

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTION WATCH ASIA PACIFIC

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The COVID-19 pandemic that characterised 2020 brought with it unprecedented challenges, affecting lives and livelihoods on a massive scale. Although a common remark was that the virus did not discriminate, many of the systems in place most certainly did, with women, poor and marginalised people disproportionately impacted.

The crisis made it clearer than ever that we are all connected and that our quest to overcome it cannot afford to leave anyone out. However, many of those in charge showed their resistance to this truth, digging their heels in and seizing the opportunity to exploit and discriminate.



The multilateral institutions appeared to be frozen in time, without the capacity to respond creatively to the crisis or to turn out recommendations amounting to anything more than business as usual. The IMF and World Bank revealed themselves to be in a pre-COVID-19 intellectual lockdown bolstered by their governance structures, dominated by rich countries, and their economists unable to think outside of the proverbial box. In fact, the IMF swiftly committed a group of countries to implementing post-COVID-19 austerity measures that will preclude any movement towards a feminist economy or gender equality.

As the IWRAW Asia Pacific team shifted to fully working from home, as well as organising virtual spaces for our ongoing work, we grappled with questions of accessibility and inclusion online, from interpretation needs and image descriptions to internet connectivity in poorly served areas. But although the shift to entirely virtual organising enabled us to forge new connections with feminist groups around the world, the United Nations treaty body system struggled to keep up, with CEDAW state reviews notably postponed again and again. At a time when it is more critical than ever to hold states accountable at the multilateral level for their violations of women's human rights, opportunities to do so appear to be fading.

With the climate crisis still looming, the possibility that COVID-19 will persist for years to come, and border controls having long served to exclude Global South activists in particular, 'online interactions' should not be considered a temporary, less inclusive or less effective process. Rather, our vision is of a hybrid system whereby online interactions and face-to-face interactions work to complement each other. We need to use technology to ensure mixed modes of interaction that can be even more inclusive than what has come before.

Our focus on marginalised groups, our problematisation of borders as a site of exclusion and discrimination, and the increased emphasis we have placed over the last several years on women's economic rights and on creating awareness



At IWRAW Asia Pacific, we engaged with these themes to the best of our abilities. while juggling our individual responsibilities and worries. impacted as everyone was by the pandemic. We sought to ensure a work/ life balance rather than risk blurring the lines to the detriment of our health, and a budget was set aside for online therapy as needed.

about the egregious impacts of the world political economy on people and the planet, have allowed us to be relevant at this moment and to have the capacity to support the women's groups we work with.

The pandemic presented the world with many challenges, and among these was a choice: innovate or stagnate. For activists who harnessed the potential of digital organising, this resulted in richer connections across borders and across movements. For institutions locked into bureaucratic modes of engagement, progress was considerably harder to attain. The case for radical change was more stark than ever, but the momentum of early to mid-2020 gradually faltered as we realised that, regardless, powerful actors would dig their heels in until the bitter end, even if it meant suffering on a global scale.

At IWRAW Asia Pacific, we engaged with these themes to the best of our abilities, while juggling our individual responsibilities and worries, impacted as everyone was by the pandemic. We sought to ensure a work/life balance rather than risk blurring the lines to the detriment of our health, and a budget was set aside for online therapy as needed.

We enjoyed new and richer connections across borders and across movements, made possible by the largescale shift to digital organising. This enabled us to bring a gender equality analysis to several new areas, particularly spaces dedicated to environmental justice, macroeconomics and development. We were able to partner with new groups, including trade unions on ILO Convention 190 and LGBTIQ+ organisations on environmental justice, amplifying their voices in spaces where they had not previously been heard, and commenced our work on statelessness. We strengthened our alliances with organisations working on human rights, and our own advocacy against antirights groups.

Money that had been earmarked for travel was diverted to resolving digital access needs. The dramatic change in our schedules afforded us time to be more reflexive, resulting in various new activities, including plans for a feminist scorecard on CEDAW implementation, staff training on anti-Blackness, and our work supported by the Heinrich Boell Stiftung to develop a project focused on feminist responses to the challenges of retrogression and capture on women's human rights in Asia..

We ended the year with a different kind of Local to Global mobilising - through the Global South Women's Forum, held online for the first time. With more than 20 sessions, it was an achievement in terms of organising online spaces, but also a success in gathering a diversity of groups, from grassroots fisherfolk in Kenya, to more macro-level analysts, to creatives in Zimbabwe and Switzerland.

In this annual report, we present to you a snapshot of our activities in a year characterised by heightened and intersecting difficulties on a global scale. Although there were many disappointments and challenges, we also found spaces for hope and creativity. The passion and commitment to justice of feminist, Global South and grassroots activists propels us forward, and it is our great privilege to support and amplify their work. Although 2020 saw a great deal of wreckage, it also resulted in new seeds being planted, and we are excited to watch them grow.

COUNTERING REGRESSION IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND UN CAPTURE

This programme is a cornerstone of the political intent of IWRAW Asia Pacific, which is to disrupt and challenge human rights regression, right-wing populism and extremism, as well as corporate and state capture. It focuses on strengthening the CEDAW process as an important strategic space to resist the capture of accountability processes at domestic and global level and the UN multilateral cooperative system for human rights, peace and development. Based on our continued investment in the systems for gender equality at the UN, we have focused on engaging in treaty body reform and mobilising women's rights organisations to actively engage with the human rights system and reaffirm its value. This means organising, mobilising and building political knowledge and analysis with women's groups to demand accountability from state and nonstate actors in respect of gender equality and women's human rights.

