



IWRAW AP Annual Report 2017

International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
10-2 Jalan Bangsar Utama 9
59000 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Tel: (603) 2282 2255

Fax: (603) 2283 2552

<http://www.iwraw-ap.org>

Twitter: [@IWRAW AP](https://twitter.com/IWRAW_AP)

Facebook: facebook.com/IWRAW.AP

Contents

Abbreviations	2
Introduction by the Executive Director	3
Executive Summary	4
The Context	8
IWRAW Asia Pacific's Theory of Change	12
Contributions towards the Achievement of the Strategic Pillar Outcomes	13
Conclusions & Way Forward	33

Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CCF	CEDAW Compliance Framework
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DFAT	(Australian Government) Department of Foreign Aid and Trade
GR	General Recommendation
GSWF	Global South Women's Forum
HLPF	High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICESCR/CESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
LBTQI	Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSWP	Global Network of Sex Worker Projects
NYU	New York University
OP CEDAW	CEDAW Optional Protocol
OSF	Open Society Foundation
SAWF	South Asia Women's Fund (now Women's Fund Asia)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SR	Special Rapporteur
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNGP	United Nations Guiding Principles
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WEL	Women, Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation
WWHR	Women for Women's Human Rights

Introduction by the Executive Director

This report describes the work of the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) Asia Pacific in 2017. The year marked the beginning of a new strategic plan that aims to address some of the critical issues of an increasingly challenging context; a context that is pushing women's rights activists to speak truth to power and to address new, emerging issues that compound existing inequalities and discriminations. We are working today in a world where the struggle for gender equality and women's human rights is exacerbated by multiple political, economic and social factors, including a rise in corporate bullying, misogyny, intolerance, authoritarian politics, vilification of civil society activism, and suppression of democratic spaces and voices. It is also an environment in which funding for women's rights organisations is severely constrained.

Despite these challenges, IWRAP Asia Pacific has succeeded in upscaling our efforts to make systemic change, using technology to broaden our reach and strengthen our impact. Collaborating with partners in the different regions, we have pushed for sustainable and transformative change that can have a positive impact on the lived experiences of women, especially women in the Global South and women who are marginalised because of their identity, location, orientation and work.

In the work that supports our partners and our strategies for change, we have developed a range of knowledge products and tools; worked with government institutions, civil society and legal and judicial actors; created spaces for marginalised women to have their voices infused into CEDAW advocacy and activism nationally, regionally and internationally; and used our analysis, our tools and our convening power to influence stakeholders to apply the frameworks of women's human rights to contemporary issues. In this report we will highlight the outcomes of these efforts.

IWRAP Asia Pacific is proud to be in partnership with several international donors committed to furthering gender equality and women's human rights. We greatly appreciate the core grant we receive from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation; the support of Oak and Channel Foundations for our work around the CEDAW review; the contributions of OXFAM Novib, OXFAM Australia and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Aid and Trade which have funded the work on Women, Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership in ASEAN; the Open Society Foundation, which has supported our work with marginalised women and provided us with institutional funding; and the support from the South Asia Women's Fund (now Women's Fund Asia) for work on access to justice and women's economic rights in Asia.

The team in IWRAP Asia Pacific's office in Kuala Lumpur wishes to thank the members of our governance bodies (the Board of Directors and Advisory Committee), and our network of feminist resource persons, colleagues and friends whose inspiration and support has enabled us to carry out our work. In the course of our journey we have worked with an amazing number of women's rights activists and women's rights organisations from different regions of the world. Your courage and your resilience is humbling; we have learned a great deal from our interactions, and hope that our contribution has helped strengthen your activism.

Priyanthi Fernando

Kuala Lumpur, April 2018

Executive Summary

This report describes the work of IWRAP Asia Pacific in the first year of its 2017-2019 Three Year Strategy. It shows that despite limited resources, the commitment and hard work of the IWRAP Asia Pacific team and our partners, the support we have from our governance bodies and the network of women's rights activists who work with us in national, regional and international spaces, have enabled us, in this first year, to clearly carve out a path towards achieving the change we want.

The global context in which we are working is a challenging one. Multiple political, economic and social factors impinge on the ability of women to realise their human rights, and compromise gender equality and non-discrimination. This is also a rapidly changing world – not always in a positive direction – where contextual analysis becomes obsolete almost as soon as it is written.

The rise of right-wing authoritarianism, economic violence, the growth of technology and artificial intelligence all contribute to creating a global context that challenges freedom, democracy and social justice. Growing xenophobia and intolerance of the 'other' are evident in a range of countries and are the outcome of protracted economic social and political processes, and shifts in the global power bases. The growth of corporate power and the 'capture' of both states and multilateral institutions have severely eroded the obligations to protect and fulfil human rights – women's especially.

We see the need to resist the unlawful manifestations of state capture, 'honour disobedience'¹ and condemn the violence that occurs through direct actions of the state military or through warmongering, the brunt of which is borne by women. The partnership of the different UN agencies, formerly custodians of human rights, with corporate actors, and the increasing influence of right-wing civil society groups is yet another challenge. A different, yet no less vicious, kind of violence is perpetrated by the global economic system, which pushes women and other vulnerable groups into precarious jobs with low wages, sub-standard working conditions, no security of tenure, no protection and no rights to organise. While the struggle against the debilitating forces of the global political economy goes on, we also need to guard against the promise of technology and artificial intelligence insidiously eroding our quality of life and further jeopardising human rights.

Amidst these overwhelming challenges to achieving gender equality, there are windows of opportunity for women's rights activism. The 2030 Agenda, though imperfect, is an opportunity to mobilise for gender equality. The #MeToo campaign has had a snowballing effect, highlighting the egregious nature of gender-based violence against women, and establishing its almost universal presence. Women have been organising and resisting the broader forces of misogyny, patriarchy and structural discrimination, from the [Women's March](#) in January 2017 to more localised protests at national level. Certain discriminatory laws have been rolled back and some parts of the world are becoming more accepting of non-heteronormative sexual orientations and concerned about bodily rights.

IWRAP Asia Pacific responds to the contextual challenges outlined above in different ways. Our strategy is based on core feminist values of diversity and inclusion, equality and non-discrimination and respect. Organised around four strategic outcomes or pillars, we work alongside our partners and other stakeholders to deal with emerging issues in the economic, social and political context, strengthen the activism of women's human rights organisations, interrogate and inform the practices of the law and policy institutions, and engage in international and regional advocacy. In

¹ Roger Cohen (2017) "In Trump World, the Need for Disobedience", *New York Times*, 13 December. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/opinion/trump-disobedience.html>

practical terms it includes strengthening the capacity of women's rights organisations and other stakeholders (national human rights institutions, legal actors, the private sector et al) to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights; driving progressive interpretations of human rights, especially women's human rights; facilitating and convening civil society forums and creating safe spaces for collaborative resistance; and strategising to ensure state accountability for women's human rights. We engage in developing tools of analysis that allow us and our partners to analyse contemporary issues using a gender equality framework; we carry out training; we open up spaces of influence and mobilise key actors; and through all of these strategies, we create awareness of and compliance with CEDAW and other global human rights standards.

In this Annual Report we look at how our efforts and the efforts of our partners and of other stakeholders have brought us closer to our strategic outcomes. Below, we consider some key achievements for 2017.

We pushed the boundaries of the discourse on women's human rights, and applied international human rights standards to emerging issues in the global political economy and development discourse.

In 2017 we were able to develop a strong analysis around women's economic rights in relation to women's work, particularly in global value chains or as migrant or domestic workers, and around natural resources and corporate accountability. The analysis was grounded in the multi-stakeholder dialogues with women workers, women's rights organisations, national human rights institutions, state officials, representatives of regional bodies (particularly ASEAN) and the private sector, and specialists and experts on labour, women's rights, environment, corporate accountability and other issues. This analysis has been documented in several publications.

We engaged with the CEDAW Committee's development on two general recommendations: we made a submission to the discussion on the CEDAW General Recommendation on Disasters and Climate Change (now GR 37), encouraging the Committee to focus on integrated responses that aim to also address the underlying drivers of climate change and social inequality; and we contributed to the discussions leading to the GR 35 (update on GR 19) on Gender-based Violence Against Women, bringing in the voices of a network of women's organisations and encouraging the Committee to locate gender-based violence against women in the broader political economy of violence. We also engaged with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in analysing the global approach to gender-based violence against women and girls, and specifically the persistence of the idea of a global treaty to address normative gaps in VAW.

Our work with sex worker groups culminated in 2017 with an analytical framework on the rights of sex workers and CEDAW, and a shadow report guideline that sex workers can use in their reporting to CEDAW. Sex workers and other marginalised women's groups are increasingly using CEDAW as an advocacy space.

In 2017, as the International Labour Organisation debated the need to create an instrument on violence at the workplace, we engaged with the formal process to influence the body in creating the instrument and also a mechanism for increasing stakeholder (state, private sector and unions) accountability for violence occurring in a workplace setting.

