21, WVL projects had provided funding to hundreds of local WROs through both multi-year grants and fast, flexible and responsive grants, as shown below.

423 Multi-year grants provided to WROs	**$46,000** Average annual value of multi-year grants	**366** Fast grants provided to WROs	**$10,000** Average value of fast, flexible and responsive grants

1 Statistics provided by the chief financial officer, data current as of February 2022. Does not include COVID 19 top-ups. This amount includes WVL Cote d'Ivoire and WVL Middle East, which were outside of the scope of the evaluation.
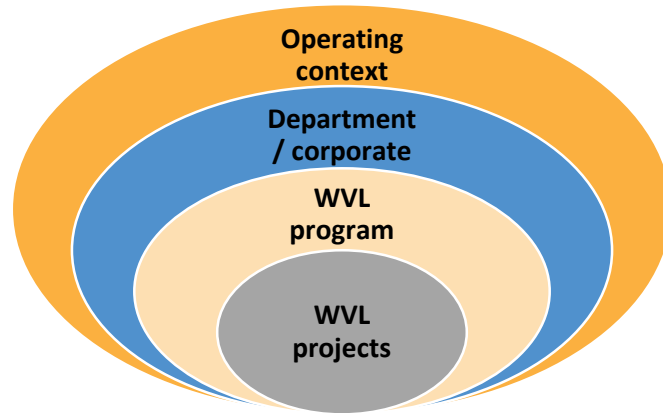2 Ibid. Disbursements calculated until the end of fiscal year FY 2020-/21

Evaluation scope and methodology

Photo credit: Study for the Defense of Women's Rights (Estudio para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer) – WVL Peru

Evaluation scope and objectives

A formative evaluation

A **formative evaluation** is an evaluation intended to improve performance and help a program adjust its course so that it can better achieve its results. It is most often conducted during the implementation phase of a program. For this reason, it focuses on a program's design, implementation and delivery and early results. It helps identify which features of the program are working well and which are not. Like WVL itself, a formative evaluation is all about learning and positive change.

Evaluation scope

The evaluation focused on the Women's Voice and Leadership program as a whole, from when it was announced in 2017 to March 2021 (end of FY 2020-21).[1] The evaluation focused on **three main components** :

1. **Global Affairs Canada's organizational structures, policies, systems, processes, practices, capacities and resources** as they pertain to WVL.
2. **WVL as a global program**, including its overarching design features, implementation modalities, governance, coordination, technical guidance and direction, and MEL.
3. **WVL projects**: 31 of the 33[2] projects were included in the scope of the evaluation. Half of them were selected for case studies (see Annex 3).

In addition, the evaluation explored relevant factors and dimensions in WVL operating contexts, including in Canada, globally and in the implementing countries.

Evaluation purpose and objectives

This was a **formative evaluation.** It aimed to generate insights, findings, learnings and recommendations for Global Affairs Canada and WVL stakeholders. It was intended to inform evidence-based decisions in support of meeting objectives, and to contribute to shared knowledge on how to best support WROs and their movements through feminist programming in the future. The evaluation had three objectives:

1. To determine if and to what extent the department was "fit for purpose" to support feminist programming that directly benefits WROs, in particular WVL.
2. To determine if WVL's design features and implementation modalities were relevant and appropriate to address the diverse needs of women's rights organizations and movements, and how it adapted to COVID-19 challenges.
3. To determine the extent to which WVL's interventions made progress toward results and what factors supported or hindered progress to date.

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[1] Most WVL projects started implementation in FY 2019-30. As a consequence, the evaluation was mostly able to assess project implementation and early results for fiscal years 2019-20 and 2020-21. The WVL program set-up and design, and whether GAC was fit-for-purpose for WVL were assessed throughout the timeframe of the evaluation, that is, from the 2017 announcement to March 31, 2021.

[2] WVL Côte d'Ivoire and the regional WVL project in the Middle East were not included in the evaluation because their implementation had not started at the time of the evaluation design.

Evaluation approach

Evaluation team

The evaluation was conducted in-house by the Evaluation Division (PRA). The core evaluation team was supported by a feminist evaluation advisor and four teams of local evaluators in Guatemala, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. They ensured the use of culturally appropriate approaches and methods, and they helped contextualize knowledge. See Annex 3 for details.

The evaluation team's core values involved active engagement with difference and diversity. Team members had rich and diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skills sets and they brought their different viewpoints to the evaluation process.

Evaluation advisory bodies

Three bodies played an advisory role to the evaluation and ensured the participation and engagement of evaluation stakeholders, both internal and external to the department. Two of these were existing WVL governance bodies: WVL's DG Advisory Committee and WVL's Coordination Group. The third body, the Evaluation Reference Group, was created specifically for the purpose of the evaluation; it included representation from departmental staff, implementing partners and WROs.

Overall evaluation approach

The evaluation approach was grounded in two evaluation theories: Feminist Evaluation and Utilization Focused Evaluation. The evaluation was guided by a "do no harm" ethic, cognizant of the unequal power relations that often exist between evaluators and participants.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, and employed participatory and collaborative approaches. The evaluation team used different types of triangulation to ensure the validity of findings: data triangulation, methodological triangulation and investigator triangulation. Data analysis was systematic and iterative. Qualitative data were coded using NVivo software and quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The evaluation used participatory sense-making[1] to engage evaluation stakeholders in discussing findings and potential recommendations. This participatory approach ensured that multiple perspectives and voices were reflected in the final evaluation products while at the same time contributing to the credibility of the evaluation approach.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation focused on three main questions as shown below. Innovation and the response to COVID-19 were addressed as cross-cutting themes. The questions and sub-questions addressed OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence and effectiveness and, partially, addressed efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation questions align to WVL's program level learning questions.

Evaluation issue	Questions
Global Affairs Canada's fit-for-purpose for feminist programming and providing direct support to WROs	1. How has Global Affairs Canada as an organization operationalized feminist values and principles in support of WVL, including providing direct support to WROs?
Relevance and appropriateness of program/project design and implementation	2. To what extent are WVL's design features and implementation modalities addressing the funding and capacity gaps of the diverse range of targeted WROs in different contexts?
Effective implementation and progress toward results	3. What early progress has been made by WVL projects in different contexts toward achieving intended results? What has worked well and what hasn't in implementing WVL projects in different contexts?

[1] Participatory sense-making is a process by which evaluation participants work collaboratively with evaluators to make sense of data, including prioritizing findings.

A feminist evaluation

Diverse voices informed the evaluation

The diagram below shows the diversity of stakeholders consulted by the core evaluation team for the purpose of this evaluation. In line with feminist principles, the evaluation team put a strong emphasis on hearing from participating WROs, through interviews and focus group discussions.
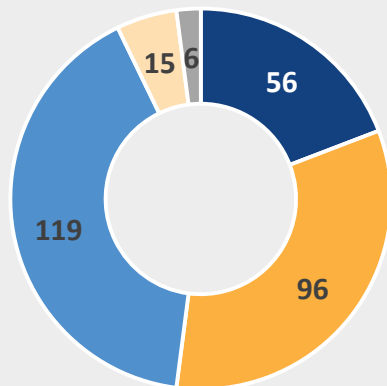
- GAC staff
- Implementing partner staff
- WRO representatives
- Experts
- Other donors

Integration of a feminist evaluation lens

This evaluation modelled feminist evaluation principles and approaches throughout the evaluation process. This is in line with the Feminist International Assistance Policy, and with WVL's MEL Workplan. The approach was informed by a theoretical and academic framework[1], and was applied using a practical, useful and empowering process. The evaluation process and its products aimed to support social change and encouraged reflection and learning both internally and externally to the organization.

A feminist evaluation :

- is grounded in three core feminist beliefs: 1. there should be equity amongst humans, 2. gender inequity leads to social injustice and 3. gender-based inequalities are systemic;

- provides a way to think about and guide an evaluation that values the process as much as the findings;

- encourages reflective, empowering, collaborative and participatory processes that actively support social justice agendas; and

- aims to provide a platform for women's voices and those of others who are often unheard.

Examples of the integration of feminist principles in the different phases of the evaluation are provided below.

Design
Inputs from the full diversity of stakeholders informed the design.

Governance
The evaluation reference group included staff, partners and WRO members.

Data
The evaluation used and valued different forms of data from diverse stakeholders.

Deep dives
Led by local researchers and co-designed with project stakeholders to reflect their needs.

Sense making
The evaluation process included participatory and inclusive sense-making workshops.

Evaluation products
Diverse evaluation products were tailored to the knowledge needs of different users.

[1] Donna Podems' Principles-focused Evaluation - Feminist Evaluation Framework (2019), based on Sharon Brisolara's feminist tenets (2014)

Methodology

Six lines of evidence were used in the evaluation.

Departmental and program level document review

The evaluation included a **document review of Global Affairs Canada documents**:

- the Feminist International Assistance Policy and related documents
- documents on departmental policies, systems, processes, etc., relevant to the WVL program
- documents on other departmental programs and initiatives that directly support WROs; and
- WVL program-level documents, including memos, reports, guidance, templates, tools, minutes.

WVL key informant interviews

A total of **81 semi-structured individual and small group interviews** were conducted with a sample of WVL stakeholders:

- Current and former staff and decision makers directly involved in the WVL program or in a support function (e.g., MGS, DPI, SGS, SGA)
- Current and former WVL project team leaders (PTLs) at headquarters and in the field.
- Other GAC staff (e.g. KFM)
- Implementing partners (IPs)
- Project monitors

All interviews were conducted using virtual platforms. Additional interviews were conducted for the environmental scan and for each deep dive.

Case studies: deep dives and desk dives

The evaluation included **deep dives**, or in-depth case studies, of **four WVL projects**: in Guatemala, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. The deep dives were led by local feminist evaluators who conducted data collection in-country, including interviews, surveys, focus group discussions and document reviews. The deep dives were co-developed and implemented with project stakeholders, used feminist and participatory methods, and included a capacity-building and knowledge-sharing component.

The evaluation also included **desk dives** of **12 WVL projects**. These were lighter-touch case studies conducted remotely by the core evaluation team. Desk dives included remote interviews and focus groups with departmental staff and with implementing partners, **10 focus group discussions with selected WROs** and detailed reviews of project documents.

Project level document review

The evaluation team conducted a **standardized and systematic review** of key documents from **31 WVL projects**, focusing on:

- contribution agreements and PIPs,
- management summary reports,
- semi-annual and annual reports, and
- statistics on disbursements provided by the chief financial officer.

More in-depth and tailored document reviews were conducted for the projects selected for the deep dives and desk dives case studies.

Online Surveys

The evaluation included **two online surveys**: one for WVL implementing partners (28 responses received representing 26 countries) and the other for PTLs (30 responses received representing 23 countries).

The surveys covered issues such as WVL program design and implementation; departmental systems; GAC processes and requirements; program-level guidance, support and requirements; relationships between the department and implementing partners; adaptations related to COVID-19; and integration of feminist principles and intersectionality.

Environmental scan

The evaluation team conducted an environmental scan of good practices in feminist funding to WROs, and an analysis of similar initiatives by other donors.

This included:

- **15 interviews with feminist funding actors** (women's funds, other bilateral donors, think tanks);
- literature review of **19 reports and papers** on feminist funding; and
- In-depth reviews of **five programs** by other bilateral donors providing direct support to WROs.

Evaluation limitations and mitigation measures

Limitations

Mitigation measures

Limitations related to COVID-19. Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 limited the ability of the evaluation team to engage in face-to-face interactions with evaluation participants. This particularly limited the inclusion in the evaluation sample of WROs with lower or more difficult connectivity. It also made the use of participatory approaches particularly challenging. The core evaluation team was not allowed to travel, and local researchers also faced considerable limitations to travelling and in-person gatherings, with variations depending on the country. The most affected country was Sri Lanka, where data collection coincided with a lock down.

Limited project performance data. Most WVL projects had limited time to implement their activities, in general less than two years, with significant disruptions due to COVID-19. The types of results sought by WVL projects, including organizational strengthening, movement building and policy changes, require a long timeframe to concretize. Incremental changes that build toward these longer-term changes were hard to capture using WVL's common project performance indicators. For these reasons, performance data were limited for many projects.

Competing demands on WVL stakeholders. The WVL Program had an extensive MEL plan with many activities at the project and program level. At the same time as the evaluation was taking place, WVL stakeholders also had to engage in other MEL activities, including project reporting, external monitoring missions and learning events. Many of these activities employed participatory methods in line with WVL's feminist approach, which by their nature tend to require more time for those involved.

Optimizing use of virtual platforms. The evaluation relied extensively on virtual platforms for consultations, data collection and knowledge sharing, and participatory approaches were adapted to a virtual environment. This approach allowed the evaluation to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. The evaluation also maximized the use of existing data, particularly from implementing partners and project level monitors who had better access to hard-to-reach WROs. Local evaluators used a combination of remote and in-person methods, where possible. Their close collaboration with local stakeholders allowed them to select the appropriate platforms for each context.

An adapted approach to assessing results. The evaluation adapted its approach to assessing results to the early stages of implementation of many projects and their related challenges in reporting against common indicators. This approach combined available project performance data, based on common indicators, with qualitative evidence of incremental progress along the three complementary pathways of change identified in the WVL theory of change. This approach allowed the evaluation team to have a fairer and more in-depth understanding of progress to date and of the factors affecting it.

Coordination and opt-in approach. During the scoping phase, the evaluation team worked closely with MGS and partners to clarify a calendar of MEL activities, to limit overlap. The timeline of the evaluation was extended to provide additional time for consultations and participatory sense-making. The evaluation took a deliberate approach to ensuring that all participation in evaluation activities was voluntary, including in case study sampling, focus groups and the reference group. The evaluation team also relied on other available MEL data, to avoid overburdening participants.

**Findings -
Global Affairs Canada
"fit-for-purpose" for
feminist programming
and providing direct
support to local WROs**

Photo credit: Association of Peasant Women of
Guaimía (Asociación de Mujeres Campesinas de
Guamía) – WVL Colombia

Corporate capacities, systems and processes

On the heels of the FIAP, WVL had a unique vision and high visibility, and was meant to be catalytic for the rest of the department. This positioning, however, led to increased scrutiny, time pressure, and rapidly evolving guidance during the formative stages of the initiative.