Throughout 2020, we consistently engaged with our local, national and regional partners:, first through rolling out a survey aiming to assess civil society interest in participating at CEDAW reviews, and subsequently, through collaborating with national NGOs seeking to participate at the 76th and 77th CEDAW sessions. These engagements, along with routine participation at external meetings, parovided us with a comprehensive overview of the impact of COVID-19 on women's human rights. The pandemic was the major externality of 2020, impacting movement, economic activity and the good practices that could have strengthened accountability and democratic norms. Lockdowns brought with them poverty, hunger, ill health and violence; many of the most vulnerable were excluded from economic recovery and rescue packages. Authoritarian governments seized the opportunity to clamp down on human rights and civil society; marginalised groups such as undocumented migrants, sex workers and LGBTIQ+ people became scapegoats in the pandemic.

The Countering Regression programme viewed these diverse issues through a feminist lens, and created space and ideas for leveraging the international human rights framework and the treaty body system as advocacy and protection tools. At a time when a global response is required to the forces which challenge multilateralism and divisive geopolitics, the programme implicitly locates IWRAW Asia Pacific's role in

spotlighting the productive and aspirational aspects of the global development and human rights system as a more accountable and efficient response than those driven by nationalism, exploitative and neocolonial economic policies and corporate dominance.

The programme works towards achieving three specific outputs during the strategic period:

OUTPUT 1:

Sustained network of WROs and marginalised women with tools, spaces and capacity to ensure that CEDAW is responsive to issues of regression, UN capture and right-wing populism

OUTPUT 2:

Capacity and access of marginalised groups of women strengthened to utilise international human rights system

OUTPUT 3:

Collective political agenda developed for network of WROs to ensure accountability and effectiveness of UN human rights system

FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL AND CEDAW REVIEWS

CEDAW75 - February 2020

IWRAW Asia Pacific supported 21 women's rights activists from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Eritrea, Kiribati, Latvia, Moldova, Pakistan and Zimbabwe to engage with their countries' CEDAW reviews in Geneva. Our flagship programme From Global to Local, delivered in collaboration with the Sexual Rights Initiative, focused on and collectively responded to regression, weakness of the multilateral system, and populism.

"The training was very helpful because we understood what we should say and do to be helpful for the issues in our country. We understood completely the structure of the CEDAW Session and its rules and without this training we could not have done well."

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANT FROM BULGARIA

"The G2L training was really helpful as it rid myself of the anxiety that had been with me since I travelled from home to attend the 75th CEDAW session thinking that we would be crucified with gendered questions that we would not be able to respond to. The orientation gave me the confidence to raise Kiribati gendered issues that I deemed to be priority issues reflected in the oral statement."

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANT FROM KIRIBATI







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CEDAW76 - July 2020

Like the rest of the treaty body system, the CEDAW Committee shifted its activities to the virtual space. We organised a virtual Q&A session with CSOs whose States were scheduled to be reviewed at the 76th CEDAW session and 78th Pre-Sessional Working Group to share information on modes of civil society participation. Unfortunately no state reviews were held in this session. IWRAW Asia Pacific was able to safeguard some CSO involvement by delivering a joint statement at the 76th CEDAW session which pulled together input from 28 WROs from 22 countries.

CEDAW77 - October 2020

In preparation for this session, IWRAW Asia Pacific made information available in English, Spanish and Azerbaijani. In the end, the session was restricted to mainly internal discussions among the CEDAW Committee. We held two online briefings for NGOs to explain their opportunities for engagement. A civil society statement, partially in English and partially in Spanish, was delivered at the session by NGO representatives from Ecuador and Sweden rather than by IWRAW Asia Pacific staff, reflecting a spirit of inclusion and resistance, and prioritising the needs of marginalised groups.

The team continued to support national women's groups to develop their capacity to claim their rights and engage with CEDAW advocacy. We carried out a three-day training for Georgian women's human rights defenders on CEDAW activism to ensure women's rights in Georgia, provided training to WROs in Yemen on monitoring Concluding Observations, and gave feedback on shadow reports prepared by WROs from Kazakhstan, the Maldives and Mongolia.

As an immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IWRAW AP additionally developed and disseminated a survey to national CSOs scheduled for review in 2020 to identify their interest in continuing international human rights advocacy through the CEDAW review process in the midst of a humanitarian crisis and also understand the ways in which civil society engagement could be ensured in the context of the pandemic.

TB-Net

Human rights violations continued and increased in 2020, but the available spaces and mechanisms to organise challenges or provide remedies were severely curtailed. Working closely with TB-Net, IWRAW Asia Pacific assisted in drafting a joint statement in April 2020 on the COVID-19 pandemic and the treaty body system, with a proposal to ensure ways of guaranteeing CSO engagement during the restrictions. In the second half of 2020, working with TB-Net, IWRAW Asia Pacific formulated a statement which was signed by over 500 NGOs from around the world, and which called attention to the pandemic's disruption of the work of the treaty bodies, urging them and their secretariats to schedule state reviews no later than 2021, and OHCHR to prioritise resources and tools for this. The CSOs demanded system predictability, transparency, inclusivity, and accessibility as essential conditions to enable the full participation of civil society. The joint positions developed with TB-Net and others were further endorsed by WROs and feminist organisations in our networks, including those reached through allied networks such as OURS and SWIFA, and signal broad interest among our constituencies to participate in collective political agenda setting.