The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights is working on integrating a gender and women's human rights lens into all its reports, and solicited our involvement in its report to the UN General Assembly on Access to Remedy. Our submission to the Working Group was based on a consultation with our partners, and the Working Group's report showed how women's experiences

and expectations should inform the provision of effective remedies in all types of remedial mechanisms, in line with the Guiding Principles.

We strengthened the voices of women from the Global South in conversations around the global economy and sustainable development.

The Global South Women's Forum on Sustainable Development has now been established as an important space for resistance and influence of the 2030 Agenda. This has been bolstered by IRAW Asia Pacific's organisational strategy on sustainable development and the setting up of a listserv. The listserv mobilises the participants of the Forum to engage around certain identified issues and to remain updated on how the discourse and practice around the 2030 Agenda is progressing. A key component of IRAW Asia Pacific's organisational strategy on sustainable development is the development of a tool to link the Sustainable Development framework to the human rights framework, especially CEDAW.

The importance of understanding and interrogating the dominant economic development paradigm has been a key element of IRAW Asia Pacific's project on Women's Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership that concluded in the third quarter of 2017. This project contributed to strengthening and informing women's activism in the Mekong Region, Thailand and the Philippines, giving voice to issues relating to economic justice in the context of ASEAN economic integration and taking those issues to regional and international spaces. IRAW Asia Pacific's partners at a national level continue to challenge corporate and state actions that violate the human rights of women workers even after the life of the project.

We reached out to more women, broadening our constituency and deepening existing partnerships.

In 2017, in line with our core feminist value of 'nothing about us without us', we worked with women workers, particularly women migrant workers, women factory workers, and women domestic workers, involving them in our discussions and using their lived experience as the basis for the development of tools that can support advocacy around women's right to work and rights at work. We engaged with sex workers and women who use drugs, and built partnerships and alliances with regional and international sex worker networks. We adopted a policy on intersectionality and marginalised women as the basis for this engagement.

By 2017 we had supported civil society from 160 countries in their advocacy around the CEDAW review, linking local and international activism on gender equality, and amplifying voices that have been muted due to democratic deficits in their countries. This work is carried out primarily through our From Global to Local programme which facilitates women's rights activists' engagement with the CEDAW review process, including mentoring them to make optimum use of their interactions with the CEDAW Committee in Geneva during the review of their governments. The report shares some insights from our engagement in 2017, but also shows, through stories from the women activists who have been through this process, how this translates into change at a national level.

Constituency building also included bringing together change advocates from the judicial sector, whose actions have resulted in concrete protections for women's human rights in the context of gender-based violence against women – ranging from prompting legislative action in South Africa, to closing a legal loophole in the Penal Code provision on rape, to pioneering a model survivor-friendly, non-confrontation court room in Thailand. This initiative, *Judges for Gender Justice*, included UN experts, lawyers and women's rights activists, and resulted in the adoption of The Bellagio Declaration on state obligation and role of the judiciary in ensuring access to justice for gender-

based violence, including sexual violence, in an effective, competent manner and with a gender perspective.

We innovated in the ways we work by exploring new ways of capacity building, changing our visual identity, and developing long-term systems for monitoring impact and ensuring organisational sustainability.

In 2017 we developed an online training course for lawyers on the application of CEDAW, to be rolled out in early 2018, and worked on changing our visual identity and developing a new look for our online presence. We also acquired an online tool for mapping our impact, and will be working to increase our capacity to fundraise for our work.

The Context²

There are multiple political, economic and social factors in the global context that impinge on the ability of women to realise their human rights, and which compromise gender equality and non-discrimination in all its egregious forms. It is also a rapidly changing world (not always in a positive direction), in which analysis of context can become obsolete almost as it is being written.

The politics of the right

The rise of right-wing authoritarianism is spreading across the world, creating a global context that challenges freedom, democracy and social justice. Growing xenophobia and intolerance of the 'other' are not just apparent in the way Europe and the USA are dealing with minorities or refugees, but are also evident in the politics of many countries in the Global South. The politics of the right go beyond the national politics of individual countries or the personalities of their leaders – they are the outcome of protracted economic social and political processes, of shifts in the global power bases, particularly the unbridled growth of corporate power. The power imbalances are bolstered by corporations' support for politicians, and by businessmen entering politics and governing nations like businesses, with scarce concern for the human rights of their citizens, least of all women.

State capture

Our conversations around global politics have raised the issue of state capture – how state institutions are being restructured to prioritise partisan or corporate interests over the obligations to protect and fulfil the human rights of citizens. State capture is in reality a “political project at work to repurpose state institutions to suit a constellation of rent-seeking networks”.³ It undermines all attempts to build democracies. In such a context, there is a need to “honour disobedience”.⁴ We need to resist the unlawful manifestations of state capture and condemn the crimes against humanity that continue to occur in different forms, whether through direct actions of the state military, as in the Rakhine state of Myanmar, or through warmongering that leads to the starvation and death of a great number of civilians, as in Yemen. Women face the most severe violations in these situations. The impunity with which violence against women is unleashed by state and non-state actors has cost many women human rights defenders their lives.

Economic violence

A different, yet no less vicious kind of violence is perpetrated by the global economic system that pushes women and other vulnerable groups into precarious jobs with low wages, sub-standard working conditions, no security of tenure, no protection and no rights to organise. The rights of women working at the bottom end of global value chains in manufacturing and agriculture, women migrant workers, women domestic workers, women in the informal sector and women carrying out unpaid care work, are not protected by their governments, who, more often than not, are in a race

² This section has been informed and inspired by two keynote presentations made by Lesley Ann Foster, Chairperson IWRAW Asia Pacific and the Executive Director of Masimanyane Women's Rights International and Chee Yoke Ling, Board Member, IWRAW Asia Pacific and Executive Director, Third World Network at the Annual Advisory Committee of IWRAW Asia Pacific, and the Write-shop on Women's Rights to work and at work respectively in November and December 2017 in Kuala Lumpur.

³ Public Affairs Research Institute (2017) *Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen*. Available at: <http://pari.org.za/betrayal-promise-report/>

⁴ Roger Cohen (2017) “In Trump World, the Need for Disobedience”, *New York Times*, 13 December. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/13/opinion/trump-disobedience.html>

to the bottom to attract foreign direct investment that will increase economic growth and reduce poverty. Foreign direct investment exploits existing exclusions and discriminations. It uses women's role in providing unpaid care work, their unequal access to resources, their limited formal education and society's stereotyping of what women can and cannot do, to create a pool of cheap labour that generates greater profit for the investors. The situation is exacerbated by the nature of Trade Agreements that give too much power to corporations, undermine tax revenues and weaken the capacity of states to fulfil their obligations to protect and fulfil human rights. The Investor Dispute Settlement clauses that are written into many trade agreements allow corporations to sue governments if they feel that government actions – for example, enacting progressive legislation to protect the environment or to improve labour conditions – have resulted, or have the potential to result, in loss of profits. Parallel to these developments, the call for gender equality is being addressed in an instrumental way – by multilateral agencies, the donor community and key players in the development sector – who position the 'exclusion' of women as the key problem, and who seek to increase the participation of women in the economy, without recognising their existing, invisible contribution, and without ensuring that participation is equal and non-discriminatory.

The promise of technology and artificial intelligence

While women struggle for equality and voice against the debilitating forces of the global political economy, we need also to be mindful of developments that are insidiously eroding our lives and that can put human rights – especially women's rights and workers' rights – even further in jeopardy. The world has been seduced by the promise of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) – and there is temptation to see 'putting a tablet in the hand of every poor woman'⁵ as the ultimate solution to gender equality. This year, the robot Sophia got significant press in the UN as someone (?) that is here to help 'humanity create the future'. In an [interview with United Nations Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed](#), Sophia is asked how the UN could help the many people in the world who have no access to electricity or the internet; her response is that the problem lies in the distribution, and that AI can help more evenly distribute resources. By her own admission, Sophia is yet to grasp social and emotional intelligence, but it would seem that the *political nature of distribution* is also eluding her capacity for analysis and understanding. Programming robots is a corporate endeavour, which begs the question of whether this power analysis will ever be programmed into Sophia's capabilities. Rather sadly, Sophia reflects an aspect of what women's rights groups are calling 'UN capture'. 'UN capture' parallels 'state capture', and constitutes a severe compromise of the UN's capacity to be an independent body, a democratic union of nations. It can also be seen in the rise of partnerships between the different UN agencies and corporate actors,⁶ and the increasing dominance of right-wing civil society groups in ECOSOC's registry of listed NGOs.

Technology and artificial intelligence could also threaten the already precarious nature of women's work, especially in export growth-led manufacturing in the Global South. 'Cheap labour' will no longer be an attraction, as manufacturers replace women's work in factories and assembly lines with robots, and technology-led cost savings will enable companies to locate their manufacturing closer to domestic markets. Some estimates suggest that automation could lead to 50-80% job losses in countries of the Global South. Technology is also driving what is being called the digital or 'gig' economy, already evident in the organisation of information by Google, commerce by Amazon,

⁵ Presentation by Chee Yoke Ling at IWRAW Asia Pacific writeshop on women's rights to work and at work.