The FIAP represented a window of opportunity for feminist programming. WVL was developed as a vehicle to operationalize FIAP's new policy priorities, in particular its strong commitment to seeing more money in the hands of local WROs. The high visibility and profile of the initiative allowed for a strong push to "do things differently" within the department. It also led to a high level of scrutiny, tight timelines and the need to adapt to changing directives as more details of how the FIAP would be implemented took shape.[1]

When WVL was launched, departmental capacities, processes and systems were not sufficiently fit-for-purpose for feminist programming and direct support to local WROs.

When WVL was launched, there were several obstacles to operationalizing the program's feminist vision of providing direct support to local women's rights organizations. These challenges, often faced for the first time, related to reconciling the existing policy framework (i.e. Treasury Board Policy on Transfer Payments, and departmental grants and contributions regulations) with the increased flexibility and risk appetite needed to channel as much support as possible directly to local WROs.

At the time the program was being developed, the department's overall capacity for delivering feminist programming was limited. Specifically, there was an evolving understanding of how a feminist approach should be applied to program design, implementation and MEL. There was also very limited understanding of the practical implications of a feminist programming approach on the department's systems, processes and ways of working. This was true for all the different parts of the department involved in WVL, including DPI, MGS, geographic branches, the Grants and Contributions Management Bureau (SGD) and the minister's and deputy ministers' offices (oMINE and oDME). Finally, the department did not have a policy document to provide strategic direction on localization of aid and expectations related to partnering with local organizations.

The desire to move quickly from announcement (June 2017) to implementation (the first group of WVL projects was expected to be approved in December 2017) did not allow for a systematic assessment of existing challenges and possible adaptations of corporate systems and tools. It also did not allow for an assessment of existing and required capacity. These pressures led to a rather ad hoc and responsive approach to addressing challenges as they emerged over time, and as they continued to evolve. They also led to significant demands on existing capacities and resources of the main divisions involved (i.e. MGS, DPI, SGS/SGA).

[1] In early 2018, when several WVL projects were already in advanced phases of design, new requirements were introduced by oMINE, including an increased focus on choosing women's funds and local WROs as implementing partners, the requirement that 50 percent of WVL overall funding be allocated to Sub-Saharan Africa, and the requirement that 50 percent of project funds go directly to local WROs.

Adaptations and challenges

"WVL is a silo of feminism in an organization that is not feminist."
-Implementing partner interview

"There have been huge efforts to adapt the tools (...). These are good strides. But this is not taking a feminist approach to funding. It is rather tweaking existing tools to adapt."
-GAC HQ staff interview

"We have stretched the rules a bit and given more flexibility. The tension between feminist programming and demanding results still remains in our processes. We have implemented the principles that were workable within the scope of our obligations"
-GAC HQ staff interview

Several solutions and adaptions to corporate processes and tools were developed for WVL to realize the innovative aspects of the program.

DPI, SGD and MGS made significant efforts to identify and develop standardized solutions to be used by geographic programs for WVL projects. Many adaptations were made to departmental tools and templates to operationalize WVL's vision into selection processes, contribution agreements, project implementation plans, risk management, and performance and financial reporting. These changes allowed for innovative elements of WVL to take shape, including the possibility for implementing partners to provide grants to selected beneficiary organizations, known as on-granting, and the possibility to include core funding as an eligible expense (i.e. salaries and operating costs). In several cases, however, these changes did not go far enough to meet WVL's vision (i.e. in relation to selection processes and risk management). In addition, some of these adaptations added extra burden on implementing partners (e.g. for reporting). For more details, see Annex 4.

The department's approach to risk management did not sufficiently change for WVL, thus limiting GAC's ability to effectively fund local women's rights organizations.

Funding local and smaller organizations either directly (as implementing partners) or indirectly (through on-granting) required a higher risk tolerance than what Global Affairs Canada and the Government of Canada were comfortable with. Within the limits set by existing policy, some innovative solutions were introduced for WVL, including, in the case of on-granting, agreeing not to audit ultimate beneficiaries except in cases of suspected fraud. The overall approach to risk management, however, did not change significantly for WVL. The perceived risk of working with new partners led to some conservative choices in partner selection and additional financial reporting requirements for organizations with lower capacity. Risk management and audit clauses related to on-granting also led to transferring the burden of risk to implementing partners. Not all implementing partners were equally capable and willing to shoulder this risk, which in turn led to choosing supposedly less risky WROs as beneficiaries.

The approach chosen for partner selection did not fully succeed in diversifying WVL's implementing partners and modelling feminist principles of inclusivity and transparency.

The overall approach to partner selection chosen for WVL, and the mechanism used (almost exclusively department initiated), was intended to allow for 1. more diversity in implementing partners, 2. better alignment with WVL's feminist vision, and 3. a shorter timeframe for selection compared to an open call. The selection process ultimately fell short of achieving these three objectives. Overall, the selection process was perceived as less transparent and inclusive by prospective implementing partners, it resulted in more than half of WVL projects being allocated to Canadian NGOs, and it experienced a few delays due to evolving requirements for the identification, application and memo approval stages .

Findings - WVL's program approach and set-up

Photo credit: Concerned Women for Family Development (CWFD) – WVL Bangladesh

WVL's program approach

Benefits of WVL's program approach

According to the survey results, **93 percent** of implementing partners and **83 percent** of GAC project team leaders considered WVL's program approach to be useful or very useful.

According to project team leaders, implementing partners and participating WROs, the benefits of WVL's program approach included:

- the possibility of cross learning and of sharing information, resources and experiences across projects;

- the ability to tell a coherent and more meaningful story of impact than with individual projects;

- clearer branding and stronger positioning of Canada as a feminist donor;

- clear direction and stronger programmatic clarity on how to design and implement feminist projects; and

- stronger motivation for implementing partners and participating WROs, as they could see themselves as being part of a bigger picture, beyond their specific project.

An overarching program approach was successful in making WVL's feminist vision a reality and in ensuring the cohesiveness of an otherwise highly decentralized initiative.

WVL's "program approach" included a common set of features across projects and an overarching program architecture. With 33 projects managed by geographic programs, the program approach allowed for a high degree of cohesiveness across projects, despite the decentralized nature of WVL. As the first feminist pilot program for Global Affairs Canada, this approach also allowed the department to provide clear direction to the different projects on how to operationalize WVL's feminist vision, from their identification to implementation.

Consulted stakeholders, including GAC staff and implementing partners, indicated that an ambitious program approach was needed to ensure that both the department and individual projects would "walk the talk" of feminist programming as much as possible. They also reported several additional benefits of a program approach, as shown in the sidebar.

WVL's program approach was hard to implement because of the complexity and newness of its design and vision, the high number of stakeholders involved, and the evolving policy environment.

The work to build a coherent WVL program across the many divisions involved was laborious and intensive. Because of the large number of different branches and divisions involved, WVL required significant time and resources for coordination. This particularly affected DPI and MGS, because of their coordination and direction roles, but also project team leaders, who had to navigate the specific WVL requirements in addition to their usual responsibilities as officers in charge of bilateral projects.

Furthermore, WVL had to build all its guidance, templates and tools almost from scratch, as WVL was GAC's first feminist pilot to provide direct support to WROs. At the same time, departmental priorities were evolving as the FIAP went from announcement to operationalization. Among consulted stakeholders at GAC there was a strong sense that the program was always a work in progress. One GAC stakeholder expressed their belief that "with WVL, we were building the plane while we were flying it." This had implications in terms of the timeliness and clarity of the guidance provided and contributed to several delays and inefficiencies in the initial phases of the program (e.g. memo approvals, contribution agreement negotiations, PIP development). For example, during the selection stage, new guidance kept emerging around types of partners and regions of focus after initial conversations with potential partners were already under way, thus leading to some course corrections. New requirements in the memo approval template and in the contribution agreement templates (i.e. in relation to budgets) also emerged, as some of the projects had already begun these processes.

Program direction and guidance

	Strongly agree	Agree
DPI	23%	30%
MGS - GE specialists	60%	30%
MGS - WVL team	53%	37%

Implementing partners were generally positive about the support and guidance received from PTLs, the MGS WVL team and other GAC staff in country. In a few cases implementing partners felt that the support provided by PTLs (8 percent) and other staff in country (11 percent) was not relevant, timely and useful.

	Strongly agree	Agree
PTL	46%	32%
MGS - WVL team	25%	43%
Other GAC staff in…	29%	32%
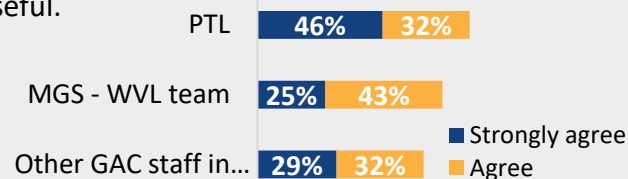
The partnership between DPI and MGS was key to allowing WVL to take off and shape up as a feminist program and to build a toolbox for feminist programming and for providing direct support to local WROs within the department.

Both DPI and MGS contributed significantly to operationalizing the vision for WVL and implementing its program approach. Evidence from interviews shows that their contributions to WVL were considered highly valuable by both project team leaders PTLs) and implementing partners. DPI played a crucial role at the onset of WVL in creating a coordination structure and tools. DPI also effectively liaised with corporate services to negotiate adaptations to existing systems and templates and developed operational guidance for the projects. MGS provided a wealth of technical guidance and direction, particularly in operationalizing the feminist vision of WVL. The hard work and dedication of these key players resulted in building the "scaffolding" needed to implement WVL. It also led to building a toolbox of both operational and technical guidance that was regarded as a unique feature of WVL.

Survey and interview data show that PTLs and implementing partners overall appreciated the general quality and relevance of this guidance, in relation to integrating feminist programming principles in project design, implementation and MEL. For both PTLs and implementing partners, guidance and direction on innovation and communications were considered the least helpful.

There were some concerns about the accessibility of the guidance provided. There was no repository of key guidance documents accessible to implementing partners, since the program's wiki was only for GAC staff, and the online WVL Learning Hub only launched in Fall 2021. Newer PTLs were also not fully aware of the extent of the guidance developed and available to them.

WVL project team leaders mostly played their role effectively, although not always consistently, with implementing partners.

With some degree of variation, implementing partners were generally appreciative of the support, openness and flexibility of their PTLs, including in navigating the needed changes and adaptions due to COVID-19. There was, however, a reported lack of consistency among PTLs in providing specific guidance (e.g. on admissible expenses). This is not surprising given the decentralized nature of WVL.

Interview and case study data show that there were variations in how PTLs understood and embraced WVL's additional technical and operational requirements and feminist approach. PTLs overall reported that WVL required a steep learning curve for themselves and a different way to approaching their role than more traditional projects. For these reasons, the frequent rotation among PTLs, which is typical for the department, posed specific challenges for WVL.

Capacities, governance and coordination

WVL's governance structure

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│ Coordination │ │ Group (discontinued)│
│    Group     │ │                     │
└──────────────┘ └────────────────────┘
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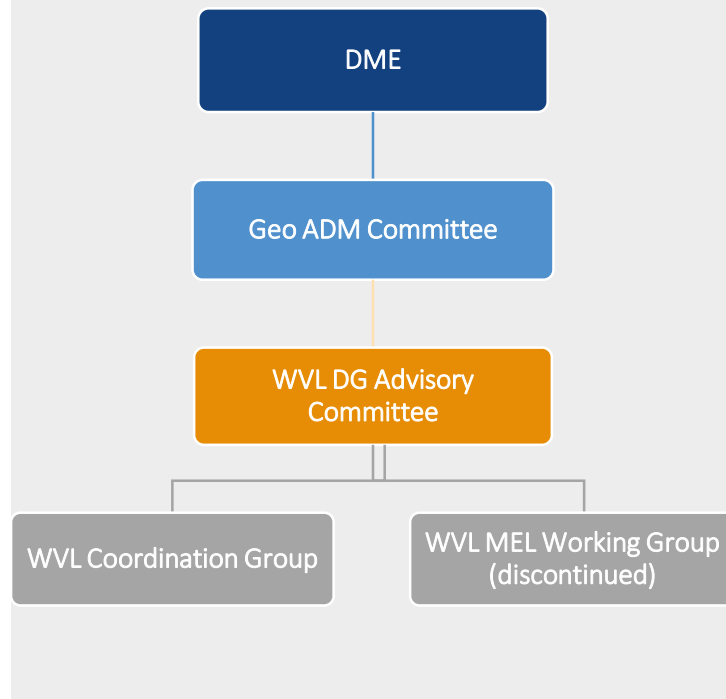
MGS' existing mandate, capacities and resources were not well aligned with its expected leadership role for WVL.

While WVL was a highly demanding program for all parties involved, it was particularly challenging for MGS, given its existing mandate, capacities and resources. MGS' role in WVL went beyond its traditional focus on providing gender equality expertise and advice to programs and pushed this team into new areas of work (i.e. feminist MEL, program coordination). MGS' capacity was significantly stretched to respond to WVL needs. At the program level, a very small, dedicated WVL team was responsible for overall program direction, MEL and technical guidance. At the project level, WVL projects required a heavier lift for gender equality specialists than standard projects. In addition, significant turnover in MGS' leadership negatively affected strategic direction and corporate memory. The transition in February 2021 that led to MGS assuming full responsibility for coordinating WVL put an additional burden on this team, without (at the time of writing) additional resources or revised mandates, particularly in relation to liaising and coordinating with geographic branches.

WVL's governance structures were effective in ensuring working level coordination, but were less successful in providing strategic leadership and management buy-in.