We also engaged with the 2020 UN Treaty Body Review process. This included engaging with the Co-Facilitation Process through making joint submissions and supporting the organisation of NGO briefings to feed back updates from the process to national CSOs.

In the midst of COVID-19's confusion, CEDAW held its elections in November 2020. IWRAW Asia Pacific shared available information about the process and the candidates, in order to make the process more accountable. This included updating the candidate questionnaires on the UNTB Elections website created by TB-Net to share information regarding the election platforms of candidates. We also sent out the collated responses from the TB-Net questionnaire to all the Permanent Missions in Geneva and New York.

Nicole Ameline (France), Marion Bethel (Bahamas), Hilary Gbedemah (Ghana), Nahla Haidar (Lebanon), Dalia Leinarte (Lithuania), Rosario G. Manalo (Philippines) and Bandana Rana (Nepal) were re-elected. The Committee has new members from Mexico (Leticia Bonifaz Alfonzo), the Netherlands (Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen), Australia (Natasha Stott Despoja) and China (Jie Xia). Geographically we see a continued underrepresentation of the African states and overrepresentation of Eastern European and Western European regions. Over a third of the members are now serving three or more terms, which is possible because CEDAW's rules of procedure do not specify term limits. See also our factsheet on the elections.

IWRAW Asia Pacific's role in rebuilding a more just world post-COVID-19 will require continued close collaboration with CEDAW and we look forward to our ongoing work with the Committee through meetings, briefings, and other productive forms of engagement.

CEDAW Elections

With SRI, CREA and NSWP, IWRAW Asia Pacific made a <u>submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women</u> on her report on rape as a form of international human rights law violation. Our submission focused on the limits of carceral responses and importance of consent-based laws.

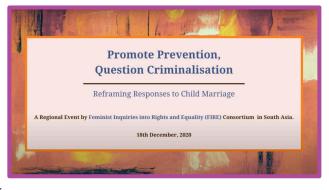
With OURs, IWRAW Asia Pacific delivered a joint statement in support of UN special procedure mandates to challenge attempts to undermine the international human rights system by anti-rights actors.

Engagement with UN Special Procedures

IWRAW Asia Pacific ran a survey with judges and legal experts who have engaged with our Judges for Gender Justice initiative. Fifteen responded, from Australia, India, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Philippines and Uganda; this resulted in the publication of our report <u>Justice Delayed</u>, <u>Justice Denied</u>. This report forms part of a broader inquiry into the gaps in rights protection being experienced by women at local, national, and international levels due to the limitations or non-functioning of institutional mechanisms mandated to protect human rights, owing to the COVID-19 crisis and consequent movement restrictions and confinement measures. The report was acknowledged by seven judges and lawyers who offered to share the report with their networks.

Feminist Inquiries Into Rights and Equality (FIRE)

Through our work with the Feminist Inquiries into Rights and Equality (FIRE) consortium of South Asian women's rights organisations, led by the Indian legal resource group Partners for Law in Development (PLD), we started a process of engagement with the treaty bodies on addressing the lack of exceptions to early marriage and the harms it can compound in domestic situations where laws on child, early and forced marriage are used to penalise adolescents who choose to marry, in a context of communal and caste-based discrimination and rising populist politics.



The treaty bodies were also asked to consider a more comprehensive package of solutions that provide for empowerment and opportunity, especially for girls. The thinking of the regional partners and allies of the FIRE consortium can be found in the <u>video of the regional meeting on 'Promote Prevention, Question Criminalisation: Reframing Approaches to Child Marriage'</u>, and the consortium's <u>recommendations</u> will form the basis for FIRE's continued anti-carceral advocacy work in South Asia.

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INTERROGATING BORDERS

This programme area involves recognising and addressing the issue of trafficking from a feminist perspective and building knowledge on the remit of the principle of state obligation as it applies to stateless, refugee and asylum-seeking women. Further, it interrogates the human rights violations incurred through border controls, examines how intersectional forms of oppression are compounded by the presence of borders, and builds links with affected groups.

The programme works towards achieving two sets of outputs:

la. Common advocacy positions among CSOs on trafficking and migration developed and adopted in line with the FACT manifesto

1b. Alliance of diverse CSOs working to advance rights-affirming positions in the context of trafficking and migration expanded

2a. IWRAW AP's position on women marginalised by borders articulated

2b. Connections established with groups and networks of stateless, refugee and asylum-seeking women

Feminist Approaches to Counter Trafficking (FACT)

The work on trafficking and migration in 2020 began on an optimistic note with the completion and launch of the Manifesto on Feminist Approaches to Counter Trafficking, a visionary framework for intermovement solidarity building and law and policy advocacy for the global labour rights, migrant rights, sex workers' rights and women's rights movements, endorsed by 15 organisations and launched publicly in April 2020. Video interviews with anti-trafficking activists and a graphic record of our December 2019



global anti-trafficking meeting, held in Nairobi, supplemented the FACT Manifesto.