⁶ Karolin Seitz and Jens Martens (2017) "Philanthrolateralism: Private Funding and Corporate Influence in the United Nations", *Global Policy Forum* Vol 8 Supplement 5. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1758-5899.12448>

urban transportation by Uber or short-term accommodation by Airbnb. These platforms provide the opportunity for (mainly) Global North-based transnational companies to monopolise these sectors, soak up free raw data and convert it into 'digital intelligence'. For Global South governments, this will signal a digital dependency with significant economic, political, social and cultural consequences. The important questions that we need to be asking are: who owns 'Big Data', as this digital intelligence is popularly called, and how can its value be socially distributed? The gig economy also glamorises the casualisation and informalisation of work. The unemployment created by the downsizing that technological advancement brings is disguised as 'freelancing', normalising work with no protection or security.

Windows of opportunity

Amidst these overwhelming challenges to achieving gender equality, there are windows of opportunity for women's rights activism. The 2030 Agenda, imperfect as it is, is expected to ensure that no one is left behind and that gender equality is integrated across all goals rather than being confined to Goal 5. Even though this has not yet been translated into practice, and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development remains a non-binding forum for voluntary national reviews, the mobilising around the SDGs is providing opportunities for voices to be heard. In recent times, the CEDAW Committee has had a heightened understanding of the macro-economic and development issues and has interrogated states on their extra-territorial obligations (Switzerland, Canada), tax justice (Singapore) and commitment to the SDGs. Unfortunately, the gulf between the UN's human rights expertise in Geneva and its development expertise in New York proves to be a continuous obstacle to having the UN present a more coherent and unified response to gender equality.

Outside the treaty body system, the #MeToo campaign has had a snowballing effect, highlighting the egregious nature of gender-based violence against women, and establishing its almost universal presence. There is the danger that the high-profile nature of the campaign could undermine the everyday violence that many women face, but even as more women are using it to expose famous and not-so-famous perpetrators of violence, it is clear that the issue of violence against women can no longer be summarily dismissed. Women have also been organising and resisting the broader forces of misogyny, patriarchy and structural discrimination. From [the Women's March](#) in January 2017, which saw five million people across every continent answering the call to show up and be counted, to more localised protests at national level, women have been a force to mobilise support for a world that is equitable, tolerant, just and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person is protected and our planet is safe from destruction.

Positive changes in the context for women's rights

There have also been some positive changes in the context for women's rights. Certain discriminatory laws have been rolled back. The campaign of Icelandic women to stop work on specific days to highlight wage inequality has influenced many women's movements in Europe, and in 2017 Iceland [led the way](#) as the first country to enforce a law requiring companies to prove proactively that they paid women and men equally. This practice of combating wage inequality moves away from a purely complaints-based system and marks a new regulatory framework requiring proof of compliance instead.

Many parts of the world are becoming more accepting of gender non-conformity, recognising that gender can be understood as a spectrum rather than a binary and more concerned about bodily rights as a lynchpin for politics around individual rights over collective rights. Liberian groups pushed ahead

for calls to [support a law banning female genital mutilation as a socio-political priority issue](#) and in Singapore, LBTQ groups were able to use the Singapore government's avowed commitment to 'the principle of equality' enshrined in the constitution '[regardless of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity](#)' to demand that the state address discriminatory stereotypes in public communications and in the education system, which reinforces domestic violence faced by LBTQ people. There has been a wave towards the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Three weeks after a national referendum showed overwhelming support for same-sex marriage, Australia's parliament legislated for marriage equality, passing a bill almost unanimously to allow two people, regardless of sex, to marry. Chile's constitutional tribunal has voted to ease the ban on abortions; in Indonesia the attempt to criminalise gay sex has been thwarted by the courts; and in the Middle Eastern countries of Lebanon, [Jordan](#) and Tunisia, archaic laws on rape have been repealed.

IWRAW Asia Pacific's three-year strategy (2017-2019)

IWRAW Asia Pacific's three-year strategy expects to deal with these emerging issues, support the movement of women's rights activists, strengthen institutions that support women's access to justice, strengthen knowledge and practices on the use of international norms on gender equality and carry out international advocacy to further women's human rights.

Our theory of change (p. 12) describes the four strategic outcomes (pillars) that frame our work. These strategic objectives cannot be achieved by IWRAW Asia Pacific on our own, and will be the result not just of what we do, but also of the contribution of our partners and of other stakeholders. IWRAW Asia Pacific will build the constituencies, and support and interconnect movements towards this end. Our contributions will include:

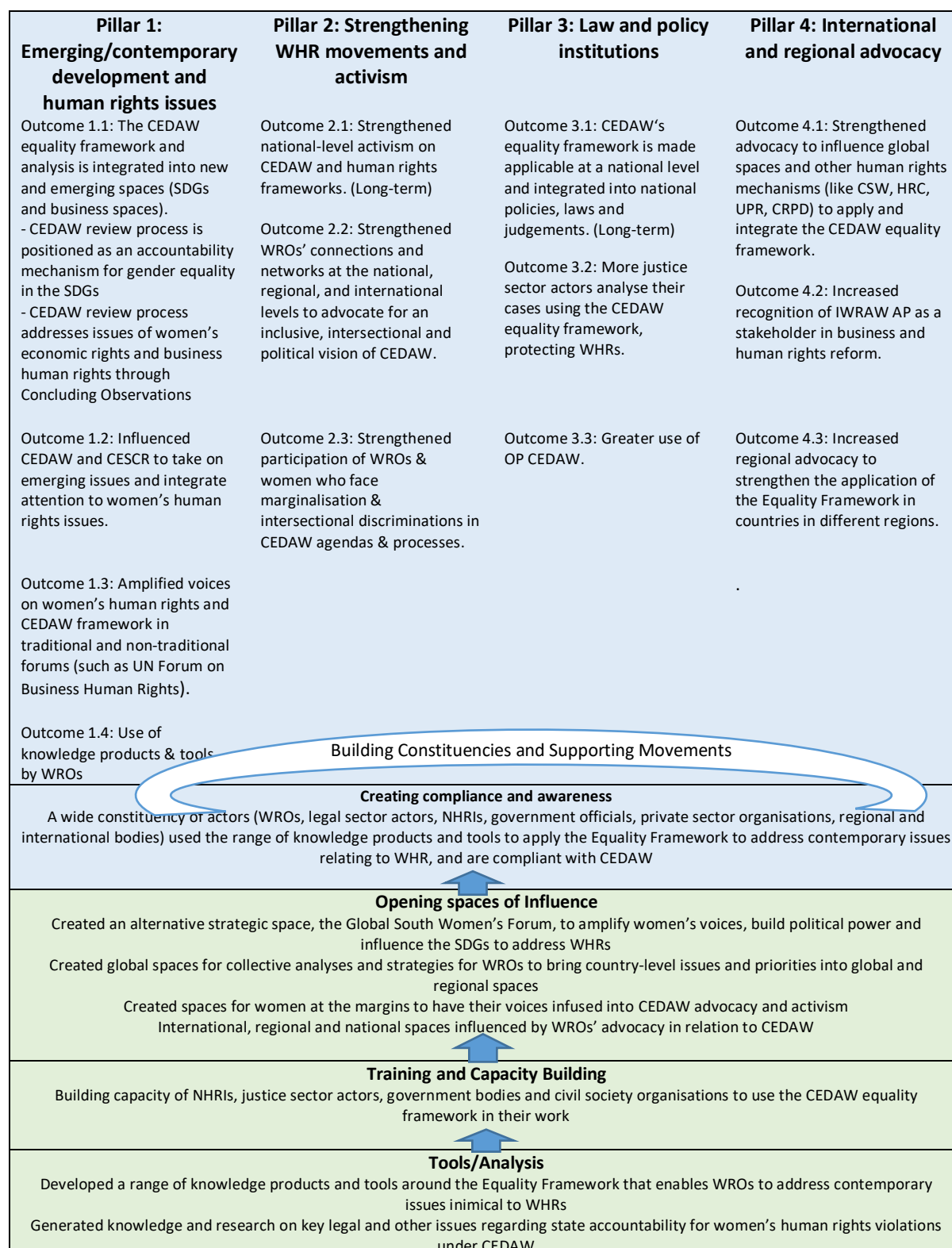
- generating knowledge and analysis, and developing a range of knowledge products and tools that support the different constituencies and movements to achieve the objectives;
- building the capacity of different stakeholders, including NHRIs, justice sector actors, government bodies, and civil society organisations;
- opening spaces of influence by creating alternative platforms to amplify women's voices and build political power and influence, especially for women who are marginalised, as well as creating global spaces for collective analyses and strategies for WROs to bring country-level issues and priorities to global and regional agenda-setting spaces;
- creating awareness and compliance with international human rights standards, especially standards on women's human rights.

Even though resources have been limited, the commitment and hard work of the IWRAW Asia Pacific team and our partners, the support we have from our governance bodies and the network of women's rights activists who work with us in national, regional and international spaces, have enabled us, in this first year of the implementation of the three-year strategy, to clearly carve out a path towards achieving the change we want.