WVL's governance and coordination structures were set up to ensure cohesiveness across the many actors involved in WVL, as well as strategic leadership and accountabilities. At the working level, a coordination group was created, including project team leaders and staff from DPI, MGS and other relevant divisions. Working level coordination was overall a success for WVL. The coordination group played a very important role for WVL throughout its different phases, bringing all different actors around the same table and being a platform for sharing guidance, tools, knowledge and experiences. On the other hand, WVL's governance structure did not fully support effective strategic leadership. By design, WVL had diffused leadership, with DPD and MGD having shared responsibility for WVL as a "program," and geographic bureaus having ultimate accountability for WVL projects. A directors general (DG) advisory committee was created to increase coordination at the DG level. While it met regularly during 2018, once projects were approved and announced it was underutilized and did not fully play its strategic role. Rotation among DGs also negatively affected ownership and leadership.

An additional challenge was the lack of involvement of management from geographic divisions in WVL's governance and coordination structures (below the DG level). This created a gap in communication between the more strategic level and the working level. It also made it challenging to translate WVL's strategic-level feminist vision and approach into the priorities and working methods of the bilateral programs implementing WVL projects. This put project team leaders in difficult positions when WVL guidance was at odds with their own Geo program priorities and approaches.

Monitoring evaluation and learning (MEL)

In February 2019, the Sub-Saharan Africa Branch and MGS co-hosted a workshop that explored feminist approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning. The workshop took place in Accra, Ghana, and involved over 57 participants from Global Affairs Canada and nine implementing partners. The workshop helped create a shared understanding of feminist principles, and their implications for MEL in the WVL Program.

Photo Credit: Global Affairs Canada

The program-level feminist MEL strategy was a unique feature of WVL that created stronger cohesiveness across projects. However, it was difficult to operationalize.

WVL developed and implemented a feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Strategy and Workplan. According to the strategy, project-level monitoring and evaluation fed into program-level corporate reporting through common indicators. The MEL strategy and workplan also included opportunities for partners to share experiences in global and regional learning platforms. A MEL working group was convened to help develop this strategy and was discontinued soon after the strategy's approval.

WVL took a very innovative and deliberate approach to feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning that embodied principles of inclusion, participation and empowerment. WVL's feminist MEL strategy created a sense of cohesiveness and positioned WVL to be able to tell a coherent story about results achieved.

MGS worked from the onset of the initiative to build a common understanding of feminist MEL for project team leaders and implementing partners through tip sheets, workshops and specific guidance, such as on feminist monitoring. MGS also provided guidance to PTLs on how to make existing reporting templates and processes more feminist, such as when reporting results during COVID-19.

However, the MEL strategy, workplan and related tools took a long time to be developed and approved, which made them somewhat out of sync with individual project needs. Learning activities had to be scaled back and adapted because of limited available resources within MGS, and because of COVID-19 restrictions. Some learning activities took a very long time to take off; for example, given the limitations of GAC IT systems, the online Learning Hub was only launched by MGS and Oxfam Canada in Fall 2021 following an extensive development process. Having such a platform to connect across WVL projects was of great interest to evaluation participants and would have been beneficial in the early days of the program. As of March 2022, the hub had more than 300 members, a strong indication of its relevance and of its potential.

WVL's MEL strategy, workplan and tools were also very ambitious. They included an exhaustive menu of activities and components, with some possible overlap. They were overall deemed burdensome by PTLs and implementing partners. In addition, WVL's specific reporting requirements, in particular the standard indicators report, added extra burden for implementing partners and WROs.

Despite MGS's efforts to date, implementing partners and WROs, and to a lesser extent PTLs, voiced a strong need for more guidance and clarity on feminist MEL, and for more opportunities for cross-learning across WVL projects. At the same time, they also voiced a need to reduce the burden on implementing partners and WROs concerning MEL activities and requests, and simplifying reporting requirements .

Findings - Relevance and appropriateness of WVL's design and implementation
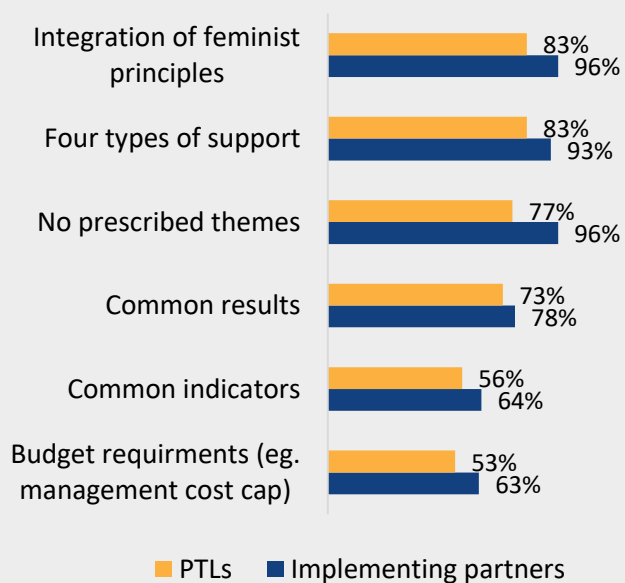

Photo credit: Equality Fund and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice – WVL Caribbean

Design features

Stakeholders' views on WVL design features

Survey respondents were asked whether the various components of WVL's design were beneficial in their projects. Most respondents felt these components were indeed beneficial, with more mixed views in relation to common indicators and budget requirements.

"To what extent are the following design features beneficial to your WVL project?"

Design feature	PTLs	Implementing partners
Integration of feminist principles	83%	96%
Four types of support	83%	93%
No prescribed themes	77%	96%
Common results	73%	78%
Common indicators	56%	64%
Budget requirments (eg. management cost cap)	53%	63%

■ PTLs ■ Implementing partners

Participating women's rights organizations greatly appreciated that WVL did not prescribe thematic priorities, allowing them to focus on what mattered most to their communities.

WVL projects did not prescribe thematic priorities that would limit the scope of women's rights organizations' (WROs) programming. This was a feature that was universally appreciated by the WROs participating in evaluation focus groups and deep dives. Participants expressed how their experience with WVL contrasted strongly with their experiences in other projects, where they felt compelled to respond to the priorities of their donor. WVL allowed these organizations to continue with their existing programming, expand the scope of their work and develop new initiatives that were responsive to the needs of their communities. Allowing WROs to define their own thematic priorities contributed to realizing the program's feminist principles of ownership and participation. WROs were able to define the priorities for their initiatives and for their respective projects, and to respond to emerging needs in their communities.

The four support modalities common to all WVL projects allowed projects to effectively address the diverse needs of WROs with sufficient flexibility to adapt them to local realities.

All WVL projects were required to include four types of support: multi-year funds; fast, flexible and responsive funds; organizational capacity building; and network and alliance building. Taken together, these design components allowed WVL projects to provide different types of support to a diverse range of WROs. The combination of these different types of support in one project allowed WVL to respond to different but often concurrent needs among WROs.

Despite these common elements, projects allowed substantial flexibility. WVL implementing partners were able to shape the designs of their WVL projects to respond to local needs and priorities. As a result, the projects adopted a wide range of delivery models. Even the common design features were interpreted in several ways. Fast, flexible and responsive funds and networking support in particular took on diverse interpretations. No one model stood out as the best, with different approaches serving different purposes in each context. See Annexes 5 and 6 for more details.

Meeting the needs of WROs

WVL projects supported women's rights organizations representing diverse constituencies, including:

Human rights defenders

Lesbian, transgender and other gender-diverse women

Survivors of gender based violence

Indigenous women

Domestic or migrant workers

Rural women

Women living with HIV/AIDS

Racial and ethnic minorities

Sex workers

Women with disabilities
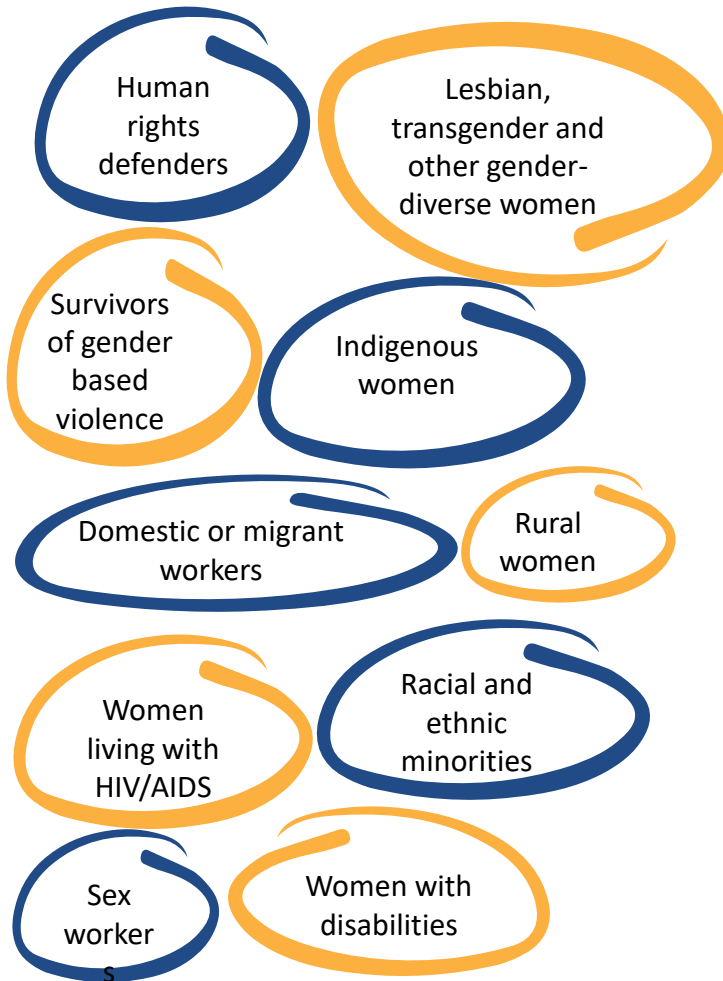
WVL projects successfully targeted diverse women's rights organizations representing the multiple intersecting identities of women and gender-diverse people.

WVL projects reached a diversity of women's rights organizations (WROs), reflecting the diversity of women's identities. They also focused on a broad variety of issues and themes in keeping with the needs in their context. The projects adopted good practices to identify and select participating WROs. Projects conducted extensive scoping and mapping exercises to understand the context and issues for WROs in their country. These exercises were used to inform the selection criteria and targeting for multi-year and fast, flexible and responsive funds. For example, WVL Kenya compiled a comprehensive WROs mapping that is now hosted on their project website.

Some projects designated different categories of multi-year grants in acknowledgement of the fact that WROs had diverse characteristics that could limit their ability to secure donor funds. For example, WVL Burkina Faso and WVL Kenya defined categories of multi-year grants for both emerging and established WROs. Others, like WVL Guatemala, chose to support large network-based organizations that then worked with their local grassroots constituencies.

Many projects succeeded in supporting small, nascent WROs representing marginalized communities. In several countries this included organizations representing transgender and gender-diverse women. This was exemplified by WVL Caribbean, which featured specific multi-year and fast, flexible and responsive funds for LBTQI+ organizations.

WVL projects struggled to reach informal organizations, and, in some contexts, organizations representing women with disabilities and the LBTQI+ community.

While WVL projects had considerable success in reaching a diversity of WROs, many projects struggled to support informal or unregistered organizations. In some cases, this was because of local laws that restricted unregistered organizations from receiving foreign funding. In other cases, this was because of the eligibility criteria put in place by the implementing partner. As a result, few WVL projects were able to support informal organizations. This meant that some groups of women were underrepresented or excluded, including women with disabilities. Groups representing the LBTQI+ community were also excluded in several cases, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to a combination of local laws, informality and stigmatization.

Design and implementation challenges

WVL South Africa is being implemented by Gender Links, a local women's organization. During the multi-year funding application process, Gender Links staff helped WROs develop and submit their proposals electronically. This reflected an ongoing approach to accompaniment and hands-on capacity building that was greatly appreciated by WROs. For a local NGO with limited human resources, however, it proved taxing.

Photo Credit: Gender Links

The design and requirements of WVL projects were complex, and they were challenging to manage for both new and established partners and project officers.

WVL projects were complex for both implementing partners and GAC staff to manage. The program's standard design features and specific requirements, combined with the unique challenges of supporting WROs in developing countries, made project management difficult.

The inclusive, participatory and empowering processes at the heart of WVL's feminist approach to project design and implementation were inherently time- and resource-intensive for all actors involved. The WVL Program provided extensive guidance on how to ensure that all stages of the projects reflected these principles. WVL projects were mostly enthusiastic and effective adopters of these approaches, but this came at a cost. The most common challenges reported by both implementing partners and project team leaders were respecting project timelines and managing the extra burden of work, particularly for participants with lower capacity (such as some of the WROs supported by WVL).

Each project included multiple support and granting mechanisms, and management of relationships with large numbers of grantees. Many projects also included local intermediaries, leading to even further complexity. WVL Indonesia, for example, provided multi-year grants to five national WROs, who in turn provided capacity-building support to 79 grassroots organizations. Providing tailored support to numerous and diverse WROs, and doing so in a manner that embodied feminist principles, was challenging for some partners and departmental staff. Ensuring financial due diligence for such a large number of grantees, many of whom had limited experience managing donor funds, was also demanding for WVL implementing partners. In the cases of WVL Caribbean and WVL Myanmar, the implementing partners chose to restrict fast, flexible and responsive funds to their existing multi-year grantees, to limit the due diligence burden.

The WVL Program required that at least 50 percent of each project's budget went directly to local WROs and imposed a cap on management costs. This was a well-intentioned design feature consistent with the program's goals. However, adhering to these requirements while providing an adequate level of support to WROs proved challenging in some cases, especially where multiple intermediaries were involved and in WVL projects with relatively smaller budgets.

Design and implementation challenges

Fast, flexible and responsive funds and COVID-19

The fast, flexible and responsive funding mechanism was a critical tool in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was used to support WROs to distribute personal protective equipment, conduct public health awareness activities and even to purchase IT equipment. Local WROs in Indonesia used their grants to plant community gardens as a source of food and income.

This mechanism was originally envisioned as a tool to support short initiatives that catalyze gender equality or to address threats or opportunities for WROs and activists. Using fast, flexible and responsive funding for relief activities demonstrated responsiveness, but for some stakeholders, it represented a shift away from the goal of enhancing gender equality.