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 38 on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration (GR 38)

A significant focus for the Interrogating Borders programme throughout 2020 was CEDAW GR 38. Its first draft included several standards advocated for by IWRAW Asia Pacific and our partners and allies, particularly around the application of a labour rights framework to migration; corporate accountability for human rights violations in global supply chains; and the adverse impact of 'raid and rescue' operations on the rights of sex workers. Even so, the draft GR had glaring issues, including the continued push for an 'end demand' approach, reliance solely on a criminal law approach, and usage of language and terminology that replicates gender stereotypes about women as victims.

The publication of the first draft provided the opportunity to develop and adopt a common advocacy position among CSOs in line with the FACT manifesto, and, together with 19 organisations and individuals, we prepared and submitted a joint response to the CEDAW Committee.

Also in response to the first draft, a new set of infographics on the negative human rights impact of the 'end demand' approach to trafficking was developed in partnership with the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). The infographics were shared across all our communications channels and received an extremely positive response.

Engaging in advocacy around GR 38 provided us with the opportunity to amplify our messages specific to the CEDAW response to trafficking to a wider audience of academics and activists working on trafficking and migration. This included an invitation from Professor Samuel Okyere, who was a participant at the Nairobi global convening and editorial board member of the openDemocracy journal Beyond

The Human Rights Violations of 'End Demand' Laws

Profiling and surveillance

It is sex workers, not clients, who experience the majority of profiling, surveillance and policing - not only while working but also in their day-to-day lives.

<u>Trafficking and Slavery</u>, to co-write and submit an <u>article</u>, as well as our participation in a <u>video interview</u> series on 20 years of the Palermo Protocol, coordinated by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

(GAATW) and Sharmila Parmanand. The episode addressed states' obligations to address human trafficking under the Trafficking Protocol and reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of CEDAW GR 38. Throughout this advocacy process, we also continued our strategic engagement as part of the Sex Workers Inclusive Feminist Alliance (SWIFA) to ensure that the specific collective objectives of the Alliance in safeguarding sex workers' rights were also advanced.



Despite all this advocacy to advance rights-affirming positions in the context of trafficking and migration, CEDAW GR 38 was disappointing and disheartening. It regresses the Committee's own position on trafficking by using the racist and archaic 1949 Trafficking Convention to connect trafficking and sexual exploitation. Further, legal inconsistencies in the document, such as the interchangeable use of the terms 'exploitation of prostitution' and 'sexual exploitation'; the numerous and erroneous references to the notion of 'demand' that goes beyond the framing of the Palermo Protocol; and the recommendation to prosecute 'those on the demand side', mean that the GR risks severely stigmatising and marginalising sex workers, and thereby impeding the global fight against trafficking.

In response, and as part of the virtual Global South Women's Forum 2020, we organised a talk show to present a feminist analysis of GR 38, through providing a structural analysis of the globally dominant neoliberal economic model that leads to trafficking and labour exploitation, highlighting that recognising sex work as work is the most effective solution to combating trafficking in the sex industry, and presenting innovative examples of opening pathways to justice for persons affected by trafficking and labour exploitation.



UN Committee on Migrant Workers

In our first engagement with the UN Committee on Migrant Workers, we made a joint submission, endorsed by 11 individuals and organisations, in response to the Committee's call for comments on a draft general recommendation on migrants' right to liberty and freedom from arbitrary detention. Through a consultative and co-creative process we were able to craft a submission that recognised the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination in the context of violations of migrants' rights to liberty and freedom from arbitrary detention. It addressed the xenophobic and nationalist discourse around migration, particularly as it is taking place as a fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic; highlighted the impact of structural inequalities and gender stereotypes on violations of the right to liberty of migrants, reaffirming the rights to bodily integrity and autonomy; and requested that specific attention be paid to the issues of ensuring accountability, accessing justice for rights violations, and recognising the current economic context as a structural driver of migration and exploitation of migrants. Several individuals and organisations who endorsed the submission also participated in drafting it.

Building Alliances and Networking

In 2020, we established connections with the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, to discuss the possibility of joint action to raise issues concerning gender discrimination in nationality laws and statelessness using the CEDAW framework and advocacy space. For the joint civil society statement delivered at the opening meeting of the 76th CEDAW Session, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights submitted information on the situation of women's rights in relation to nationality in the context of COVID-19. ISI shared the NGO Statement on Statelessness and COVID-19 with IWRAW Asia Pacific with a request to disseminate it further to the CEDAW Committee and members of the TB-Net platform. We look forward to further collaboration with these organisations, as well as with GAATW and the Human Trafficking Legal Center.



IWRAW Asia Pacific's Environmental Justice programme uses a feminist lens to explore, analyse, and challenge current policies and narratives related to environmental degradation and climate change. Its approach amplifies the voices of women, especially those from marginalised groups in the Global South, in reclaiming narratives on the impact of the climate crisis on their lived realities, and to place women at the centre of global policy solutions around climate change. In its first year, this programme sought to prioritise learning from and platforming communities most directly affected by environmental degradation and climate change, playing a supportive role in broadening these groups' reach and enhancing their impact.

The outputs for the environmental justice programme are:

1. WROs and marginalised women have the knowledge and capacity to challenge neoliberal policies, frameworks and narratives as solutions to environmental degradation and climate change.