IWRAW Asia Pacific's Theory of Change

PARTNER/STAKEHOLDER CONTRIBUTIONS

IWRAW-AP CONTRIBUTIONS



Contributions towards the Achievement of the Strategic Pillar Outcomes

IWRAW Asia Pacific's theory of change (see p. 12) is based on four strategic pillars with outcomes that are a result of IWRAW Asia Pacific's own work, the efforts of our partners, and the constituencies of women's rights advocates that we have nurtured over two decades, as well as the institutions that we have influenced (and continue to influence) through our work.

IWRAW Asia Pacific's contribution to the different outcomes is through constituency building and supporting movements, and falls broadly into four categories: analysis and the development of tools; training and capacity building; opening spaces of influence; and creating compliance and awareness.

In this section we will show how in 2017 these efforts came together in national, regional and global contexts.



Pillar 1: Emerging/Contemporary Development and Human Rights Issues

Aims to integrate the CEDAW Equality Framework into Sustainable Development, Business and Human Rights frameworks and other contemporary discourses.

Outcome 1.1: The CEDAW equality framework and analysis is integrated into new and emerging spaces (SDGs and business spaces).

- CEDAW review process is positioned as an accountability mechanism for gender equality in the SDGs
- CEDAW review process addresses issues of women's economic rights and business human rights through Concluding Observations

Even though the SDG monitoring architecture (the High Level Political Forum process) has yet to consider the CEDAW review process as an accountability mechanism, during this year we saw the CEDAW Committee routinely calling "for the realization of substantive gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in all of its Concluding Observations.

Progress has also been made towards harmonising the sustainable development and human rights frameworks. More than 54 participants from 33 different countries, participating in the Global South Women's Forum (GSWF), are now aware and interested in harmonising the two frameworks. This is reflected in the 2016 GSWF Declaration from Phnom Penh and further endorsed by participants at the second GSWF in Kigali.

... the Global South Women's Forum seeks to ... develop modalities and strategies to incorporate women's human rights guaranteed by CEDAW and other global and regional treaties within the sustainable development agenda (GSWF 2017 Outcome Document, p. 21)

IWRAW Asia Pacific will continue to stimulate the links between the SDGs and CEDAW frameworks through the ongoing process of developing a tool to implement the harmonisation and through strategic alliance building.

Outcome 1.2: Influenced CEDAW and CESCR to take on emerging issues and integrate attention to women's human rights issues.

The CEDAW Committee has, in its Concluding Observations, been making recommendations on macro-economic issues such as tax justice, and the extraterritorial obligations of states. The 2017 review of Singapore proposed that

*... the State party undertake independent, participatory and periodic impact assessments of the **extraterritorial effects of its financial and corporate tax policies** on women's rights and substantive equality, ensuring that those assessments are conducted impartially, with public disclosure of the methodology used and the findings (CEDAW/C/SGP/CO/5)*



Similarly, the 2017 review of Norway recommended that

... the State party review its climate change and energy policies, and specifically its policy on extraction of oil and gas, to ensure it takes into account the disproportionate negative impacts of climate change on women's rights. (CEDAW/C/NOR/CO/9)

The CEDAW Committee in this period under review revised and updated the General Recommendation 19 (GR 19) on Violence against Women and issued a fresh General Recommendation (GR 35) on Gender-Based Violence against Women. Thematically related to the production of GR 35 were the calls of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (SRVAW) for submissions on the adequacy of the international legal framework on violence against women and on online violence.

The Committee also began drafting a GR on Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of Climate Change in 2017, and released it as GR 37 in 2018.

ICESCR issued General Comment No 24 on State Obligation in the context of Business Activities.

Outcome 1.3: Amplified voices on women's human rights and CEDAW framework in traditional and non-traditional forums (such as UN Forum on Business Human Rights).

Voices on women's human rights in the treaty body spaces

CEDAW

New General Recommendations

IWRAW Asia Pacific consulted with partner women's rights organisations through the cedaw4change listserv and conversations on telephone and Skype, contributed to the updating of GR 19, and responded to the SRVAW. GR 35 recognises that gender-based violence has evolved into a principle of customary international law and makes reference to clarify the responsibility of non-state actors – two issues that were flagged in IWRAW Asia Pacific's submission.

Work around GR 35 also included a Twitter series rooted in the #16dayscampaign in 2017 #endviolenceagainstwomen.

IWRAW Asia Pacific made a submission to the CEDAW Committee on the proposed GR on Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of Climate Change, mainly highlighting the need to “move away from responses to disaster risk caused by climate change that are purely adaptive, and instead focus on integrated responses that aim to also address the underlying drivers of climate change and social inequality”.

Thematic briefings at CEDAW

The growing presence of sex workers advocating for their rights through CEDAW resulted in a thematic briefing of the CEDAW Committee in October 2017 organised by the [Global Network of Sex Work Projects \(NSWP\)](#) and focused on the human rights impacts of ‘end demand’ legislation. ‘End demand’ legal frameworks are often presented as compatible with the decriminalisation of women sex workers and the reduction of human rights abuses and vulnerability to violence. A growing number of countries engaged in sex work law reform have adopted or are exploring the adoption of this model, in lieu of the more expansive removal of laws which penalise and criminalise sex work – which is what sex workers have been calling for over the past decades. The thematic briefing attempted to bring the voices of women sex workers into the dialogue. Eleven CEDAW Committee members attended the dialogue.

Also in October, a thematic briefing on tax justice was organised for the CEDAW Committee. The organising coalition comprised the Center for Economic and Social Rights, the Tax Justice Network, the Center on Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU School of Law, IWRAW Asia Pacific, and a professor from Queens University Faculty of Law. Several of these same organisations co-authored a shadow report for the CEDAW Committee on Switzerland’s financial secrecy policies and its obligations under CEDAW in 2016, and made a similar submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights concerning tax policies and practices in the United Kingdom. This briefing aimed to build on the important strides made by the Committee. Addressing why and how tax policies and practices are crucial for women’s rights, it made the link between state parties’ CEDAW obligations and their tax laws and financial secrecy policies, which adversely affect women – both in their jurisdictions and extraterritorially. It further discussed the CEDAW Committee’s key role in ensuring that tax policies uphold women’s rights. The Committee had requested this briefing because members were very interested in raising these issues of tax, governance, corruption, financial secrecy laws, and extraterritorial obligations in country reviews. They requested more country-specific information in order to fashion questions for the constructive dialogues.

CESCR

IWRAW Asia Pacific made a submission to CESCR and presented an oral statement at the CESCR Day of Discussion in Geneva on the General Comment on State Obligation in the context of Business Activities. ICESCR General Comment No 24 recognises groups disproportionately affected by the adverse impact of business (paragraphs 8 and 9), particularly with regard to multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls, gender role stereotyping and discrimination. It acknowledges that women are overrepresented in the informal economy, highlights the lack of labour-related and social security protections, and puts forward temporary special measures to improve women’s representation in the labour market, including at decision-making levels. It also made reference to CEDAW Articles 2 and 5, and its General Recommendation 28 on the State Obligation.

Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights

IWRAW Asia Pacific's submission to the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights on her report on the impact of fundamentalism and extremism on the cultural rights of women pointed out that fundamentalism and extremism need to be considered together with other contemporary forces, such as the dominant neo-liberal economic model, militarism and arms proliferation, persistence of patriarchy, erosion and regression of fundamental freedoms and constitutional protections of human rights, and deep-rooted discriminatory stereotypes. It is important to make links between the prevalence of these diverse contexts which produce and reproduce social and power hierarchies, inequality, discrimination, hate and exclusion, and curtail states' abilities to guarantee the human rights of women and other marginalised groups. It is significant that of the 189 member states that have ratified CEDAW, 61 state parties continue to retain reservations/declarations to the convention articles. Article 16 of CEDAW, which deals with equality in matters concerning marriage and family, is the one that has attracted the most reservations. State parties have argued that the reservations are not being withdrawn due to the growing threat of religious fundamentalism.

Business and Women's Human Rights

In its report on access to effective remedies, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights used the example of women to illustrate how their experiences and expectations should inform the provision of effective remedies in all types of remedial mechanisms, in line with the Guiding Principles.

This was influenced by IWRAW Asia Pacific's contribution to the UN Working Group, following a facilitated discussion with women's rights organisations, state institution representatives, NGOs, experts, and activists, held in conjunction with IWRAW Asia Pacific's Regional Dialogue on Natural Resource Governance. This was an invited contribution and illustrated the openness of the Working Group to take into account women's rights issues, and reflected IWRAW Asia Pacific's positioning as a respected resource to the Working Group.

There is increased pressure for the proposed binding treaty on Business and Human Rights to incorporate gender equality and women's human rights, and IWRAW Asia Pacific has been active within the Feminists for a Binding Treaty alliance.