Photo Credit: Hivos Indonesia

In the WVL design there was inadequate consideration of how to build the capacity of new, local partners to implement Canadian-funded projects.

While the WVL program itself is intended to build the capacity of local WROs, there were limited resources dedicated to building the capacity of new implementing partners. New partners faced a significant learning curve in adapting to the department's reporting requirements, financial management processes and project management expectations. Some partners did not have sub-granting experience and had to build these systems from scratch, or lacked sufficiently robust financial systems to satisfy GAC's reporting requirements.

New partners did participate in the financial capacity-building activity routinely provided by Global Affairs Canada, but there was no dedicated capacity-building component for new implementing partners as part of WVL. In many cases, project team leaders stepped in to provide ongoing support and guidance. This required extra effort and time commitment for the PTLs and implementing partners, especially during the initial phases of the projects. While many local partners excelled in implementing WVL projects, they did so despite significant challenges.

WVL allowed significant flexibility to adapt and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However this remained the most disruptive factor in WVL's implementation to date.

COVID-19 affected all projects, albeit to varying degrees, because of preventive measures, government restrictions or the effects of the virus on project staff, participants, and their families. For projects still in their early stages, the arrival of COVID-19 affected, among other things, finalizing their project implementation plans (PIPs) and selecting participating WROs and initial capacity assessments for grantees. For projects already in the initial stages of implementation, the pandemic resulted in a slowdown or even a temporary halt in activities. The transition to virtual work modalities, while allowing for the continuation of project activities, also presented challenges. Problems with access to the Internet and electricity prevented or reduced the participation of some WROs, especially in remote areas.

WVL stakeholders, including PTLs, implementing partners and participating WROs demonstrated significant adaptability and flexibility throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Several projects modified their activities and timelines, changed their communications strategies, made budget reallocations, facilitated access to fast, flexible and responsive funds and offered increased support to their WROs, including through specific COVID-19 top-ups. These changes were made possible by the inherently flexible nature of WVL's design; by the openness, adaptability and flexibility demonstrated by most PTLs, implementing partners and WROs; and by Global Affairs Canada's COVID-related measures to streamline processes.

Partnership approaches

Two examples of projects implemented by locally based partners are **WVL Ukraine**, implemented by the **Ukrainian Women's Fund**, and **WVL South Africa**, implemented by **Gender Links**, a local NGO. These local implementing partners, by being embedded in the local feminist movement, could support an extremely diverse group of smaller local WROs. The success of these projects was possible, among other things, because of the very productive relationship between implementing partners and project team leaders, and targeted efforts to strengthen the capacity of these local organizations to respond to GAC requirements.

Examples of Canadian NGOs working in close partnership with local organizations include **WVL Kenya** and **WVL Ghana**, implemented by **Care Canada** and **Plan International**, respectively. These organizations were successful in empowering leading local WROs as partners in project implementation, leveraging their knowledge, capacity and networks. In these cases, Canadian implementing partners shouldered some of the administrative burden related to working with Global Affairs Canada.

Given the different contexts in which WVL projects were implemented, diverse configurations of Canadian/international and local implementing partners were better able to effectively deliver on WVL's vision of strengthening and empowering local WROs.

Despite guidance to explore diverse implementing partners, including local women's rights organizations (WROs) and women's funds, more than half of the WVL projects were implemented by Canadian or international NGOs. While this may seem at odds with WVL's vision of strengthening and empowering local WROs, including by selecting them as implementing partners, the reality was more nuanced.

According to interview and survey data, there were two key success factors for WVL projects:

1) the implementing partner's understanding of gender equality issues in-country, connectedness to WROs and feminist movements, and understanding of feminist programming; and

2) the implementing partner's capacity to manage WVL projects and understand Global Affairs Canada requirements.

Unsurprisingly, the lack of one or both of the above were considered among the most important hindering factors for the success of WVL projects**.**

More seasoned Canadian partners tended to be more familiar with Global Affairs Canada's requirements but there were exceptions, especially among the country offices of some international and Canadian NGOs. New partners faced a significant learning curve but, in several cases, they were able to learn, adapt and deliver effectively on their projects. While local partners, in particular women's funds, tended to have a stronger connection with feminist movements in country, this was not always the case. Some Canadian/international NGOs were able to play an important bridging role with local women's movements, particularly in countries where the feminist movement was either less developed or more fragmented. Some were also very successful in integrating feminist principles in their programming and adapting their internal processes accordingly.

There is no strong evidence that one type of implementing partner was generally better than another in promoting WVL's vision of stronger and more sustainable WROs while being able to deliver effectively on project requirements. Depending on the contexts and on the resources available, two more effective models were emerging:

1) strong local implementing partners with significant support from GAC staff (particularly in the early phases of the program); and

2) international/Canadian partners working in close partnership with selected local organizations for project implementation.

Emerging strategies for…

Evaluation data did not point to one single type of implementing partner or implementation model as the most successful. The diversity of WVL projects contributes to the program's richness and responsiveness to local needs. However, the evaluation observed different strategies that were emerging as more conducive to operationalizing different aspects of WVL's vision and achieving objectives in different contexts.

… engaging the feminist movement

- Any type of implementing partner could embody feminist principles.
- Women's funds and local NGOs with strong feminist credentials could provide a direct link to the local feminist movement.
- Women's funds were uniquely situated in the global feminist funding ecosystem, being at the same time feminist activists and funders.

… engaging diverse WROs

- Local implementing partners could facilitate access to certain marginalized groups.
- Selection criteria for multi-year and fast, flexible and responsive funds could be tailored to allow more diverse WROs to succeed.
- Different tiers of grant recipients created opportunities for small WROs.
- Fiscal sponsorship could help to reach informal/unregistered WROs.

… effective implementation

- Canadian NGOs were, in general, accustomed to working within GAC's systems and reporting expectations. This was not always the case for their country offices.
- New partners could have more time to adapt to GAC's way of working; targeted support was required for their success.

… dealing with social conservatism

- Local partners could help to identify what terminology is appropriate for a given context, especially in countries where explicit references to feminism are frowned upon or rejected.
- The presence of an international partner could, in certain situations, lend legitimacy and shield local grantees from scrutiny.

… working in fragile states

- International NGOs were sometimes the only partners able to operate in these settings based on GAC requirements.
- Explicit strategies for security and safeguarding of grantees could be needed where threats exist.
- A "do no harm" approach could mean limiting the visibility of grantees.

… engaging a strong civil society

- International and Canadian NGOs could still have a role where civil society is strong but fractured.
- Engaging local partners in implementation could build their capacity and leverage their unique skills.
- Projects could engage in movement building from an early stage.

Innovation

WVL's Initiative to Foster Innovation in West and Central Africa

Led by the West and Central Africa Bureau (WWD), this initiative involved WVL projects in eight countries. The objectives of the pilot were to monitor, evaluate and learn from innovative activities or practices implemented by WVL projects, test innovations and measure what works and what doesn't, and share learning. This initiative was guided by learning questions and specific indicators to determine what innovation means to WROs, how GAC can best support innovation and if supporting innovation in a direct way leads to better results. At Global Affairs Canada, the Tiger Team (formed by WVL PTLs) was created for this purpose, but without additional or dedicated capacities. The Tiger Team collaboratively developed several guidance documents, most notably tip sheets on innovation and experimentation, and terms of reference for regional feminist monitors.

The pilot was perceived as very top-down by consulted stakeholders. It was also hampered by administrative constraints that prevented the hiring of a regional monitor who could have facilitated data collection and cross-learning. Individual projects responded by hiring their own monitors, who had begun to collect relevant data. Based on the data available to date, the evaluation was not able to demonstrate the added value of this pilot regarding its initial objectives.

While containing many innovative aspects, the WVL program overall did not have an explicit innovation strategy and approach.

The WVL Program was considered by most stakeholders to be an innovation in itself, because of its design features, implementation modalities and feminist approach. Because of this, many consulted stakeholders, including women's rights organizations, did not see a need for stand-alone innovation strategies and activities.

As a core commitment under the FIAP, innovation was mentioned in most WVL program documents as a cross-cutting theme and an important element to be integrated into all projects, but the program did not have an explicit and overarching innovation strategy. The only exception was the Initiative to Foster Innovation in West and Central Africa (the Innovation Pilot, see sidebar), which was developed and integrated after WVL was launched as an add-on to the original design and only applied to one region. While some specific guidance was developed by the pilot and shared with WVL projects, it was not widely known and used by WVL projects stakeholders. Confusion on the subject was expressed by many WVL stakeholders, including implementing partners and women's rights organizations, with some seeing innovation as a nebulous concept with little relevance for grassroots WROs. Outside of the Innovation Pilot participants, few GAC PTLs and implementing partners saw innovation as a priority for their WVL project.

A few WVL projects made deliberate efforts to integrate innovation, while most of them chose a more organic approach.

Some projects, mainly those part of the Innovation Pilot, made a deliberate effort to integrate innovation. Two trends emerged. Some projects (e.g. Ghana and Senegal) integrated innovation in a cross-cutting way, within their structures, processes, activities, monitoring and evaluation. Other projects (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] and Nigeria) established specific innovation funds for WROs to propose innovative projects and approaches. In these cases, allowing WROs to define and propose innovative elements/projects themselves was seen as a strength. It is important to note that several projects had not started their planned innovation-specific activities because of various implementation delays. These included a few projects (e.g. the Caribbean, Morocco, Peru and South Sudan) that intended to use dedicated funds to enhance innovation.

Consulted WROs mentioned many examples of how WVL allowed them to integrate what they considered as innovations into their projects. This included the new technologies used to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions, as well as social change innovations. This was mostly achieved organically, through WVL's different funding mechanisms and capacity strengthening activities, and not through dedicated innovation activities.

Findings - Alignment to feminist principles

Alignment to feminist principles

The WVL program and projects integrated feminist programming principles to varying degrees.

The evaluation team drew a list of ten principles for effective feminist programming from an environmental scan that included a literature review of best practices and guidance from relevant actors in the global feminist funding ecosystem. WVL—as a program—and approximately half of WVL projects (the 16 case study projects) were assessed against these principles. At the **program level**, WVL at least partially integrated **9 out of 10 principles**. The program only had poor alignment in terms of adapting Global Affairs Canada's internal systems and processes to the needs of local, particularly smaller, WROs. At the **project level**, there was **adequate alignment to five** of the principles and mixed levels of alignment to the other five principles; this was due to the diverse project designs, contexts and stakeholders involved. See Annex 7 for a more detailed explanation of the ratings.

Principle	Program-level Alignment	Project-level alignment
1. Transform unequal power relations embedded in funding practices by ensuring feminist leadership and grassroots involvement in project design and implementation	Adequate	Partial
2. Consider risk management and crisis response strategies to protect feminist activists in contexts of violence and insecurity	Adequate	Partial
3. Adapt funding priorities and practices to the needs of WROs and feminist activists, not the other way around	Adequate	Adequate
4. Select partner organizations based on their commitment to feminist principles, practices and policies, on their ability to represent the diversity of feminist movements and on their knowledge of the context in which the project is to be implemented	Partial	Adequate
5. Provide core, long-term funding as well as capacity-building support to WROs and feminist movements, including small grassroots and nascent organizations	Adequate	Adequate
6. Agree to medium to long-term programming cycles and focus on strategic-level outcomes that aim at larger societal change (transformational approach)	Partial	Partial
7. Adapt system and processes within the institution to be coherent with feminist principles and to be viable for small organizations to become and remain part of the program (due diligence, accountability, contracting, risk assessments, MEL)	Poor	Partial
8. Promote engagement from other donors, particularly through multi-stakeholder initiatives	Partial	Partial
9. Build on the expertise of activists and civil society actors involved in the feminist funding ecosystem	Adequate	Adequate
10. Promote movement building across regions and issues through programming, advocacy and policy dialogue	Adequate	Adequate

Findings - Early results

Early results[1]

Pillar 1 - Institutional strengthening of WROs

Perspectives from the field

WVL Bangladesh, implemented by Manusher Jonno Foundation, provides multi-year grants to 18 WROs. One of these is Diner Alo, an organization that supports members of the transgender community (*hijra*). As reported during focus groups discussions, WVL's support allowed WROs like Diner Alo to hire new staff, better equip their offices and refine organizational processes. They also became more comfortable engaging in online activities using tools like Zoom.

Photo Credit: Diner Alo

[1] Highlights of early results achieved by WVL's deep dives countries (Guatemala, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Ukraine) are provided in Annex 8

The majority of WVL projects made early progress toward strengthening the organizational capacity of supported women's rights organizations (WROs).

WVL projects have contributed to positive changes in participating WROs in terms of strengthening their organizational capacities. These changes were contributing to WROs becoming better managed and organized and, to a lesser extent, better able to manage risk. Examples of early results achieved under this pillar include:

- newly developed or improved documents, including strategic plans, communications plans, standard operating procedures, financial manuals, human resources strategies, succession plans;
- strengthened knowledge of accounting, financial management and MEL;
- more systematized internal processes (e.g. granting) and new or improved governance structures;
- improved access to and use of technology, and ability to pivot to virtual work in response to COVID-19;
- better-equipped, dedicated and safe work spaces.

The most successful projects under this pillar combined predictable multi-year core grants with tailored capacity building. They provided WROs with the time, funding and tools to identify and then address areas for organizational improvement. Many of the WROs who participated in evaluation focus groups considered the organizational strengthening to be one of the most valuable and unique contributions of WVL. Smaller, less formal organizations expressed how WVL allowed them to take important steps toward becoming more structured and confident (e.g. in Bangladesh, DRC, Senegal). More mature organizations reported how WVL gave them the opportunity to reflect on themselves, their strengths and weaknesses and accompanied them in restructuring/repositioning processes (e.g. in Indonesia, Peru).

Whether these early results will lead to more financially sustainable WROs remains unclear.