2. WROs and marginalised women have a space to collectively strategise and reflect on priority areas and demands for WHR in relation to climate justice

3. WROs and marginalised women have knowledge and capacity to challenge rights violations related to environmental degradation and climate change

4. WROs and marginalised women are organised to engage in international spaces in advocating for environmental justice

As the newest priority area to IWRAW Asia Pacific, the first quarter of 2020 was allocated for the mapping of key partners, actors, focal points, spaces, key issues, groups left out, and critical gaps. The mapping gave relevance to structuring the programme through a feminist and intersectional lens; Global South regions, key groups of women and marginalised communities impacted, regional and international spaces for participation, and will form the basis for expanding the programme over this strategic period.

In the context of COVID-19, the failures of governments to adequately respond to a devastating global crisis mirrored the historical sidelining of the climate movement. The destructive greed of international corporations and governments that continued unchecked throughout the pandemic exacerbated the impacts of climate events. Experiences of vulnerability, homelessness, and physical and financial insecurity multiplied. From tropical cyclones in Fiji, hurricanes in the Caribbean, heavy rains and flooding of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil and Ecuador, and food scarcity in China and Pakistan, marginalised communities were made to pay the price of extractive capitalism. Yet amidst the losses, stories of resilience and endurance unfolded in abundance.

Climate Change and Marginalised Groups

One such story came from the programme's first assessment which focused on the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 on Rainbow Pride Foundation's LGBTIQ+ community in Fiji. The effects of the cyclone and the pandemic were investigated through interviews with community members, highlighting the myriad consequences of climate change for LGBTIQ+ persons as well as Indigenous people, sex workers, and people with disabilities. This analysis helped to shape the programme's objective of using an intersectional lens to investigate climate change, and also led to conversations with Indigenous women living with disabilities in Nepal, Black lesbians and feminists fighting against extractive industries in Papua New Guinea and Latin America, and LGBTIQ+ communities in the Caribbean.

CEDAW Engagement

The Environmental Justice programme has sought to facilitate women's rights organisations working on climate change to participate in the CEDAW process, as well as support the development of WRO and NGO reports on environmental and climate justice. An example is our work connecting the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) to organisations contributing to a <u>climate-change-focused parallel report</u> for the 78th Pre-Sessional Working Group on Norway, focusing on the ongoing extraction and export of fossil fuels and the impacts of these activities on women and girls. This document explains how CEDAW applies in the context of disaster risk reduction and climate change, describing how women's rights are impacted by disasters and the greater risks, burdens, and impacts experienced by many women and girls in the context of disasters due to pre-existing gender inequalities.

Building Alliances and Networking

COVID-19 has highlighted to us the need to think intersectionally about the rippling impacts of environmental and climate crises on existing issues faced by communities. To better understand these overlapping concerns and critiques, alliance building and networking comprised a significant portion of the programme's activities in 2020. Our Environmental Justice programme officer, Marisa Hutchinson, attended monthly network meetings of the ESCR-Net Working Group, Women and Gender Constituency, HR & CC Working Group and CBD Women4Biodiversity Advocacy Network. She also participated in an ESCR-Net Climate Justice, ESCR & Just and Equitable Recovery Strategy Meeting and contributed to the Capacity Building Working group of CIEL's Human Rights and Climate Change network.

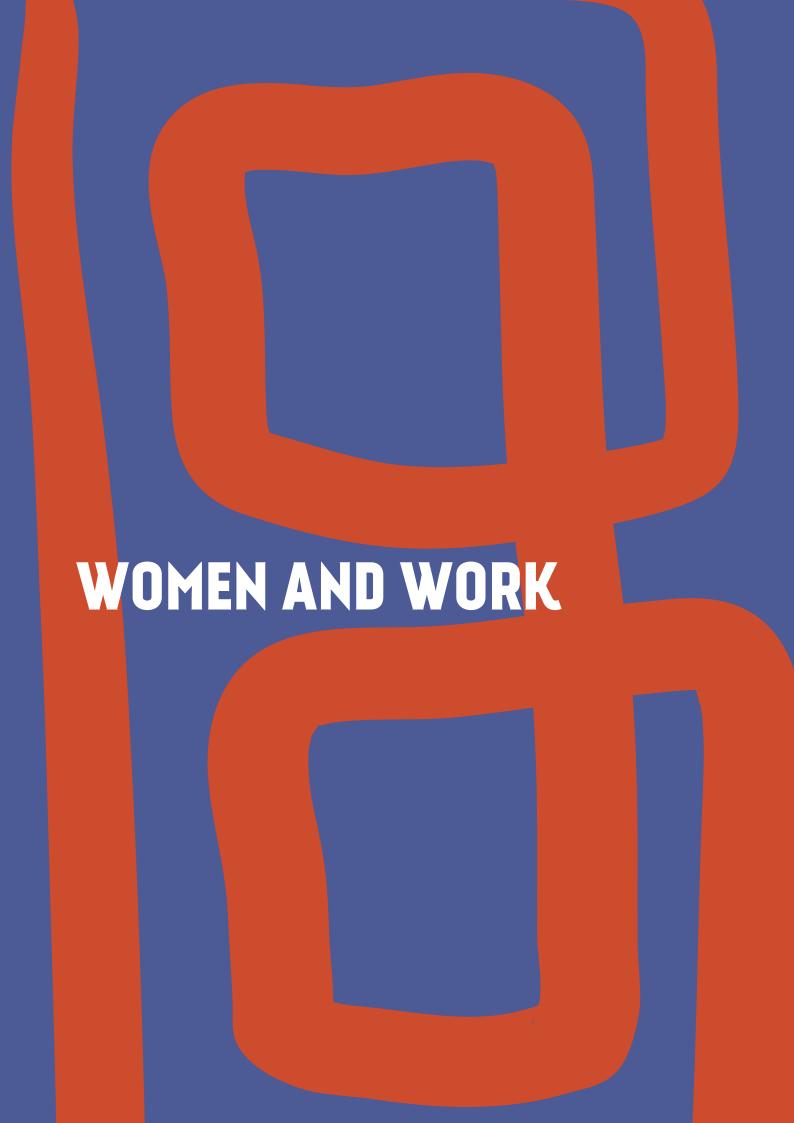
Our connection with 350.org East Asia has been especially meaningful, involving our participation in a week-long series of roundtable discussions to discuss the Just Recovery principles in October 2020. We gave input to the various roundtables concerning movement and capacity building and feminist approaches to a just recovery from COVID-19, which contributed to their Asia Just Recovery report. We