IWRAW Asia Pacific has been recognised as the go-to resource on business and women's human rights by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, and introduced as such to the International Monetary Fund. As a result, we were invited to participate in a regional workshop hosted by the IMF, to share our perspectives on the intersection of gender and macro-economic policies. A second invitation to participate in the Spring meetings of the IMF in 2018 was also extended.

SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

The Global South Women's Forum on Sustainable Development

The second Global South Women's Forum was convened in Kigali, Rwanda, in May 2017. Fifty-four participants from 33 different countries attended.

At the first forum, Global South women clearly annunciated a need to create space for them to collectively engage with the SDGs with a human rights-based approach. The second forum delivered on the promise of continuing to create this space whilst it remained vital to amplify Global South women's voices in local to global discussions on sustainable development. At the country level,

IWRAW Asia Pacific will continue to develop resources, such as the tool for harmonising CEDAW and the SDG frameworks, to enable national and local organisations to advocate for women's human rights in the SDGs. At the global level, members of Global South Women's Forum will aim to engage with the HLPF and continue to develop other resources for advocacy. It formed working groups so that members could work together to push the agenda forward.

CEDAW Committee members and mandate holders have attended the two Global South Women's Forums, which has helped to create an understanding of where Global South women stand on issues relating to the SDGs.

In 2017, IWRAW Asia Pacific developed an organisational strategy on sustainable development. One



activity under this strategy is advocacy on the revision of methods of work of the HLPF. This will contribute to profiling gender equality as an issue that cuts across all the goals, and illustrate the potential of using CEDAW as an accountability mechanism for the SDGs. A series of infographics based on the key asks of the 2017 Global South Women's Forum have been developed and shared. They form part of the *2017 Outcome Document of the Global South Women's Forum*.

Outcome 1.4: Use of knowledge products & tools by WROs

The CEDAW Equality Framework is being used by organisations working with sex workers. This is evidenced in the shadow reporting on sex work at CEDAW. To facilitate the use of CEDAW, members of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) created, together with IWRAW Asia Pacific, the *Framework on Sex Workers' Rights and CEDAW* and the *Shadow Report Guidelines on Rights of Sex Workers under CEDAW*.

IWRAW Asia Pacific's tool, the CEDAW Compliance Framework (CCF), was used by partners in Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia to analyse critical national laws: Social Security Law 2012 (Myanmar), Vietnamese Guest Workers Law 2007 (Vietnam), Royal Ordinance Concerning the Management of Foreign Workers' Employment (Thailand), Environment and Natural Resources Code (Cambodia). Capacity building of the use of the CCF was carried out at the Law and Policy Workshop of IWRAW Asia Pacific's Women's Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership project in August 2017. The framework has been translated into Vietnamese for use with national WROs.

The CCF will also be used in the Strengthening the Implementation of CEDAW project work that IWRAW Asia Pacific has initiated in Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Timor Leste during 2017-2019.

Several new knowledge products were created in 2017. They included products that emerged through the work with partners in IWRAW Asia Pacific's Women's Economic Empowerment, Rights and Leadership (WEL) in ASEAN project. These were:

- *Corporate Accountability and Women's Human Rights*
- *Corporate Power and the Space for Women's Activism*
- *Key Issues and Recommendations concerning Rights of Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN*

- *Stories of Change – Women’s Economic Leadership and Empowerment in ASEAN project and the accompanying video [Women’s Economic Rights in ASEAN](#)*
- *The Missing Women – Implication of ASEAN Integration for Women*



Pillar 2: Strengthening WHR movements and activism

Movement building that aims to establish sustained, effective coalitions and partnerships of WROs at the national, regional and international levels, connecting also to the agenda of groups facing intersectional discrimination.

Outcome 2.1: Strengthened national-level activism on CEDAW and human rights frameworks. (Long-term)

IWRAW Asia Pacific has been consistent over the years in its support to women’s rights groups to understand and use the CEDAW convention, and its standards and mechanisms, as a framework to interrogate laws and policies, to strengthen the institutions of the state and the cultural environment in terms of gender equality and combating discrimination against women. Through our From Global to Local programme we have facilitated women’s rights organisations’ engagement with the CEDAW Committee during the review of state parties. This engagement is not an end in itself but a basis for organising, for delivering quality information and common agreement to the CEDAW Committee, and for using the Concluding Observations of the committee in national advocacy.

Post-CEDAW review activities, some of which are described below, were reported in several countries by partners/WROs:

Armenia, Belarus and Estonia (countries reviewed during the 65th CEDAW Session) have a list of prohibited professions for women. This is a pattern across post-Soviet countries. [Our House](#), a WRO in Belarus, works on this list as an issue of priority, and ran a social media campaign on it in the lead-up to the CEDAW review. Women workers are however resisting the lifting of the prohibition, as they understand it as a law to protect women from dangerous work and worry that repeal would disadvantage them. In both Armenia and Belarus, women’s groups have actively monitored state action around the Concluding Observations from the CEDAW review. Our House began an innovative initiative of lobbying local government to make budgets more accessible to the public. In the words of Our House representative, Olga Karatch:

We estimated that the most realistic scenario was that after three years of systematic work one of the councils will give in [and] publish a local budget. The results of our campaign to get public access to the local budgets have outdone even our most bold expectations ... As per request of the activists of OH there were 60 (sixty) (!) instances of accessible for everyone publications of the local budgets. (personal email communication, 01/09/2017)



We connected the different WROs from Armenia and Belarus to the Global Initiative on ESCR Rights, which also works with groups in Bulgaria on the same issue.

Communication from women's rights activists in **Trinidad and Tobago** indicates that they

completed a 4-day CEDAW training in Trinidad for a cross section of duty-bearers including women's organizations, civil society, government functionaries, Police and Judiciary, Human Rights Actors and stakeholders and welcomed Ms. Alda Facio and the WHRI team as facilitators. (email communication from Terry Ince)

In **Cambodia**, a coalition of NGOs have been working on amending the law on domestic violence. In 2016, the coalition led by NGO-CEDAW (an IRAW AP partner trained under the CEDAW Compliance Framework project) met with officials from the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) to present their recommendations to amend the domestic violence law, to which MoWA agreed. This advocacy continued into 2017 and 2018.

In **Mauritania**, the women's rights group AMANE, which attended the From Global to Local session in 2014, has been organising national debates on a law on gender-based violence which is being blocked by conservative forces in the country.

On March 31st and April 7th, we organized the "Preliminary Debate on the adoption of the draft law on gender-based violence" in Nouakchott. The originality of our work is that it is based on the bill itself and several other standards, including the recommendations of CEDAW, CEDAW itself and other national, regional and international instruments, as well as the analysis document produced by AMANE.

Present were women leaders and activists from senior NGOs, as well as women's rights activists, women lawyers, women journalists, as well as technical and financial partners for gender equality. With this event we not only produced other proposals to amend the law but also an action plan to convince the authorities responsible for the adoption and application of the laws without whom our proposals cannot be incorporated into the text.



Photos from the debate on the gender-based violence bill in Nouakchott, Mauritania

A Plan International officer from **Burkina Faso** blogged about her participation in the CEDAW review, following the training on CEDAW conducted by IRAW AP in April 2017.

... The icing on the cake was the NGO lunch briefing with the Committee, during which I discussed and read out a 2-minute oral statement on "early pregnancies at school" to further inform the review. On the actual day of the review and interactive dialogue between the Committee and government of Burkina Faso, I had the unique privilege of seeing how this issue was very smartly formulated into precise questions, put to my country's delegation, and how they responded. ... The Committee's questions were met with answers that I am set on checking, and which, in all honesty begged for more truth and substance ... I left Geneva with 5 other NGOs who brought up other issues of concern relating to the rights of women and

girls in Burkina Faso, and we agreed to hold a press conference upon our return to inform the public about what happened in Geneva. I am filled with hope that the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee will spur solutions to the issue of early pregnancies and their detrimental effect on girls' education, and look forward to follow-up on them at the national level.

Outcome 2.2: Strengthened WROs' connections and networks at the national, regional, and international levels to advocate for an inclusive, intersectional and political vision of CEDAW.

While participation in the CEDAW review process stimulates national networking and women's rights organisations coming together to prepare joint reports to the Committee, many of IWRAW Asia Pacific's other activities also contribute networking among WROs working on similar issues. This is clearly evident in our thematic convenings and in the convening of the Global South Women's Forum on Sustainable Development, but also in our participation in a range of networks, such as the WESCR working group of ESCR, the Women's Major Group discussions on the SDGs, TB Net – the NGO group on treaty bodies, Feminists for a Binding Treaty, and others. The work with women who use drugs was informed and strengthened by sex worker groups whose positive experience with CEDAW encouraged these other women to choose that path for advocacy.