The organizational strengthening component of WVL was grounded in the assumption that increasing the organizational and programming capacity of WROs would contribute to stronger, more sustainable WROs. WROs were intended to become better managed, better able to mitigate risk, and able to secure sustained and diversified new sources of funding, given this increased capacity. While there was emerging evidence of WROs becoming better managed (as explained above), there was insufficient evidence at the time of the evaluation to determine whether WROs were more financially sustainable. There were some early examples of success, where WROs receiving WVL support were able to secure new funding from other donors (e.g. in DRC, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa). In these cases, WROs benefited from support to identify funding opportunities and develop funding proposals, and from the enhanced credibility that came with receiving funding from an international donor like Canada. In the Caribbean, steps to establish a long-term fund for WROs were under way. While these examples were encouraging, it is too early to say whether greater capacity would translate into increased and sustained funding for participating WROs.

Early results

Pillar 2 - Effective performance of WROs activities and programming to advance gender equality

Perspectives from the field

WVL DRC, implemented by the Carter Center, supports organizations like REFEDEF, which works to protect the rights of children and women (Le Reseau des femmes pour la protection des droits de l'enfant et de la femme). During a focus group discussion, REFEDEF reported how, with the support of WVL, network members carried out advocacy actions on a number of issues, including increasing women's political participation.

Photo Credit: REFEDEF RDC

WVL allowed participating WROs to continue, expand or strengthen their existing programming and to launch new programming to promote the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people, including in emergencies and in response to COVID-19.

In most countries, WVL projects provided women's rights organizations (WROs) with funding to implement diverse interventions according to the priorities and needs identified in their contexts and for their constituencies. A varied combination of multi-year and fast, flexible and responsive funds were used by grantees to deliver services, launch advocacy campaigns and raise awareness on a wide variety of gendered issues. Given that WVL supported such diverse WROs focusing on various thematic issues, generalizing these results is not possible.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WVL (and particularly the fast, flexible and responsive funds) enabled WROs to provide relief supplies to affected communities (e.g. food supplies, hygiene and sanitary products), to raise awareness on health measures and to advocate for a more gender-sensitive response to the pandemic from their governments. WROs who participated in evaluation focus groups were proud that WVL's support allowed them to "keep their lights on" and continue serving their constituencies during the pandemic. The pandemic highlighted the adaptability of WROs and their ability to be community-based respondents.

There were positive indications that, within a limited timeframe, WVL positioned local WROs to be more-effective change agents for their communities and constituencies. Approximately one third of projects reported increased reach of grantees' programming, and there were notable examples of successful advocacy initiatives led by WVL-supported WROs (e.g. in Bangladesh, Guatemala, Peru). Some projects helped WROs to gain new skills and knowledge to improve their programming. For example, WROs have become better able to leverage traditional and social media, and to integrate feminist approaches into their programming. Finally, in several countries (e.g. Bangladesh, Colombia, DRC, Senegal), WVL facilitated stronger relationships for WROs with public institutions at various levels. This was particularly important for grassroots WROs who had not had access to public authorities and decision makers before.

Despite these positive trends, some challenges limited the ability of WVL projects to support transformational gender equality results at scale. In some contexts (e.g. Ukraine), WROs indicated that the size of the grants was too small to have a large outreach, or significant impact. The overall timeframe of WVL projects, and more specifically the duration of most grants (less than two years), were also an obstacle to achieving, consolidating and maintaining transformational gender equality results, raising further questions about the sustainability of these results.

Early results

Pillar 3 - Effective performance of women's rights networks, alliances and movements in advancing gender equality

Perspectives from the field

WVL Kenya is being implemented by CARE Canada/Kenya in collaboration with four Kenyan partners, including Community Advocacy and Awareness (CRAWN) Trust. As part of their WVL activities, CRAWN organized the Women's Economic Forum 2021, attracting more than 13,000 online viewers.

Photo Credit: CRAWN Trust

Movement strengthening was the least clearly defined pillar and the one that saw the least progress in the initial years of project implementation, despite some positive early results.

There were significant variations in how WVL projects interpreted and approached network building and alliance strengthening. There was also less progress on Pillar 3 compared to the other two pillars. To some extent this was by design, with several projects adopting a sequenced approach: Pillar 3 activities were to start after Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 activities (in many cases, not in the initial years of project implementation that were the subject of this evaluation). This pillar was also significantly affected by COVID-19 restrictions, with many networking and alliance-building events being postponed or cancelled (e.g. in Sri Lanka, Ukraine). The impact of COVID-19 on movement building was particularly acute for rural women and others with limited access to the Internet. In a few cases, the pandemic helped implementing partners to accelerate progress, by using effectively virtual platforms (e.g. South Africa) and rallying around common COVID-19-related causes and joint advocacy initiatives (e.g. Bangladesh, Kenya, Mozambique).

Despite challenges, some positive results were starting to emerge under this pillar. Several WVL projects contributed to building stronger relationships among WVL grantees, with women's rights organizations (WROs) beginning to work more in synergy and less in competition with each other. This was achieved by creating spaces and opportunities for connections, including informally and using virtual platforms (e.g. Burkina Faso, the Caribbean, Colombia, DRC, Senegal, South Africa). During focus group discussions, WROs expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to connect with colleagues working on similar issues and drew encouragement from the successes of others. In Kenya and Peru, WVL contributed to more positive relationships among the local implementing partners. These stronger and more positive relationships could be seen as a stepping stone toward more effective feminist movements, particularly in countries with a historically fragmented rights movement (e.g. Peru) or in competitive environments (e.g. Kenya, Senegal).

A number of projects were providing funding directly to women's networks and providing support to build their organizational capacity. These projects reported progress toward strengthening women's rights networks' structures and making them more effective. This was, for example, the case of Ghana, Guatemala and Indonesia, where the focus of WVL was on strengthening selected networks through a combination of dedicated funds and capacity building. Grantees and implementing partners also worked together on major advocacy campaigns, magnifying the voices of those at the grassroots.

Given the diversity of approaches and the limited progress on this pillar to date, there were no clear indications of which were the most-effective approaches for strengthening feminist movements and alliances and, more broadly, on whether stronger and more effective WROs contribute to stronger networks. This should remain an area of focus of WVL MEL going forward.

Emerging lessons and strategies to strengthen WROs

Evidence is emerging about which strategies are proving effective in strengthening WROs, both organizationally and programmatically.

Organizational strengthening

- WROs particularly benefitted from the combination of dedicated funds for organizational capacity strengthening, such as core multi-year funds, with participatory and tailored capacity-building support.
- When adapted to local realities, participatory self-assessment tools and processes allowed WROs to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and devise action plans based on them.
- WROs benefited from a diversified offering of training and capacity-building opportunities, based on their identified needs and priorities.
- WROs benefited from ongoing support, one-on-one coaching and mentoring (even informal).
- WROs also benefitted from capacity building as part of the grant application process, when this was available (e.g. South Africa).
- In a few countries (e.g. Guatemala, Peru), a focus on strengthening the capacity of a small number of local implementing partners led to strong evidence of organizational strengthening for them. There was, however, less evidence of organizational capacity strengthening trickling down to grassroots WROs.

Programmatic strengthening

- A combination of different funding opportunities, be they multi-year or fast, flexible and responsive funds, allowed WROs to better deliver on their mandates and respond to new priorities (e.g. COVID-19 related).
- WROs had more diverse views on the contribution of the programmatic capacity-building component, with wider variations by countries/projects.
- Where programmatic capacity building was a focus of the project (e.g. Bangladesh, DRC, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa), it was generally considered an added value. Otherwise, WROs were generally confident in their ability to deliver programming when provided with the needed funding.
- To respond to the COVID-19 emergency, some WVL projects (e.g. Sri Lanka) shifted their focus from capacity building to project delivery. This allowed WROs to respond to urgent needs, but it is unclear whether these projects will be able to catch up on the capacity-building component.
- Consulted stakeholders also pointed out that it was beneficial to see organizational and programmatic capacity building as part of a continuum rather than to see them as distinct.

Conclusions

Photo credit: Hivos – WVL/We Lead Indonesia

Conclusions

WVL as a feminist program in a feminist organization

The evaluation showed that WVL's ambitious program approach was successful in making WVL's feminist vision a reality and in ensuring the cohesiveness of a highly decentralized initiative. DPI and MGS were able to set up the "scaffolding" needed to deliver WVL and contributed to a departmental toolbox for feminist programming and for providing direct support to local WROs. This work was intensive and challenging—particularly for MGS, which took on a new role with only marginal adjustments to structures, resources and capacities. WVL showed that change is possible, but it takes leadership, time and adequate capacities and resources.

The evaluation found that one of the major challenges faced by WVL was that corporate processes and systems were not sufficiently "fit for purpose" for feminist programming and for providing direct support to local WROs. The main roadblock was to reconcile the existing policy framework with the increased flexibility and risk appetite needed to support local WROs. The overall approach to risk management did not change significantly for WVL. This led to transferring the burden of risk to implementing partners and to some conservative choices in the selection of implementing partners and beneficiary WROs. Corporate requirements in relation to contracting, due diligence and reporting were particularly challenging for new partners, especially for local organizations. Finally, selection processes did not fully succeed in modelling feminist principles of inclusivity and transparency.

The evaluation points to the fact that, looking forward, there is a need to put in place measures to strengthen the capacities of local organizations to become effective implementing partners. Also, there is a strong need to explore how to better adapt corporate systems and processes to feminist programming and to provide direct support to local WROs.

Responding to the needs of women's rights organizations

The evaluation shows that WVL was highly relevant to local WROs' needs in diverse contexts, contributing to filling both funding and capacity gaps. This was thanks to several of its design characteristics, in particular the flexibility allowed by not having predefined themes for funding, and the combination of different modes of funding and support. WVL projects were able to reach a wide diversity of WROs but faced some challenges in reaching informal WROs. Additional efforts to reach these groups could be beneficial in the future.

Despite a limited timeframe for project implementation and significant disruptions due to COVID-19, the evaluation shows evidence of early results. The majority of WVL projects made progress toward strengthening the organizational capacity of supported WROs. WVL also allowed participating WROs to continue, expand or strengthen their existing programming or launch new programming, including to respond to COVID-19. Progress toward strengthening women's rights networks, alliances and movements was less consistent and is an area that will require more attention and strategic direction going forward.

Consolidating these results, however, takes time, and the current WVL timeframe is a challenge from this perspective. Project extensions and options to effectively bridge projects into a possible WVL 2.0 will need to be explored.

In addition, the sustainability of these changes remains a concern. In particular, the evaluation found limited evidence that stronger WROs would also be more financially sustainable WROs. Increased consideration of sustainability should be given going forward, both in the final years of WVL and in the design of a possible WVL 2.0.

Recommendations and considerations

Photo credit: Carter Center – WVL
Democratic Republic of Congo

Recommendations

1 **Capacities, resources and mandates**

a. In the remaining years of the WVL program, MGD should ensure the mandate, roles, responsibilities, capacities and resources of MGS, as they pertain to WVL, are fit-for-purpose to ensure that it is well resourced and positioned within the department to continue to provide program guidance and coordination to WVL.

b. In the lead up to a potential WVL 2.0, MGD should work with international assistance (IA) programming branches to determine which branches and bureaus are best positioned to lead and coordinate, and what governance structures are needed, to ensure leadership and strategic and operational integration of WVL 2.0 in the department. MGD should also work with IA programming branches to secure adequate human and financial resources and capacities to ensure leadership and strategic and operational integration of WVL 2.0 in the department.

2 **Sustainability of WROs.** MGS, in consultation with Partnerships for Gender Equality and Innovation Unit (KGAP), IA programming branches, partners and WROs, should identify and document effective strategies and best practices to support and foster WROs sustainability; facilitate knowledge sharing and cross learning among WVL projects on this matter; and provide specific guidance to existing WVL projects on how to strengthen this dimension in the remaining years of project implementation. MGS should also ensure that the identified effective strategies and best practices will inform the design of a potential WVL 2.0.

3 **Capacity of local organizations and organizations from developing countries as implementing partners of WVL 2.0.** MGD, in consultation with IA programming branches, DPD and SGD, should include specific and resourced measures in the design of WVL 2.0 to strengthen the ability of local organizations and organizations in developing countries to serve as effective WVL 2.0 implementing partners.

4 **Corporate processes and tools for direct support to local organizations**

a. DPD and SGD, in collaboration with IA programming branches and MGS, and in alignment with the Grants and Contributions Transformation Initiative, should explore solutions to address the specific roadblocks in programming processes that directly affect the capacity of the department to support local organizations effectively, with a particular focus on selection and application processes, capacity-building support to new partners, contracting, and reporting requirements and templates. These solutions should be informed by consultations with IA partners.

b. SGD, in collaboration with DPD and in consultation with MGD and geographic bureaus, should explore what adaptations and innovative solutions could be introduced to the department's risk management approach for grants and contributions that would allow the department to more easily provide direct support to local organizations, while respecting the principles of responsible stewardship of public funds as laid out in departmental grants and contributions regulations.

5 **Project extensions**. MGS should work with SGS, SGA and geographic branches to develop a consistent and streamlined approach to approving extensions for operational WVL projects, within the boundaries of existing processes and rules. Wherever possible, this should be coordinated with the roll out of a possible WVL 2.0, to allow for continuity in support of WROs.

6 **Guidance.** MGS should work with DPD and IA programming branches to leverage the wealth of guidance, tools and learning products developed to date to strengthen a common understanding and shared ownership of WVL's feminist approach among all involved PTLs, their management, other GAC staff directly involved in WVL, and the implementing partners, including through organizing onboarding and refresher sessions for new PTLs and their managers, maintaining the WVL wiki, making existing guidance more widely available to implementing partners and exploring how to embed the guidance function within relevant geographic branches.

Considerations

Considerations for horizontal, thematic and multi-country international assistance initiatives

- As horizontal, thematic and multi-country international assistance initiatives are increasingly common at Global Affairs Canada, the department should consider conducting a reflection on what is the most appropriate positioning of these initiatives within the department; which branches and bureaus are best positioned to lead and coordinate them; and what governance structures are needed to ensure leadership and strategic and operational integration in the department.

- There are also opportunities for Global Affairs Canada to play a more active role in facilitating exchange, learning and collaboration among its partners around the world. The department should consider leveraging the increasing availability of and familiarity with virtual collaboration tools to create more opportunities for local organizations to connect with each other and further the goal of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. WVL's newly developed online learning hub could provide useful lessons for other collaboration platforms.