later took part in their year-end check-in on Just Recovery work in Asia. We also initiated our own public-facing engagement on the environment with a Climate Action Day tweetstorm in October 2020.

Throughout October to November, the programme engaged with GI-ESCR to co-sponsor a roundtable discussion which focused on renewable energy and gender justice, which brought together women's rights activists working in this area in different Global South regions including the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America; members of the CEDAW Committee (Nahlah Haidar, Hilary Gbedemah); the CESCR Comittee (Heisoo Shin); and the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (Melissa Upreti), sponsored by the Friedrich-



Ebert-Stiftung. This event was successful especially to inform these Treaty Body Committees and the UN Working Group on the issues encountered by women and girls as a result of the design and implementation of the renewable energy transition in the Global South.



The Women and Work programme envisions a dignified and decent world of work for women. The programme understands and combats overarching systemic and structural issues which negatively impact women's economic rights, while simultaneously addressing immediate concerns related to labour rights such as wage equality, decent work, access to social protection, right to unionisation and collective bargaining. The strategic thrust of this programme is to facilitate movements to strengthen access to justice for women's human rights in the world of work and to engage and influence actors, agendas and actions to demand accountability for women in the world of work, including paid and unpaid work.

> In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted that demands like living wage, healthcare, social security, valuation of unpaid care work, protection from sexual harassment at the workplace, and everything related to the inequalities of women's labour are important demands of the women's rights movement which are more relevant than ever. Even as our partnerships and dialogues with women's rights and labour rights organisations and movements highlighted the negative impact of COVID-19 containment measures on workers in different sectors, our parallel engagements with advocates of economic justice and critics of the global economic environment enabled us to identify administrative weakness, poor coordination, centralised and one-size-fits-all approaches and security-heavy responses from many governments. Our survey which informed the CSO statement on women and girls at the opening of the 76th CEDAW session in June 2020 revealed gender discrimination in the world of work as a major issue, highlighting inequalities in the employment sector and the wage and safety divide for women-dominated occupations. Key concerns were the intensified economic vulnerabilities experienced by women working in the informal sector; challenges faced by women migrant workers due to job loss, mobility restriction and difficulty accessing justice; the burden of unpaid care work on women; challenges faced by women farmers in accessing markets during lockdown; complexities for rural women in accessing job loss and hardship funds, long working hours for domestic workers since the onset of the crisis; loss of income and harassment faced by sex workers; and safety risks and long working hours experienced by frontline medical workers. Additionally, our membership of ESCR-Net Women's ESCR working group enabled us to understand the impact of COVID-19 on women and work in various sectors and countries.

Even as our partnerships and dialogues with women's rights and labour rights organisations and movements highlighted the negative impact of the COVID 19 containment measures on workers in different sectors, our parallel engagements with advocates of economic justice and critics of the global economic environment enabled us to identify administrative weakness, poor coordination, centralised and one-size-fits-all approaches and security-heavy responses from many governments. Global trade regimes and the policy advice of the international financial institutions have pushed governments to relax labour rights protections, to allow the growth of unregulated labour and to de-invest in social infrastructure and universal social protection schemes. Rather shockingly, some governments are using the pandemic as a smoke screen to push regressive labour legislation.

Within the CSO movement, there is increased interest in the work agenda and greater understanding that a major shift is needed in our economic infrastructure. A large number of virtual events in 2020 were dedicated to issues around work and employment, particularly the importance of care work and need for public investment in care infrastructure.

Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value

Aiming to raise awareness about the concept and application of equal pay for work of equal value as outlined by ILO Convention 100 and CEDAW General Recommendation 13, our <u>animated explainer</u> was launched on our social media platforms on International Women's Day on 8 March. The video is available with English, Chinese and Spanish subtitles. It received a total of 674 views in 2020, with a watch time of 21.3 hours, and was the subject of our top tweet for March 2020, with 4,790 impressions



and 133 engagements. Groups such as Trinidad and Tobago's National Union of Domestic Workers (NUDE) informed us that they found it very useful in the training they provide to domestic workers.

ILO C190 Ratification Campaign

In 2020, substantial progress was made towards advancing our work for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 (C190) on violence and harassment. We plan to enhance cross-movement solidarity, awareness and knowledge towards ratification of C190 by challenging the systemic violations of rights in the apparel industry in South and Southeast Asia, through working closely with Awaj Foundation in Bangladesh, Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) in Vietnam, and other regional and national actors. This programme will draw synergy between existing international instruments, particularly CEDAW GR 35, thus expanding the outreach and accelerating ratification and domestication of the new Convention.