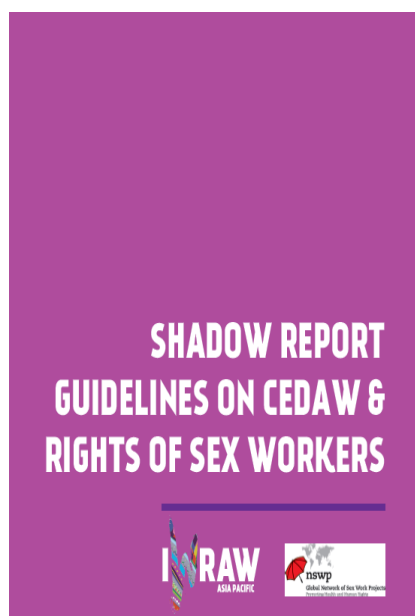
The Women, Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership (WEL) project supported by OXFAM Novib and the Australian Government (DFAT) was concluded in mid-2017. It strengthened the connections between women's rights organisations with a strong interest in addressing women's human rights in the context of ASEAN integration. Working together using the CEDAW Compliance Framework to analyse national laws, or participating in the regional dialogues with different stakeholders (government, private sector, ASEAN bodies), women's rights organisations in the region have been able to share and learn from each other.

Outcome 2.3: Strengthened participation of WROs & women who face marginalisation & intersectional discriminations in CEDAW agendas & processes.

A significant number of shadow reports reflecting the particular issues of women facing intersectional discrimination and marginalisation were submitted to the CEDAW review in 2017.

The Issue	No of thematic shadow reports in each session		
	66 th	67 th	68 th
Roma & Traveller Women	2		
LBTQI	5	3	1
Women, Peace & Security	3	3	1
Women Sex Workers	3	3	3
Muslim Women	1	2	4
Abortion Rights	1		
Working Women	1		
Women in Detention	1		
Women living with HIV	1		
Sexual Violence	1		

The Issue	No of thematic shadow reports in each session		
	66 th	67 th	68 th
Women who Use Drugs		1	
SRHR		1	2
Women with Disabilities		2	2
Indigenous Women		1	1
Women Human Rights Defenders		1	
Young Women			1
Refugees & Asylum Seekers			1
Right to Food			1



In addition, IWRAW AP has developed **an institutional policy on working with marginalised groups of women**. The policy is based on IWRAW AP's commitment to the realisation of rights of all women. It seeks to find more inclusive ways to make the human rights claims of marginalised groups of women visible and effective, especially when their lived realities of discrimination and inequality are not yet reflected in the political demands and/or ideological frameworks of the 'majority'.

Over the last year, IWRAW AP has provided support to such groups, such as the [Global Network of Sex Work Projects](#) (NSWP) or [Humanity and Inclusion](#) (formerly Handicap International).

Our support to NSWP entailed working with them to finalise a Framework on Rights of Sex Workers & CEDAW and an accompanying shadow report guideline to help sex worker groups to engage with the CEDAW review process.

... I hope this is another development based on the CEDAW recommendations as of 2015 to decriminalise sex work in Russia, which were quoted in our Alternative reports and discussions with the CESCRC committee. This is a great example how we were able to use the experience delivered and shared by IWRAW as at least 6 persons from the Silver Rose passed your trainings between 2010 and 2015 ... This time the Silver Rose together with the new network of individual sex workers EECA Sex Workers' Alliance tried this new UN treaty body to inform of the barriers that impede sex workers from realising their economic, social and cultural rights, and we hope that this can improve the position of sex workers. (email communication)

We also provided technical support to the Healthy Options Project (HOPS) and Coalition of Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalised Community (Coalition) to draft an OP CEDAW inquiry submission regarding systematic and widespread denial of access to justice for women sex workers in

Macedonia. The submission was reviewed (though subsequently rejected) by the CEDAW Committee.

Nothing about us without us

IWRAW Asia Pacific's **organisational policy on marginalised women** consolidates our commitment to diversity and inclusion and the principle of 'nothing about us without us'. We have actively increased the participation of our different constituencies in our convenings, especially our meetings on women's economic rights. A third of the participants in the Write-shop on Women's Economic Rights, held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2017, were factory workers or domestic workers from ASEAN countries, several of who were also migrants. This participation helped ground the discussions, and the output – a guideline for applying international standards for women's right to work, due in 2018 – will be richer for it. There are however challenges, especially relating to language, and we need to commend the commitment of colleagues who accompanied these women and were able to translate for them so that their participation in the discussions was assured.



Pillar 3: Law and Policy Institutions

Outcome 3.1: CEDAW's equality framework is made applicable at a national level and integrated into national policies, laws and judgements. (Long-term)

Indicators of progress in the direction of this outcome are the number of states that have domesticated the substantive equality framework into national legal frameworks and into policy, and the number of legal actors, national human rights institutions and other government bodies working on protecting and fulfilling women's human rights.

Despite the pushback on women's human rights and gender equality, **there is some movement towards CEDAW's equality framework being made applicable at a national level and integrated into national policies, laws and judgements, either explicitly or implicitly.**

[Bermuda in 2017](#), as a British Overseas Territory (protectorate), formally requested the extension of CEDAW to its territory, signalling its intention to comply with the international standards of gender equality and women's rights entrenched in the convention.

Women's right to abortion has always been a contentious issue in many Latin American countries. El Salvador's CEDAW Review Concluding Observations in February 2017 highlighted the grave violations facing even (minor) victims of rape who seek termination of pregnancy but are criminalised by the current law. Since then, [domestic discussions](#) and [international pressure](#), as well as cabinet ministers', including the minister of health's, questioning of judgements relating to foetus protection, has seen the Salvadoran state willing to look at the impact of this legislation on women and girls. In 2015, the [CEDAW Committee recommended that Bolivia review and amend the restrictive conditions under which abortion was available to women](#), and required the state to implement the Constitutional Court ruling to abolish the requirement of judicial authorisation for abortion in the case of rape. In 2017, [the Bolivian government moved to loosen restrictions around abortion services](#), allowing students, adolescents or girls to end unwanted pregnancies under eight weeks. Another amendment to allow abortion for women in extreme poverty is also being proposed.

After receiving inputs from the CEDAW review, the minister of labour in Trinidad and Tobago expressed her support for inclusion of domestic workers in the labour protection frameworks. Women's groups and the union of domestic workers had lobbied the CEDAW Committee to highlight their exclusion from the protections of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act – a situation that has had the effect of “denying them rights as all other workers”. [The government has since announced a new package of laws to ensure that this discrimination is not perpetuated. Civil society activism, especially by Hindu women, resulted also in a law to outlaw child marriage in Trinidad and Tobago.](#)

CEDAW has impacted legal frameworks even in countries that have not ratified the convention. In December 2017, [Taiwan's Executive Yuan released its third national report on the implementation of CEDAW](#), highlighting efforts by the government between 2013 and 2016 to promote women's rights on all fronts and enact national legislation to protect women's rights. In the United States, the Cities for CEDAW initiative adopts an innovative approach to establish CEDAW norms and principles at municipal/city level, with various cities creating local laws and policies that incorporate CEDAW into local/city-wide laws and regulations. This began in [San Francisco](#), with its CEDAW Ordinance, and has since extended to the Californian cities of [Palo Alto](#) and [Laguna Woods](#), as well as [Rapid City](#), South Dakota. This approach to domesticating international norms is important to demonstrate that ensuring implementation and accountability for gender equality can happen at various levels, not just through the executive, or through a state's engagement with global structures, but also through the domestic policy space and with its own citizenry.

Outcome 3.2: More justice sector actors analyse their cases using the CEDAW equality framework, protecting WHRs.

In 2017, two IWRAW Asia Pacific initiatives contributed to strengthening the capacity of justice sector actors so that they could adopt the principles of substantive equality and non-discrimination in national litigation.

The **online training for lawyers** was developed over this period, in collaboration with the University of New Mexico. The training uses the lawyers training package that IWRAW AP had developed over the years through a process of consultation with women's rights activists. The call for participants resulted in the selection of 15 respondents from Asia and Africa, for a course that began at the end of January in 2018.

In December 2017, IWRAW Asia Pacific held a Judicial Colloquium at the Bellagio Centre, the first convening in our Judges for Gender Justice programme. The colloquium brought together eight high-level judges who have made progressive judgements on sexual violence against women in their countries. Here's what CEDAW Committee member Patricia Schultz had to say about it:

We heard from each judge how they deal with the challenges they face to ensure women's rights and notably to ensure prevention, prosecution, punishment, remedy and reparation for sexual violence against women ... The program was heavy but well balanced ... and enabled a fantastic exchange of experience and knowledge. We of course heard of many atrocities. It was sobering, also due to our shared evaluation of the increase in the intensity of violence against women and girls. But it was also very encouraging to learn about the diversity and creativity of legal approaches to deal with sexual violence, in everyday life or in armed conflict situations ... It was hard work, done in an atmosphere of respect and listening to each other.

The colloquium concluded with a declaration that called for the removal of reservations, the ratification of the OP and for the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

We agree with Ms Schultz that the Bellagio Centre is "a wonderful place to work and think together" and are pleased that we were able to meet the challenge of acquiring it for the meeting. Regional colloquiums are being planned in Asia and Africa in 2018.

Outcome 3.3: Greater use of OP CEDAW.