Considerations for localized programming and supporting local civil societies

- To support the FIAP's direction of diversifying partnerships and engaging with local organizations, the department should engage in a reflection on what are the department's expectations for partnerships with non-Canadian CSOs; which branches/bureaus/divisions should be responsible for them; and which policy tools are needed to define and guide the department's localization agenda.

- Departmental programs and initiatives aiming at strengthening local CSOs and their movements should explore which strategies work well in supporting informal organizations, and in strengthening linkages and alliance building among formal and informal organizations.

- Departmental programs and initiatives aiming at providing direct support to local CSOs should strive to make appropriate use of existing measures to allow more flexibility in relation to fiduciary risk management, including the DG override request. This is a mechanism that allows DGs to override recommendations from fiduciary risk assessments.
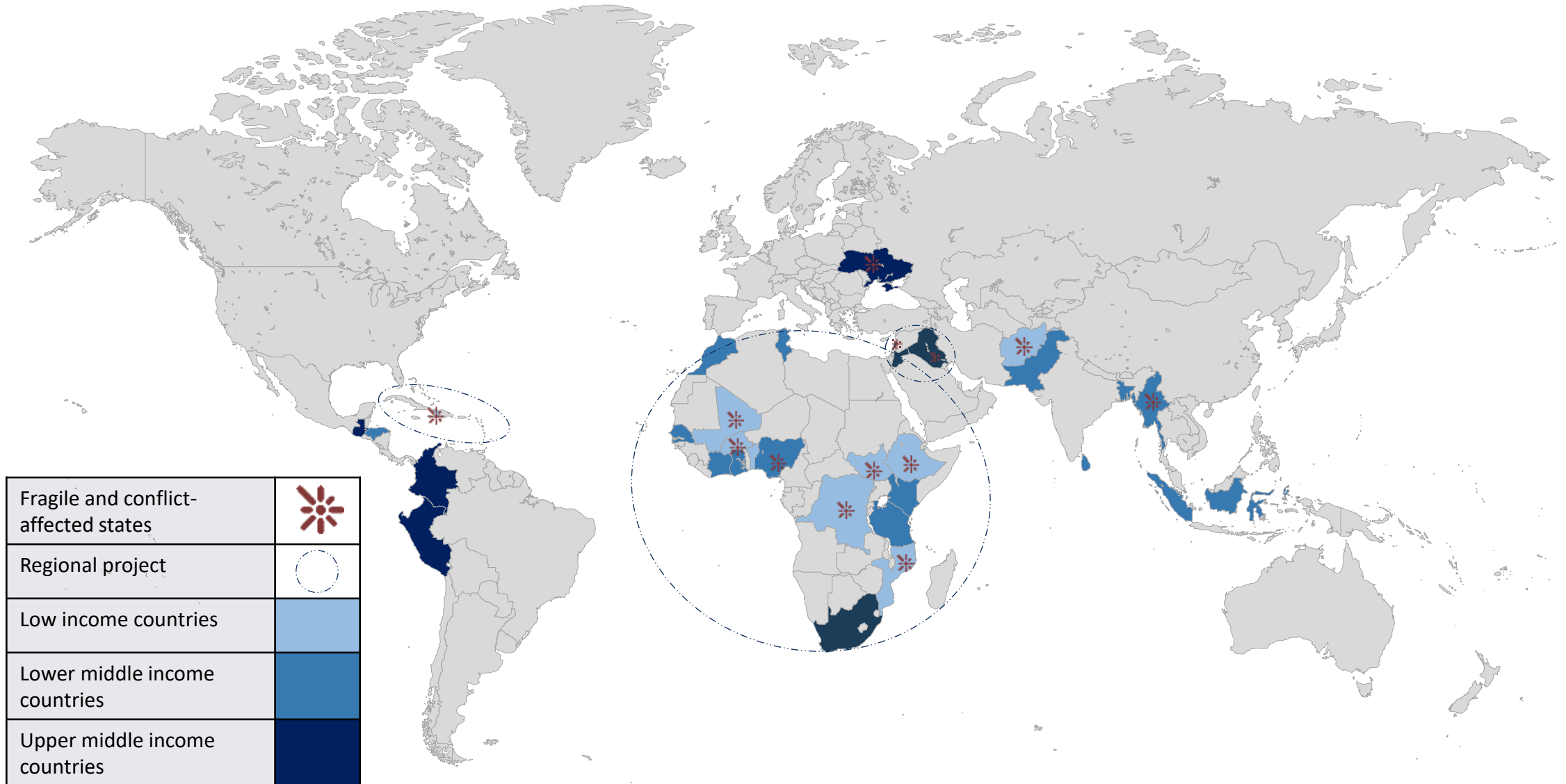
Considerations for feminist programming

- Several GAC initiatives contribute to strengthening the department's understanding of what it means and what it takes to operationalize a feminist approach to international assistance programming from the perspective of a bilateral donor. The department should build on these resources to continue improving its internal toolbox for feminist programming; to continue to position Canada as a lead feminist donor in international forums; and to strengthen the understanding of what is the added value as well as the inherent limitations of bilateral donors in the feminist funding ecosystem.

- Participatory, inclusive and empowering approaches and processes that are at the heart of a feminist approach to program design, implementation and MEL tend to require additional time, resources and commitment by all actors involved. Any project, program or initiative seeking to effectively include these types of approaches needs to plan and budget for them from the onset, and adapt workplans, timelines and budgets as needed.

Annexes

Annex 1 - Countries with WVL projects

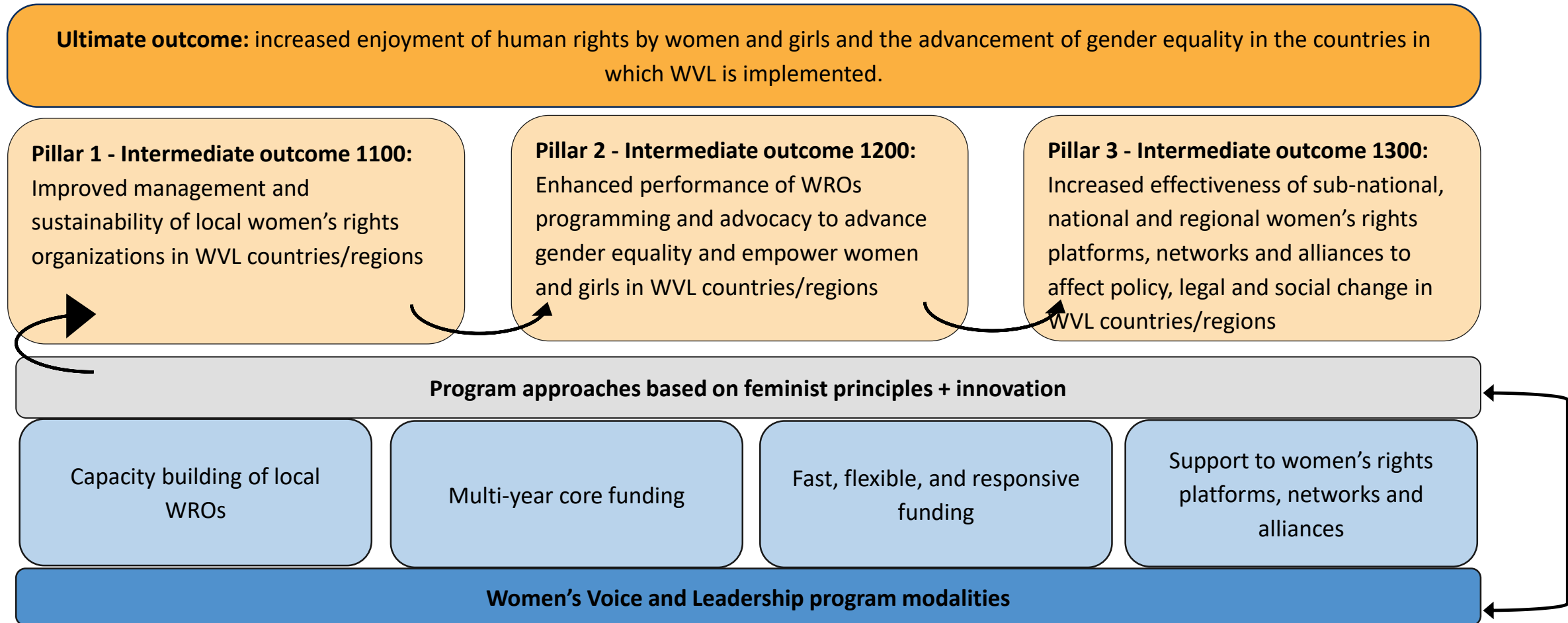| Fragile and conflict-affected states | ✳ |
Regional project	⊙
Low income countries	
Lower middle income countries	
Upper middle income countries	

Sources: *FY22 List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations,* World Bank, 2022; *World Bank Country and Lending Groups,* World Bank 2020

Annex 2 - WVL's theory of change

Ultimate outcome: increased enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and the advancement of gender equality in the countries in which WVL is implemented.

Pillar 1 - Intermediate outcome 1100: Improved management and sustainability of local women's rights organizations in WVL countries/regions

Pillar 2 - Intermediate outcome 1200: Enhanced performance of WROs programming and advocacy to advance gender equality and empower women and girls in WVL countries/regions

Pillar 3 - Intermediate outcome 1300: Increased effectiveness of sub-national, national and regional women's rights platforms, networks and alliances to affect policy, legal and social change in WVL countries/regions

Program approaches based on feminist principles + innovation

Capacity building of local WROs

Multi-year core funding

Fast, flexible, and responsive funding

Support to women's rights platforms, networks and alliances

Women's Voice and Leadership program modalities

Annex 3 - Case study sample and evaluation team

Case study sample

Case studies	Countries	Implementing partners
Deep dives	Guatemala	Oxfam Canada
	Nigeria	Action Aid Nigeria
	Sri Lanka	The Asia Foundation
	Ukraine	Ukrainian Women's Fund
Desk dives	Bangladesh	Manusher Jonno Foundation
	Burkina Faso	Oxfam-Québec
	Caribbean (regional)	Equality Fund and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice
	Colombia	Oxfam-Québec
	DRC	The Carter Center
	Ghana	Plan International Canada
	Indonesia	Hivos and Just Associates
	Kenya	CARE Canada
	Morocco	Oxfam-Québec
	Peru	Cuso International
	Senegal	Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
	South Africa	Gender Links

The evaluation team

Core evaluation team
(Global Affairs Canada Evaluation Division)

Colton Brydges   *Silvia Grandi*   *Sergio Michel Chavez*   *Bénite Mandaka*

Local Evaluators

Guatemala: Marisol Garces Vergara

Nigeria: JSA Consulting

Sri Lanka: Chrysalis Consulting

Ukraine: Oksana Potapova, Anastasia Chebotaryova

Feminist Evaluation Advisor

Donna Podems

Additional contributors

(Former PRA team members)

Samuel Fortin-Lambert, Alexandra Santillana, Anca Serban, Emily Walter

Annex 4 - GAC corporate systems and processes: identified solutions and adaptations and remaining challenges for WVL

|	Solutions and adaptations	Challenges
Partner selection	• GAC geographic programs were encouraged to identify the best suited partners for WVL, including non-traditional partners such as local WROs and women's funds. At the same time, selected implementing partners needed to have the capacity to manage a large GAC project. • Geo programs conducted in-depth country or regional analyses to identify the best suited potential implementing partners. MGS developed specific guidance for this. • Following these analyses, most Geo programs invited a specific partner to apply through a department initiated mechanism. Some used a new selection process where a shortlist of candidates could apply, the department-initiated multiple invitations mechanism (DIMI). • This department-initiated approach was deemed to be faster than a traditional call for proposals, and to allow for more diverse and new players to have a better chance at being selected (if identified during the initial analysis) • To stay true to WVL's vision of providing direct support to local WROs, specific budget requirements were imposed on all WVL projects at the approval stage to ensure that at least 50 percent of project funds went to WROs and were spent locally.	• The thoroughness of the country analysis varied. • To align to the evolving FIAP priorities and guidance, several mid-stream changes in requirements were introduced (e.g. geographic distribution, common indicators, budget requirements and templates). These added delays and additional back and forth with applicants at the proposal and approval memo stages. • Overall, the selection process was perceived to have been less transparent and inclusive than more traditional calls for proposals, and overall not consistent with feminist principles. • Fewer new and local partners were ultimately chosen than had been originally expected. • Some consulted GAC stakeholders also pointed to the fact that programs did not always provide sufficient documentation to complete a full due diligence review as part of a department-initiated multiple invitations (DIMI) process pilot.
Financial instruments (contribution agreements)	• To ensure coherence across WVL projects and allow for the diverse WVL support components to be implemented, DPI worked with S branch to develop a standard approach to contribution agreements to be used for all WVL projects. WVL-specific contribution agreement templates and guidance were developed, including new tailored budget template and reporting requirements. • The new contribution agreement template also included new or modified clauses to allow on-granting and core funding and capacity building for local implementing partners as eligible expenses, as well as an updated position on auditing ultimate beneficiaries. • Corporate contractual and financial services areas (SGS/SGA) dedicated senior level resources as focal points to support the efficient delivery of the WVL program.	• Several different GAC teams were involved in developing the revised contribution agreements. This was time-consuming and challenging. • The evolving requirements in the contribution agreement templates also affected the PTLs and IPs who had to continue adapting as they were already in the process of negotiating their contribution agreement. • Some of the changes in the contribution agreement added additional requirements for implementing partners, making the negotiations process lengthier than usual (particularly in relation to budget and on-granting mechanisms).