Similarly, in collaboration with International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Asia Pacific, CARE and ActionAid, we have launched a collective campaign to raise awareness of the new instrument, connect to women's and labour rights groups in the Asia and the Pacific region and consolidate actions at national and regional levels to accelerate the ratification of C190. Towards this, a virtual regional convening was organised on the occasion of the first anniversary of C190 in June 2020. The webinar provided an opportunity to update interested



stakeholders on C190 progress across the region, to discuss what needs to be done to address the increase in GBV in the context of COVID-19, and to consider how to continue amplifying calls for ratification of C190. ILO's intervention afforded an opportunity for CSOs and trade union representatives to understand the conceptual framework of the new convention and the process for ratification, and created space for suggestions and commitments towards this.

Programme manager Shanti Uprety also made a case for ratification of C190 on IWRAW Asia Pacific's blog.

Care Work

In partnership with the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) and Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau, Philippines, IWRAW Asia Pacific co-hosted an online strategic discussion on care economy to address the deep gender and class inequalities present in the current care economy and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Key women's rights organisations and women's labour rights groups from the Asia Pacific region participated in the virtual roundtable discussion that was organised on 19 August; these included Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development, Center for Migrant Advocacy, DAWN, HomeNet Thailand, International Domestic Workers Federation, International Migrants Alliance, International Trade Union Confederation, Kalyanamitra, Legal Center for Women and Children, Migrant Care and some independent activists and workers.

Some key work undertaken by programme officer Constanza Pauchulo under the TrEAD programme informed our work and helped to shape our understanding in relation to the care agenda. This included a brief on care work that was developed in partnership with CESR and an <u>in-depth interview</u> with Liz Hilton from Empower Foundation and Bee Pranom Somwong from Protection Desk Thailand.

Additionally, as a member of the ESCR-Net women and ESC rights working group, we contributed to the development of <u>a human-rights-based</u>, <u>global social pact on care</u> which was launched in December during GSWF2020.

Documentation Project

IWRAW AP initiated a documentation project in the last quarter of 2020 in partnership with BHRRC and national partners Women's Center in Sri Lanka, CGFED in Vietnam and Local Women's Initiatives for Rights and Empowerment (LWIRE) in the Philippines to consolidate the testimonies and case studies of human rights violation in the garment supply chains in three countries. The findings of this project are expected to pave the path towards collecting evidence for and organising the Tribunal that IWRAW AP has been planning for some time, as well as support evidence-based advocacy at the national level to demand accountability of apparel brands and suppliers.

OP-CEDAW as a Route to Claiming Workers' Rights

Owing to increased cases of subcontracting and job loss of garment workers in Cambodia, IWRAW Asia Pacific was approached by the Workers' Information Center (WIC) in June about initiating an OP-CEDAW inquiry case to demand accountability from the state party for the violation of workers' rights in the sweatshops and lack of labour inspection and regulation of the garment industry. WIC requested a virtual capacity-building workshop for workers to demystify the concepts of the convention in relation to worker's rights and develop understanding about the OP-CEDAW mechanism, which was held in November. The objectives of the training were to visit the key features, procedural aspects and admissibility requirements of the communications and inquiry procedure under OP-CEDAW to build capacity of partners to understand its application; possible challenges and opportunities in their priority areas of work; and how they could strategise their advocacy by using the mechanism.

CEDAW Sessions

CSOs' engagement with CEDAW sessions was very different in 2020 after constructive dialogues ceased to be held with the State Parties. At the request of the CEDAW Secretariat, IWRAW AP delivered a CSO statement on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls at the opening of the 76th CEDAW Session in June 2020. The statement was informed by input from 28 women's rights organisations from over 22 countries. Gender discrimination in the world of work constituted the major proportion of the statement which particularly highlighted the inequalities in the employment sector and the wage and safety divide for women-dominated occupations.

Building Alliances and Networking

Some interesting partnerships were established in 2020, including efforts towards establishing more strategic partnerships with the existing groups that were already connected to us. The virtual events on various thematic issues such as the care economy and GBV in the world of work helped us to establish new partnerships and renew old connections with some key organisations working to advance gender equality in the world of work such as International Domestic Workers Federation, International Migrants Alliance, HomeNet, and Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL). Some new connections have been established with a number of organisations as a result of their participation in the GSWF2020.

There is a need to nurture these relationships in the coming days to ensure that the Women and Work programme is informed by the lived realities of women workers in the informal sectors. We will continue exploring opportunities to have strategic conversations with these groups on priorities surrounding women and work and navigating their advocacy through CEDAW processes. In terms of funding, Laudes Foundation and BHRRC substantially supported our work in 2020 in this programme area.

Programme manager Shanti Uprety is active on the steering committee of the Women and ESCR working group of ESCR-Net, and in 2020 commenced her second term representing the Asia region.

TRANSFORMING ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH A FEMINIST APPROACH (Tread)

The Transforming Economics and Development through a Feminist Approach (TrEAD) programme is premised on a demand for economic and development policies that enable the full enjoyment of women's human rights and are established through meaningful and effective participation of women, especially those from marginalised groups in the Global South. It recognises that macroeconomic and development policies that are not accountable to the rights of people and the needs of the planet are a threat to human rights. It seeks to critically analyse and challenge dominant global macroeconomic and development discourses by mobilising women's rights organisations around a feminist agenda rooted in the priorities of marginalised groups of women.