Since 2000 when the OP CEDAW came into force, IRAW Asia Pacific has supported the women's movement in understanding and using this mechanism to incorporate CEDAW obligations into domestic law. Since 2003 we have mobilised strategic thinking around the OP CEDAW as a means for pushing legal frameworks and access to justice issues through regional consultations and through technical assistance to country partners' filing of cases and inquiries. In 2017, we continued to provide this support to country partners, though confidentiality means we cannot disclose the countries or the partners involved. However, the demand for our services demonstrates continued relevance and uptake of litigation-based strategies by WROs.

In addition, our design of an online training course for lawyers in 2017 has allowed us to create an opportunity to reach out to a broad network from the legal community on various legal questions related to legal strategies around women's rights claims. This includes sharing of strategies related to the use of OP CEDAW as a mechanism that strengthens legal norms through international mechanisms.



Pillar 4: International and Regional Advocacy

Outcome 4.1: Strengthened advocacy to influence global spaces and other human rights mechanisms (like CSW, HRC, UPR, CRPD) to apply and integrate the CEDAW equality framework.

The CEDAW Process

The CEDAW Committee has recognised the legitimate and effective role of civil society in the domestic implementation of gender equality, especially since women's human rights are often contested on the basis of traditional practices, customs and religion. The Committee sees civil society as key in instigating and sustaining change in compliance with international human rights norms. This recognition, and the continued involvement of women's rights organisation in the Convention's reporting process, feeds important information to the UN body, and influences international processes, policies and programmes.

In 2017, through our **From Global to Local programme**, IRAW Asia Pacific facilitated the engagement of 206 women from the following countries at the different sessions of CEDAW.

66th Session: Ukraine, Ireland, Jordan, El Salvador, Germany, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Micronesia

67th Session: Barbados, Costa Rica, Italy, Montenegro, Nigeria, Thailand, Niger, Romania

68th Session: Burkina Faso, Kenya, Guatemala, South Korea, Nauru, Singapore, Monaco, Norway, Israel, Kuwait, Oman, Paraguay



Thailand NGO lunch briefing: Thai NGOs express their diverse representation and issues through a solidarity wall for women who could not come to the review to share their issues in person.

The From Global to Local programme mentors women activists in Geneva to make optimum use of the opportunity to engage with the CEDAW Committee. Our presence at each and every CEDAW review also enables us to ground our work on the priorities of women coming to the reviews of their state parties, and to shape our own programmes. The reviews show that the world and its institutions continue to be dominated by patriarchal values and attitudes, and that despite significant progress in legislation, issues of discrimination, gender stereotyping and gender-based violence against women persist in every state.

As the analysis of shadow reports (pp. 20-21) shows, to some extent, it is also clear from the reviews that in most states progress towards gender equality and non-discrimination is not equally distributed. There are many women whose lived realities are not always visible to the state parties and are not strongly reflected in the political demands of the dominant women's movement in their country. The CEDAW reviews highlight that in different contexts, LGBTQI women, migrant women, women refugees, women sex workers, older women, women with disabilities and women living in rural areas and in conflict-affected situations face multiple discriminations. The From Local to Global Programme strengthens their voices.

Working with the CEDAW Committee

Our engagement with the CEDAW Committee includes encouraging their participation in our regional and global programmes, using the time in Geneva to have key discussions and targeted briefings, and mobilising women's responses to new and emerging General Recommendations that progress the interpretation of the Covenant.

Four CEDAW Committee members participated in IWRAW Asia Pacific's meetings in 2017: Ismat Jahan participated in the Global South Women's Forum in Kigali, Dalia Lenarte participated in the Expert Group Meeting on the rights of women who use drugs in Vilnius, Hilary Gbedemah in the Law and Policy workshop on women's economic, social and cultural rights in Chiang Mai, and Patricia Schultz in the Judicial Colloquium in Bellagio, Italy.

Two thematic briefings were held in Geneva (see p. 16): one organised by the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) on the human rights impacts of 'end demand' legislation, and the other by a coalition of NGOs including IWRAW Asia Pacific, on tax justice.

IWRAW AP was also able to mobilise inputs from women's rights groups into the CEDAW Committee's formulation of GR 35 on violence against women, and GR 37 on disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change (see p. 5).

In addition, IWRAW Asia Pacific has been providing analysis and contributions to the work of the special procedures. We responded to the Special Rapporteur on VAW's call for information on shelters and protection orders and to the call for information on online VAW. We also made a submission to the SR on Cultural Rights.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

The Commission on the Status of women (CSW) is another global advocacy space for Global South women. At an institutional level, IWRAW Asia Pacific recognises CSW as a strong networking space for civil society, even though it may not be the strongest platform for advocating state obligations or for developing international norms. In 2017, however, we felt that we could contribute significantly to the theme of CSW 61 – Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work.

Our inputs illustrate our convening power and our connectedness to different sections of the women's movement:

- Written and oral statement on women's empowerment in the changing world of work at the CSW 61, delivered by Shanti Uprety



Shanti Uprety making the oral statement at CSW 61

- Parallel event at CSW 61, which brought together a panel of women to talk about redefining the value of women's work. Board member Maria Graterol moderated the panel, which included Corina Rodriguez from [DAWN](#), Ida Le Blanc from the National Union of Domestic Employees, Trinidad and Tobago, and Channsitha Mark from the United Sisterhood Alliance, Cambodia. They talked about the social organisation of care work, the rights of women domestic workers, and the rights of women in the garment and entertainment industries. Shanti Uprety provided the CEDAW perspective.



*IWRAW AP's Redefining the Value of Women's Work panel
(L to R) Channitha Mark, Ida Le Blanc, Maria Graterol (moderator),
Corina Rodriguez*

- Founder director Shanthi Dairiam took up the invitation from [Women for Women's Human Rights \(WWHR\)](#) to participate in their event on a New Economic Order for Gender Equality, at which Ipek Ilkkaracan, a member of our Advisory Committee, discussed the 'Purple Economy'.



At the WWHR Parallel event: Shanthi Dairiam (second from left); Ipek Ilkkaracan (far right)

- Shanti Uprety spoke at the parallel event 'Promoting Women's Human Rights within the UNGP Framework' organised by FOKUS. She talked about how to ensure state and corporate accountability using UNGP and existing international human rights standards and mechanisms such as CEDAW. The objective of the parallel event was to introduce the UNGP on Business and Human Rights to a gender perspective and present a case study to show how these principles should be employed to protect and respect women's human rights.

The right to work in its current manifestation has led to savage exploitation and enslavement of women and girls worldwide.



Our presence in New York was supported by a series of infographics on social media on the theme of CSW 61, women's right to work.

Outcome 4.2: Increased recognition of IWRAW AP as a stakeholder in business and human rights reform.

Over the last two years IWRAW Asia Pacific has been building a body of knowledge on corporate accountability (see publications on p. 17), and working with partners in different spaces to advocate for holding private sector actors accountable for respecting women's human rights.

The UN Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises invited IWRAW Asia Pacific to make a submission to inform its report on access to remedies, which it presented to the UN General Assembly in October 2017. The report “unpack[ed] the concept of access to effective remedies under the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework. It clarif[ied] the interrelationship between the right to effective remedy, access to effective remedy, access to justice and corporate accountability. It examine[d] the issue of effective remedies from the perspective of rights holders and propose[d] that remedial mechanisms should be responsive to the diverse experiences and expectations of rights holders. Affected rights holders should be able to claim what may be termed a “bouquet of remedies” without fear of victimization”.⁷ The Working Group also used women as an “an illustrative group to show how their experiences and expectations should inform the provision of effective remedies in all types of remedial mechanisms, in line with the Guiding Principles.”⁸

Participants in the Women, Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership in ASEAN (WEL in ASEAN) project that concluded in the third quarter of 2017 considered appropriate approaches for women's rights organisations to engage with the private sector. This conversation resulted in a briefing paper on corporate power (see publications on p. 17).

IWRAW Asia Pacific is a member of Feminists for a Binding Treaty, a network of feminist organisations which submitted suggestions to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Ecuador to the United Nations, and other international organisations in Geneva, for inclusion in the Draft Elements of the international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises. These included recommended wording on mandatory gender impact statements and gender-sensitive justice and remedy mechanisms and wording to ensure respect, protection and an enabling environment for women human rights defenders.

This advocacy will continue through 2018. The key rationale for a binding treaty is to address impunity and lack of remedies from current system of voluntary non-binding rules. It is important to note that within companies, the supporters of a binding treaty are looking to having an even playing field to ensure compliance by all businesses. The global good practices being discussed include mandated disclosure regimes, e.g. French duty of vigilance, law.

⁷ UN General Assembly: Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises (A/62/162)

⁸ Ibid, p. 10/25 para 28.

Sanyu Awori represented IWRAP Asia Pacific at the IMF Workshop with CSOs from the ASEAN region and the Joint IMF Indonesia High Level Conference 'International Taxation in Asia: Issues and the Way Forward' held in Jakarta in July 2017. Sanyu has also been called to discuss issues of women's human rights and trade with the Gender and Development Network of the UK. Sanyu has been contributing to the discourse on business and human rights through journal articles and blog posts, such as her article [How the 'Business Case' for Gender Equality Sidelines Human Rights](#).