Annex 4 - Continued

	Solutions and adaptations	Challenges
Project implementation plans	• There was a strong willingness to ensure that the PIP processes would reflect feminist principles (be inclusive, participatory, empowering) while at the same time, where possible lighten the burden for implementing partners and allow for more flexibility. • MGS developed specific guidance for PIP reviews to ensure integration of the WVL vision and feminist approach.	• Despite some simplifications in the PIP template and requirements, these did not have a significant impact in simplifying the process for implementing partners. • On the contrary, the fact of making the PIP process more participatory and inclusive, while well aligned with WVL's vision, required more time and effort for implementing partners and their partner WROs. As PIP-related activities occurred before implementation started, they resulted in instances of unpaid labour. • The PIP process was particularly challenging for new partners and required a significant time commitment by the PTLs and the implementing partners. Even experienced partners encountered challenges with extensive PIP revisions. These led to several delays in project start up.
Reporting	Overall, WVL project reporting followed GAC standard processes and templates (management summary reports, operations reports, results reports), but there were some WVL specific adaptations: • Use of common outcome level indicators, to ensure coherent reporting across projects. • Introduction of standard output indicators and of specific reporting requirements and templates to track direct support to WROs and roll up information for corporate reporting on the FIAP. • Tailored financial reporting requirements and template	• Despite good intentions, the burden of reporting was not lightened for WVL. Reporting requirements and templates were not simplified. On the contrary, PTLs and implementing partners agreed that WVL reporting requirements were heavier than other projects and created increased burden, especially for newer implementing partners with less experience with GAC requirements. • In addition, reporting templates and the need to report against many quantitative indicators were not conducive to capturing the successes of the projects in terms of qualitative incremental changes.
Fiduciary risk	• Funding either directly (as implementing partners) or indirectly (through on-granting) local and smaller organizations required a higher risk tolerance than what Global Affairs Canada, and more broadly, the Government of Canada were comfortable with. • One innovative solution was introduced for WVL: GAC agreed in principle not to audit ultimate beneficiaries, to avoid extra burden on WROs, but reserved the right to do so in case of fraud. • Beyond this, GAC's overall approach to risk and risk tolerance did not change significantly for WVL, and no changes were made to the fiduciary risk assessment process and the fiduciary risk evaluation tool (FRET) template.	• For new GAC partners, the fiduciary risk assessment process was longer and harder. This may have discouraged some programs from looking "outside the box" when identifying potential implementing partners. • When new organizations were invited to apply, the FRET process often pointed to a higher risk level. Greater perceived risk (according to the FRET) meant that programs imposed heavier risk management requirements for WVL implementing partners (e.g. reporting), thus adding extra burden to already weaker organizations. • Audit and compliance requirements for on-granting transferred the burden of risk to implementing partners. Some implementing partners accepted to take on extra risk, while others decided to have more cautious approaches in selecting grantees.

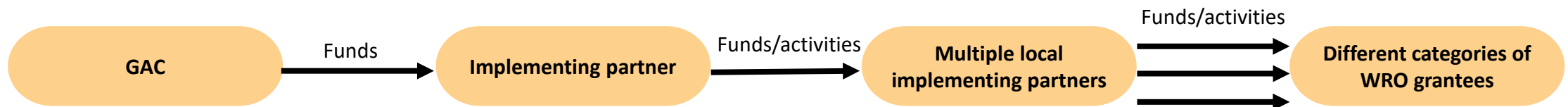# Annex 5 - How did WVL take shape in different countries?

Model 1 (e.g. Colombia, South Africa)
This model provided a simple, direct relationships between implementing partners and WROs. It placed considerable emphasis on the capacity of the partner, and generally presented fewer opportunities for direct WRO participation in the project's design and governance.
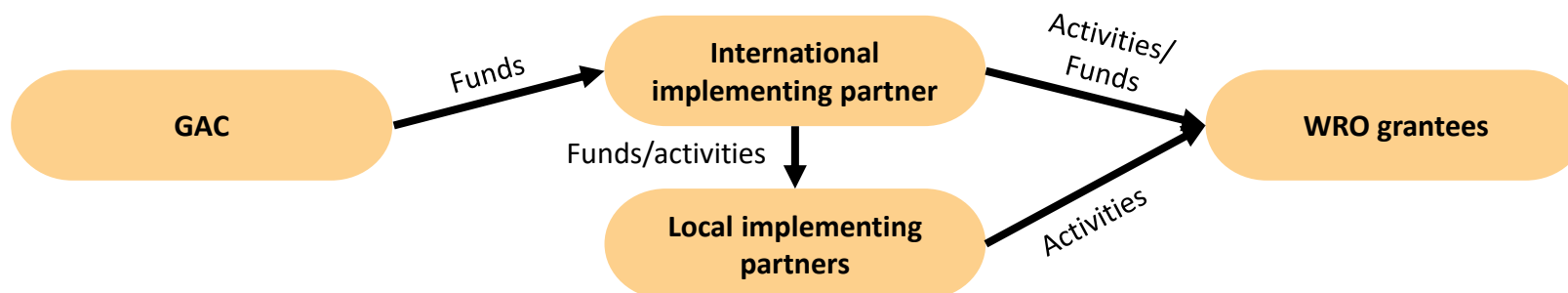
```
GAC  --Funds-->  Implementing partner(s)  --Funds Activities-->  WRO grantees
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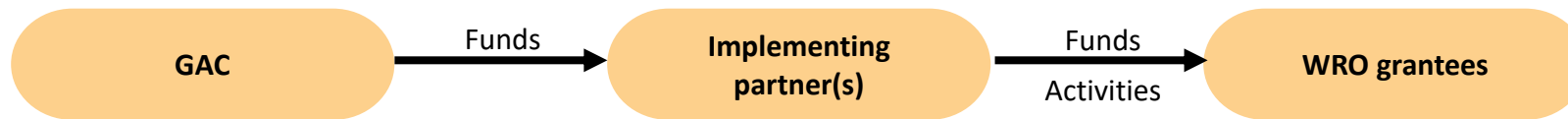
Model 2 (e.g. Kenya)
In this model the inclusion of local partners, with special skillsets or contextual knowledge, benefited both the project and the local partner(s). However, this model was complex, featuring multiple intermediaries (and their management costs) responsible for different funds.

```
GAC  --Funds-->  Implementing partner  --Funds/activities-->  Multiple local implementing partners  --Funds/activities-->  Different categories of WRO grantees
```

Model 3 (Peru)
This model put funds directly in the hands of large, local WROs who received support from an international partner. There was less funding available for smaller grassroots WROs. These projects relied on the local partners to cascade training to those WROs within their networks.