Outcome 4.3: Increased regional advocacy to strengthen the application of the Equality Framework in countries in different regions

Regional advocacy in Southeast Asia

ASEAN governments were a key focus of the advocacy of IWRAP Asia Pacific's Women, Economic Rights, Empowerment and Leadership (WEL) in ASEAN project, which ended in the third quarter of 2017. The project strengthened the capacity of WROs to raise accountability of the state and business sector for gender equality. This was achieved by identifying and addressing systematic patterns of discrimination, by building the capacity of selected WROs to plan and implement appropriate interventions to claim their rights, and by providing opportunities and spaces for NGO-state/stakeholder advocacy through both regional and national trainings, and thematic regional dialogues. The project created knowledge resources and tools to aid WROs in their advocacy on women's economic rights in ASEAN (see p. 17). While policy spaces enabling WROs to engage with decision-makers proved to be limited in this region, the project created alternative platforms, such as the thematic dialogues at the regional level for engagement with civil society, state and ASEAN decision makers on the priority issues of the project. National-level partners made considerable headway in engaging with the state machineries and ASEAN representatives in their countries.

Developing the capacity of WROs' knowledge and skills on women's economic rights proved to be a key enabler for other rights. One hundred and seventy-four (174) women's rights organisations from the Mekong region, Thailand and the Philippines were trained on women's economic rights, and contributed to influencing international recommendations from CEDAW to the ASEAN states, as well as policy-influencing outcomes through the ASEAN People's Forum (APF) and national-level dialogues with state and ASEAN representatives. In Vietnam, the women's rights organisations organised two dialogues, one with 40 participants from state agencies on the analysis of data on economic rights of women and the impacts of joining the AEC, and a second for 45 state officials on monitoring and taking forward the Concluding Observations from the CEDAW review. In Thailand, the dialogue on protection of foreign migrant workers included the Thai representatives from AICHR and ACWC. In Myanmar, a training requested by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Rehabilitation Women's Development Unit, included participants from six government ministries.

In targeting nascent women's economic rights environments in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, IWRAP Asia Pacific contributed to developing a coherent and strategic approach to addressing women's economic rights in the region. For example, it promoted engagement on responsibility of the business sector, on the issue of state regulatory frameworks for business impact, on the need to strengthen domestic legal protections for women migrant workers and domestic workers, and women's right and access to productive and natural resources. All ASEAN member states have committed to international legal obligations on gender equality under CEDAW. As such, IWRAP Asia Pacific and our partners in ASEAN were able to use CEDAW's normative

framework for claiming and upholding women's economic rights. National-level advocacy by partners in the region focused on migrant women domestic workers in Thailand, natural resource governance in Cambodia, and rights of women workers in Vietnam. Partners discussed these issues with other civil society actors and with government. This advocacy has continued beyond the project.



Infographic developed on natural resource rights

Advocacy through social media

Several social media advocacy messages related to our thematic work have been mentioned in different parts of this report: SDGs, gender-based violence, women's right to work.

In addition, IWRAW Asia Pacific's communications included the following two series of infographics.



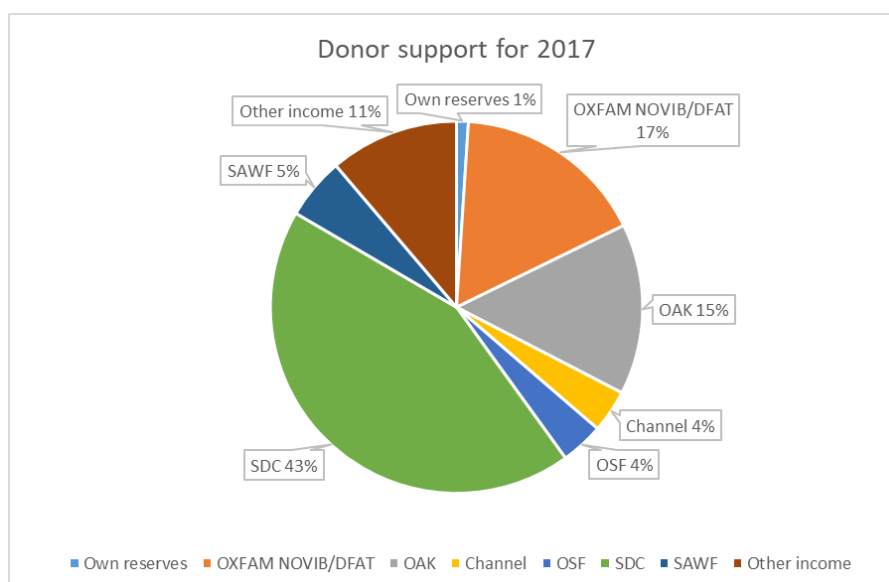
A series on abortion rights as articulated in CEDAW for the #OneDayOneStruggle annual campaign which takes place every 28 September, when women around the world come together in celebration of sexual and bodily rights as human rights.

A series on CEDAW [General Recommendation 34](#) about #RuralWomen



Organisational Outcome: IWRAP AP's organisational capacities are strengthened and its financial sustainability is secured.

The strategy envisages an organisational outcome of uninterrupted team capacity to deliver on outcomes, able to diversify its donor base and grow its reserve.



The chart above indicates the diverse funding that IWRAP Asia Pacific received in 2017.

To achieve organisational sustainability, IWRAW Asia Pacific aimed to grow its reserve, rationalise costs, diversify our supporter base, strengthen in-house capacity to raise resources, work with partners to raise resources, innovate, and communicate our impact and successes more widely.

We started using Impact Mapper software, but it has yet to show impacts in a meaningful way, given especially that our strategy is just one year old. We also developed the online training course for lawyers, as an innovative pilot, to test among other things the demand and usefulness of online capacity building. It was disseminated online in 2018. Our efforts to retain diversified support for our work was given a huge boost also in 2018, through the use of a fundraising consultant who strengthened our capacity to build an organisational 'funding machine' that will give us more financial stability. We appreciate the Open Society Foundation's support of this effort.

2017 also saw us expand our communications, networking and digital presence, with staff capacity now dedicated to communications. The impact of this change can be seen in the dramatic changes in our social media statistics below.

	2016	2017
Facebook followers	666	1285
Twitter followers	1200	1994
Cedaw4change listserv	784	792
Website pageviews	Not tracked	25266

Work also commenced in 2017 on the new website and visual identity. These were launched in February 2018.

Conclusions and Way Forward

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” – Arundhati Roy

The beginning of our new three-year strategic period, 2017, got us off to a good start. We have a full team in the office, and a strong portfolio of work that enables us to meet many of the challenges to women’s human rights in the current context. The demand to use the treaty body process as a space for advocacy and for holding states accountable is intensifying despite the ‘capture of UN spaces’, making our work as relevant as it was 25 years ago. The rapidly changing context however requires that as an organisation we can be adaptable and nimble, and take on the challenges of making the interpretations of CEDAW relevant to the achievement of the human rights of all women, everywhere.

Our plans for the next years of this strategic period will be to:

- expand the work we have done and build on the knowledge we have gained on women’s economic rights in ASEAN, focusing our efforts on profiling the rights of women at work;
- strengthen our business and women’s human rights portfolio, by building alliances with other organisations working on business and human rights, and contributing a strong gender and women’s rights perspective to their efforts;
- expand our knowledge to address corporate and state accountability for the impacts of macro-economic policy, including in the area of global trade;
- deepen our engagement with marginalised women, because we can see that this work is providing a huge value addition to achieving the rights of all women, everywhere;
- make our unique contribution to the discussion and implementation of the 2030 Agenda through our efforts to harmonise the SDG and human rights frameworks, with a special focus on ensuring that there is accountability for achieving gender equality. This work is already gathering momentum;
- facilitate the alternative space that the Global South Women’s Forum provides for women;
- broaden the discourse on violence against women, so that it becomes an issue that cuts across all our strategic pillars and everything we do.

We are also focused on contributing to changing the external environment to strengthen receptiveness of states and other actors on gender equality approaches and outcomes, while challenging and resisting efforts to undermine and diminish the framework of progressive and inclusive feminism that strengthens human rights, diversity and democracy for all peoples.

Organisationally, we need to address issues of how we can continue to broaden our reach and share our knowledge and experience more widely, as well as to scale up our work with marginalised women to reach others, such as migrant women and refugees. We recognise that all struggles for equality and freedom are interconnected, and that to fight the impunity with which the powerful perpetuate inequality and discrimination, we need to join hands with movements for land rights, labour rights, indigenous peoples’ rights and others. We need to be smarter in how we push our feminist agenda, and engage with a wide range of stakeholders so we can overcome the constraints of limited human, financial and time resources.

In 2018 we celebrate 25 years of IRAW Asia Pacific's existence. We see this as an opportunity to honour the work of the feminists that led this organisation and the fight for equality and non-discrimination over the last quarter-century, and to look to the new generations of young feminists to take forward the struggle with equal vigour and commitment.