```
GAC  --Funds-->  International implementing partner  --Activities/Funds-->  WRO grantees
                 International implementing partner  --Funds/activities-->  Local implementing partners  --Activities-->  WRO grantees
```

Annex 5 - continued

Model 4 (e.g. Indonesia, Guatemala)
This model puts funds directly in the hands of large, local networks who could work at scale and influence policy decisions at a national level. Less funding was available for small, local WROs, with funds staying within specific constituency-based networks.
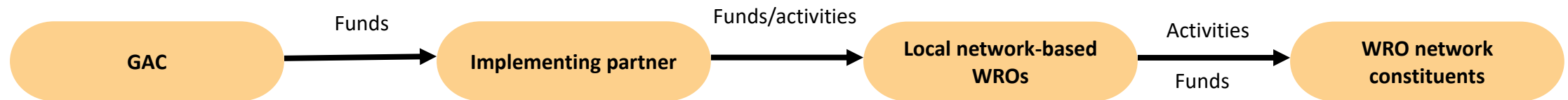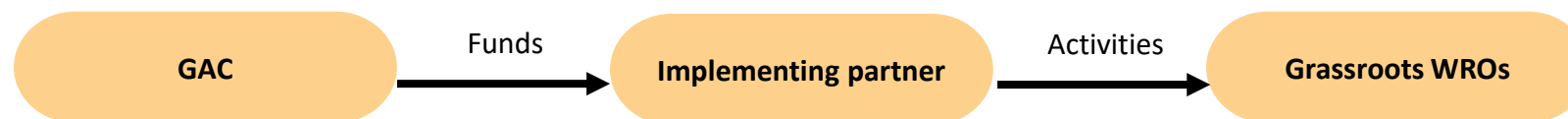

Model 5 (e.g. Ethiopia, Ghana)
This model provided support for large WROs who could engage at a national level and play a leading role in the women's movement, while also proving funding opportunities for smaller grassroots WROs. The implementing partner had to manage multiple complex partnerships.
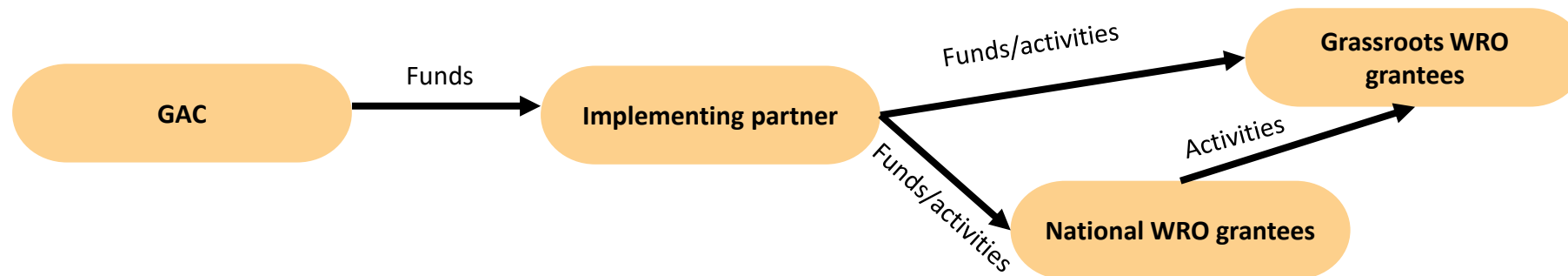
Model 6 (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme)
In this model, the granting functions are embedded in a separate WVL project. This approach leveraged the partner's particular skills with capacity building and networking. However, this limited their ability to support WROs since they did not have a granting mechanism.

Annex 6 - Characteristics of WVL direct support components

Type of funds	Characteristics
Multi-year funding	• Most projects identified and funded WROs through one or more open calls for proposals. • Some projects designated different tiers of multi-year grants based on the size or characteristics of WROs (e.g. Burkina Faso, Ethiopia). • A few projects directed most of their funding toward large, network-based WROs that were identified during the design phase (e.g. Guatemala, Peru).
Fast, flexible and responsive funding	• Most projects were distributing fast, flexible and responsive funds through an open call; it was either time bound or applications were taken on an ongoing basis. • Some projects designed their fast, flexible and responsive funds to meet specific objectives. For example, some were used as innovation funds (e.g. Nigeria, Senegal) or to fund activities promoting knowledge and evidence (e.g. Pakistan). • A few projects restricted access to fast, flexible and responsive funds to their existing multi-year grantees, who were expected to partner with other WROs (e.g. Myanmar, Caribbean).
Movement and alliance building funds	• Most projects did not have specific grants for movement building; instead, the implementing partner leads activities to build and strengthen alliances. • Some projects provided direct funding to national or sub-national networks (e.g. South Africa, Kenya). • A few projects set aside funds that WROs could access to fund networking activities like conferences (e.g. Bangladesh).

Annex 7 - WVL program- and project-level alignment to feminist principles

In the following table, adequate (green) means a good level of alignment to the principle. Partial (yellow) means a fair level of alignment to the principle due either to a few major gaps or to a non-systematic integration. Poor (red) means that this principle is either not integrated at all or it is done very superficially. Given the variations in approaches and contexts where WVL is implemented, project level ratings are based on a detailed rubric that applied to the 16 case studies. An adequate rating at the project level means that at least 60 percent of assessed projects had adequately integrated a principle.

Feminist principle	Program-level	Project-level
1. Transform unequal power relations embedded in funding practices by ensuring feminist leadership and grassroots involvement in project design and implementation	**Adequate –** The original program guidance encouraged projects to include WRO's in key governance bodies, such as project steering or grant selection committees, and to actively involve them in management and accountability processes. Also, WVL encouraged projects to be based on consultations with WROs in the design phase, by making it a PIP requirement.	**Partial** – Most projects were implemented by a Canadian or an international NGO, reproducing some unequal power dynamics, but in most cases there were deliberate efforts from IPs to elevate local NGOs or WROs as either active participants in project design and governance (e.g. Ghana, Indonesia) or as local implementing partners (e.g. Peru, Kenya). A two-stage PIP process facilitated WROs involvement in the design phase of some projects (e.g. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka). Nevertheless, grassroots and smaller WROs had limited opportunities to formally participate in the design/governance of the projects, even where local organizations were implementing partners.
2. Consider risk management and crisis response strategies to protect feminist activists in contexts of violence and insecurity	**Adequate** – WVL guidance considers risk factors and encourages strategies to respond to them. Since the early stages of program development, there was awareness of the risks for feminist activism in the context of violence and insecurity, as well as in contexts where Canadian support could expose human rights defenders by giving them visibility, in line with GAC's policy on supporting human rights defenders.	**Partial** – Some projects considered an increased capacity to respond to natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic as part of their risk management strategy (e.g. Bangladesh, Guatemala), but few projects had the specific resources/tools to protect participants from potential risks associated to their involvement in WVL (e.g. Indonesia, Peru). In cases where projects targeted regions affected by violence, there were strategies to analyze and prevent potential risks for the WROs; self-defence strategies for some WROs were also supported by the project (e.g. Colombia). There is not enough information to determine the level of alignment to this principle in four case studies.
3. Adapt funding priorities and practices to the needs of WROs and feminist activists, not the other way around	**Adequate** – There are no pre-established thematic areas in WVL. Its flexible funding modalities and unique program design features allowed WROs to set the agenda of what they want to focus their work on. Although there are variations in how funds are operationalized, both the fast, flexible and responsive funds and multi-year core funds are designed to adapt to the needs and priorities of WROs.	**Adequate** – Project stakeholders in most case studies valued the flexibility of WVL funding that allowed WROs to focus on their own priorities. Some projects tailored funding to WROs depending on their size, needs and capacity (e.g. Bangladesh, Colombia) while others offered participants the possibility to set the agenda and focus on issues that were particularly relevant to them (e.g. Guatemala, Indonesia).

Feminist principle	Program-level	Project-level
4. Select partner organizations based on their commitment to feminist principles, practices and policies, on their ability to represent the diversity of feminist movements, and on their knowledge of the context in which the project is to be implemented	**Partial** – WVL had appropriate parameters in place to select IPs, but many considerations weighed heavily on the selection process, including risk management and a tendency to use the networks already known by GAC. Country program directors were responsible for the decision, and several selection mechanisms were available. This led to a suboptimal distribution among IPs in terms of alignment to the principle, as a result, fewer local organizations and women funds than intended were selected. As of March 2021, WVL was implemented by 21 signatories to GAC contribution agreements: 11 of these signatories were international NGOs (INGOs) (including Canadian), 5 were women's funds and six, national WROs. Some of the INGOs considered themselves as feminist organizations.	**Adequate** – Although only one third of the case studies are implemented by avowedly feminist organizations, there was commitment from implementing partners to understanding and operationalizing feminist principles in all case studies. Similarly, even though only a few projects were implemented by a local organization as the CA signatory (e.g. South Africa, Bangladesh, Ukraine), most IPs have a strong context knowledge of the regions where WVL projects were implemented, thanks to either their in-country offices/staff (e.g. Sri Lanka, Kenya, Ghana) or their partnerships with local NGOs/WROs (e.g. Peru, Indonesia). Only a minority of projects did not fully engage with WROs that represented the multiple identities of women in their countries/regions; instead, these projects focused on specific groups of women (i.e. DRC, Guatemala, Nigeria).
5. Provide core, long-term funding as well as capacity-building support to WROs and feminist movements, including small grassroots and nascent organizations	**Adequate** – WVL's capacity-building component is a value added of the program that supported the core mandate of WROs using multiple capacity assessment tools. The program also provided core and sustained support to WROs through its multi-year core funding and allowed some core support through the fast, flexible, and responsive funds, to adapt WRO's work to the context of the pandemic.	**Adequate** – Most projects allowed small WRO's to apply for support, with some projects specifically targeting small or nascent organizations (i.e. DRC, Ghana, Kenya). Only in two case studies was there very limited or nonexistent direct financial support to small WROs, but they could receive indirect support through either capacity-building or networking activities (i.e. Indonesia, Peru). Most projects offered multi-year core support to their grantees, with significant variations in the extent to which core costs are covered. In a few cases, fast, flexible and responsive funds had also become an instrument to fund core support, particularly through equipment purchases to help WROs adapt to working in the context of the pandemic (e.g. Caribbean, Senegal). In most projects, WRO grantees had continuous support for 3+ years as part of multi-year funding tranches, but in two case studies participant WROs need to re-apply for support each year (Caribbean, Ukraine).
6. Agree to medium to long-term programming cycles and focus on strategic-level outcomes that aim at larger societal change (transformational approach)	**Partial** – WVL focuses on strategic outcomes but uses prescriptive indicators to have a consolidated approach to programming. This limited the possibility to account for unexpected results, which characterize transformative processes. Furthermore, programmatic cycles needed to be consistent with the strategic outcomes that the program pursues.	**Partial** – The majority of projects reported high-level policy advocacy on gender equality issues; in these projects, substantial support was usually provided to either large WROs or to national WROs networks. There were only a few exceptions where there was minimal linkage between the programming efforts of individual WROs and broader strategic goals (e.g. Sri Lanka). Delays in movement building activities including networking and collective advocacy efforts, due in part to COVID-19, makes it difficult to evaluate the transformative potential of most projects to date.

Feminist principle	Program-level	Project-level
7. Adapt system and processes within the institution to be coherent with feminist principles and to be viable for small organizations to become and remain part of the program (due diligence, accountability, contracting, risk assessments, MEL)	**Poor** – Despite several efforts and some adaptations to corporate processes and systems, adjustments made to corporate systems (e.g. due diligence, contracting, reporting) did not make processes easier for WROs or IPs. There were burdensome compliance requirements for IPs, a lack of flexibility in negotiations regarding core issues such as audit requirements, and an aversion to "risky" relationships that prevented reaching smaller organizations while making it easier to channel funds through INGOs (see also, feminist principle 4).	**Partial** – Over half of the projects reproduced mechanisms that were highly formal and complex, with a heavy reporting and due diligence burden for WRO grantees. This was particularly challenging for small WROs, which in some cases ended up excluding them from gaining access to WVL funding. There were considerable efforts from some implementing partners to adapt their internal reporting and due diligence requirements to better reach small WROs (e.g. Caribbean, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria).
8. Promote engagement from other donors, particularly through multi-stakeholder initiatives	**Partial** – WVL as a program does not promote multi-stakeholder engagement, but it was used by GAC to promote engagement from other donors, particularly through forums such as the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements.	**Partial** – Most WVL projects indirectly contributed to an increased visibility and capacity of WROs to receive funding from other donors, but only a few projects had strategies in place to connect participants with other donors or to seek opportunities for other donors to support grantees (Caribbean, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Ukraine). In two of the case studies (Colombia and Sri Lanka), there was very limited information on how the project had engaged with other donors.
9. Build on the expertise of activists and civil society actors involved in the feminist funding ecosystem	**Adequate** – WVL was designed based on wide consultations with civil society actors, including feminist organizations, and there have been regular consultations with experts on the feminist funding ecosystem since the program was launched. There is no representation of WROs (traditional set-up) in the current program-level governance structure.	**Adequate** – In most case studies, relevant actors of the feminist movement in their respective WVL countries were involved in either the design, governance and/or implementation of WVL projects. While in some cases their involvement was more noticeable, such as where projects were implemented by longstanding feminist CSOs, in others there was at least some form of guidance from experts on feminist programming.
10. Promote movement building across regions and issues through programming, advocacy and policy dialogue	**Adequate** – WVL supports movement building initiatives that increase the voices of WROs and networks at national, regional and international forums, and includes facilitating network and alliance building among and between different WROs along with feminist movement building.	**Adequate** – Most projects reported increased collaboration among their participant WROs. Valuable learning experiences are emerging from WVL activities that bring stakeholders from different projects together, such as the regional clusters. The effect of COVID-19 was referred to by a few projects as a factor delaying movement building activities (e.g. Colombia, Ghana).

Annex 8: Deep dives - early results highlights

Photo credit: High Commission of Canada in Nigeria – WVL Nigeria

Guatemala deep dive

Early results highlights

With WVL's support, Tz'ununija' mobilized to denounce racism and violence against indigenous women in Guatemala.

Photo Credit: Tz'ununija'

The WVL Guatemala project, implemented by Oxfam Canada, helped the Indigenous women's movement Tz'ununija' to strengthen its organizational structure and its work. The project financed the Tz'ununija' team, which was made up of territorial liaisons from each department (province) and program staff at its headquarters in Guatemala City. It also strengthened its identity, and political positioning as a movement through campaign activities, internal training and alliance work.

One of the key tasks of Tz'ununija' was its work to eradicate violence against Indigenous women. The WVL Guatemala project contributed considerably by providing resources for staff to carry out legal and psychosocial accompaniment, for campaigns to denounce violence and racism and for the elaboration of CEDAW shadow reports about violence against Indigenous women. In addition, the project approach helped Tz'ununija' deepen its knowledge and strategies to address violence against women.

The project's contribution to enabling Indigenous women's organisations to carry out their work is highly valued by local women leaders and by the Tz'ununija' leadership:

- 84 percent of the interviewed women considered that the project helped them support women experiencing violence.

- 79 percent believed that the project helped them analyze the racism and discrimination that they experience as Indigenous women.

- 74 percent believed that the project supported their capacity for dialogue with community authorities, both in promoting approaches and tools to address these dialogues.

- 79 percent indicated that the project contributed to the strengthening of the networks, alliances or platforms in which Tz'ununija' member organizations participate.

"The project contributes significantly to strengthening various aspects or lines of work of the movement. On the issue of violence against women, it contributes to work in the departments where it had not been possible to reach with precision, helping to standardize the processes that the movement has in place. In the area of women's participation and advocacy, it has contributed to generating the conditions for addressing the situation of violence and to follow up on the processes of drafting alternative reports to the United Nations system."

-Interview with leader of the Consejo Menor de Tz'ununija'

Nigeria deep dive

Early results highlights

Olive Community Development Initiative (OCDI) is one of WVL Nigeria's grantees. OCDI has been a vocal advocate for addressing violence against women in Kwara State. With WVL's support, OCDI led protests at the Kwara State House of Assembly calling upon local leaders to adopt the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act.

Photo Credit: OCDI

The WVL project implemented by ActionAid Nigeria has some 100 women's rights organizations as beneficiaries.

The case study findings showed that the support provided to WROs was beyond financial assistance. The strategy employed by the implementing partner in Nigeria aimed at strengthening the organizational and program capacity of the women's rights organizations. This capacity strengthening strategy involved professional training and activities in organizational development, resource mobilization, program management and financial management, among others. The financial assistance appeared to be a means to an end, where beneficiary organizations are provided financial resources to put their strengthened capacity into use.

Beneficiary organizations were beginning to show signs of improved management and were on the journey toward their sustainability. Of the 54 surveyed beneficiary organizations, 43 agreed that their organizations had leveraged the WVL funding to access other funding. There was also significant evidence that organizations had strengthened the reach and effectiveness of their programming, including in relation to gender-based violence. Participating WROs and networks reported increased capacity to deliver quality programming through the multi-year grants and capacity-strengthening support they received within the framework of the WVL project in Nigeria. The case study also observed some trends of improved management translating into innovative programming, for example, through using different types of media.

The WVL project in Nigeria was an interesting platform for coordinated national advocacy activities. A WhatsApp group brought together all the beneficiaries and provided them opportunities to share experiences including policy advocacy strategies. By extension, the case study team observed cross-national solidarity where WVL beneficiary organizations engaged with non-WVL women's right organization in advocacy activities, for instance, the passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Bill.

"As an organization, the WVL has helped in building our network and putting in place all necessary internal control systems to enable us to grow. Through the mentorship of ActionAid Nigeria, we were able to set up executive positions, which we initially didn't have. This was done through elections. Additionally, we were able to secure office space. Also, in terms of grants, WVL has opened doors for us, and we have received three other grants from other donors since then. We have achieved this in a space of just two years of registration"   -Outcome harvesting participant

Sri Lanka deep dive

Early results highlights

WVL Sri Lanka supports WROs like Social Welfare Mandram (SWM), a small community organization that engages with women working on plantations. Through their multi-year grant, SWM is forming women's societies on 10 plantations, with the goal of supporting approximately 300 women.

Photo Credit: Asia Foundation

WVL Sri Lanka, implemented by the Asia Foundation, provided financial support to 26 WROs under the multi-year funding component.

WVL support enabled many of the WROs to build on and enrich their own mandates. They were given the opportunity and ability to work within their space, capitalize on the relationships and expand geographic coverage and existing project implementation. For example, the organization Praja Diriya Padanama (PDP) had worked with sex workers since 2007. With WVL support. PDP was able to continue to empower female sex workers, as well as sensitize government officials, including the Sri Lanka Police, on the needs and rights of commercial sex workers.

Some organizations expanded their programming portfolio by engaging new target groups and stakeholders. WVL's support provided critical opportunities for certain WROs to engage in work that was unfamiliar to them or pursue work that would not have been funded through traditional funding mechanisms. For example, the Muslim Women Development Trust (MWDT) identified the vital need for awareness building and knowledge-sharing within the Muslim community, given the mounting marginalization and stigmatizing of the community following the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. WVL funding enabled MWDT to do this work despite the sensitivities and suspicions it would raise.

"If we ask for money to educate women on things in the Quran, will any organization be ready to give? Some people may think: Is this something that promotes religion? But truly through this project, when we [proposed] a project like this, when we explained [what we wanted to do] to [the Foundation] they were the first organization and project that gave us the [opportunity] to do [this project]."

-Interview with the participant organization MWDT

"We have been able to expand our existing intervention into difficult geographies. We also identified new community leaders who can continue this work. It [WVL funding] also supported our organizations financial accountability by getting a qualified fulltime accountant for the organization."

-Participant organization Women Development Centre during the sense-making exercise

Ukraine deep dive

Early results highlights

Building on the findings of the deep dive case study, the Ukrainian Women's Fund has worked with PRA's local consultant to conduct a series of dialogues where WROs are defining what feminism, intersectionality, and other key concepts mean for the women's movement in their country.

Given the current situation in Ukraine, and to preserve the safety of participants, we have not shared a photo of the project in this report.

WVL Ukraine is being implemented by the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), a locally based organization and member of the Prospera International Network of Women's Funds. UWF is also working with two local organizations, the International Renaissance Foundation and La Strada Ukraine, which support capacity-building efforts.

The first grants given under WVL Ukraine coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and the project's fast, flexible and responsive funds enabled WROs to provide immediate support to their constituencies, as well as support their own teams and staff. These early rapid response initiatives included training on the use of online tools, mental health support for women in crises, and well-being and recovery for staff of WROs after a period of intense COVID-19 response.

The deep dive case study focused largely on the theme of relationships and defining an identity for the Ukrainian women's movement. The findings showed that UWF has dedicated considerable efforts to broadening and deepening its relationships with a variety of partners throughout the country, to position the project to effectively represent and support the women's movement. While there are few results to report at this early stage, these efforts at relationship building have enabled WVL Ukraine to reach a diverse and inclusive group of WROs. Grantees included the Roma community, LBTQI+ organizations, sex workers' organizations and women with disabilities. This was a major added value for the project, and greater attention to diversity and inclusion was itself strengthening the women's movement in Ukraine.

The case study results also highlighted the value of working with local women's funds like UWF, as they were deeply embedded in the local feminist movement and saw themselves as active participants rather than merely implementing partners. This was exemplified by UWF's advocacy efforts around the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women. UWF engaged with government officials and conducted outreach with grassroots WROs, serving as the conduit to bring together a nation-wide advocacy campaign.

"I have been in this work for over 20 years, and I hadn't realized till now some of the biases which our community holds, such as homophobia. Through partnership with LBTI organizations I've had a chance to learn about their struggle, and to realize that it's our common struggle and that we need to constantly check our biases".

-Focus group participant representing an established Roma organization