In 2020, the urgency of understanding and demystifying global macroeconomic and development structures and their impact on the daily lives of women only intensified. In the wake of COVID-19's far-reaching impacts, we sought to familiarise ourselves with strategic pressure points and find or create ways to meaningfully participate in research and policy discussions on the gender impacts of macroeconomic and development policies. Recognising the precarious and pivotal circumstances of a post-pandemic world, we collaborated with feminist economists, activists, and policy experts in conversations on developing evidence-based solutions and alternatives for radical and transformative economic change.

COVID-19 has spotlighted the deep inequalities inherent in neoliberal, profit-driven and extractive approaches to economic and development policies that have been dominant for the last several decades. In particular, demands for care-centred or caring economies with strong public sectors are central within feminist and other economic justice groups. The TrEAD programme is particularly engaged with activists, practitioners, academics, and institutions that address macro-level economic and development issues, including debt cancellation and restructuring, global tax justice, an end to austerity, global accountability for corporate impunity, and a reimagining of trade and investment regimes. These policy areas - and the intersectional feminist critiques and solutions that are advanced in relation to them - are in line with IWRAW AP's ways of working and ability to leverage existing knowledge and access to decision-making spaces.

From Global to Local and CEDAW Sessions

IWRAW Asia Pacific provided support for Bilquis Tahira, executive director of Shirakat - Partnership for Development, to participate in the 75th CEDAW session and From Global to Local, reporting on the impact of IMF conditionalities on women's human rights in Pakistan.

Targeted outreach to groups interested in reporting on issues relating to TrEAD was also conducted leading up to the 76th CEDAW session and 79th Pre-Sessional Working Group, resulting in shadow reports submitted by NGOs and civil society organisations on the role of mining, foreign direct investment, and IFIs on women's health in Mongolia, and on the role of tax and financial secrecy laws in Panama and Brazil on women's human rights.

Global South Women's Forum (GSWF)

Recognising that missing from the analysis and programmatic work of many women's rights organisations are processes and fora for spotlighting violations and risks to women's human rights posed by neoliberal macroeconomics and development policies dominated by corporate influence, we have looked to contribute to creating resources and tools to build collective action towards a more feminist and inclusive future. With the goal of tapping into the expertise and activism of Global South individuals and organisations and building cross-movement momentum among women's rights, land rights and labour rights groups to have stronger advocacy impact at national, regional and international level, we hosted the first-ever virtual Global South Women's Forum in December 2020.

Organised around the theme Disrupting Macroeconomics, the programme was based on submissions received in response to our call for proposals, and comprised 24 live sessions and one pre-recorded session held over five days. The sessions were organised by a range of activists, academics, artists, and practitioners from the Global South, along with partners from Global North. We learned a lot not only from the substantive content of the sessions, but from organising the event online, from hosting inclusive online spaces to new ways of supporting national- and grassroots-level CSOs, including through funding for related reports, videos, in-person gatherings, and so on. We also looked at enhancing accessibility of online space through, for example, interpretation, funds to support connectivity, childcare funds, and other considerations for future online events.

Through organising and hosting GSWF 2020, new alliances have been developed and existing ones deepened, as described below. We have also gained significant experience and ideas for adapting our ways of working and organising to online spaces, which is particularly useful with virtual gatherings likely to be the norm for at least 2021 and remaining even after international travel is open again.

Gender Equality and Macroeconomics (GEM)

A notable accomplishment for the TrEAD programme was the development and dissemination of the GEM videos, consisting of individual interviews and an advocacy video. Launched in the final quarter of 2020 to overwhelmingly positive response, the latter, Breaking Silos, Building Movements, is available with subtitles in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. As part of increasing awareness among women's groups and organisations of the impact of macroeconomic and development policies -



including taxation, fiscal spending and debt repayment, and trade and investment policies - on their rights, translation and subtitling have been important tools to advance macroeconomic and development discourses in public spaces.

Building Alliances and Networking

The greatly increased reliance on virtual engagement in 2020 saw the active involvement of IWRAW Asia Pacific programme officer Constanza Pauchulo in various network reflection and strategic planning sessions, including with ESCR-Net's Corporate Accountability Working Group and Economic Policy

Working Group, as well as the tax and gender working group of the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, the Gender and Trade Coalition, and the Feminists for a Binding Treaty collective. We also began to strengthen our capacity to convene virtual spaces by organising a webinar entitled 'Mobilising for Feminist Trade Justice within the United Nations' as part of the Gender and Trade Coalitions webinar series on trade justice in the era of COVID-19; and co-organising an SDGs Learning, Training & Practice Session, called 'Sustainable and Just Economies: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Crisis and Enabling Factors for the SDGs', with Women's Major Group, ILO Green Jobs Programme, UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Global Reporting Initiative, UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Benchmarking Alliance, and UN Global Compact, held as part of the virtual High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2020.

Programme officer Shanti Uprety was invited to attend a retreat organised by Global Policy Watch as part of the PyeongChang Peace Forum in South Korea, organised to share information and brainstorm around the crisis in multilateralism and consolidate ideas and responses in key macroeconomic and development policy areas such as trade, digital technology, environment, economic policies and governance, militarisation and austerity, global governance and international institutions. These discussions also fed into the deliberations and outcome of the PyeongChang Peace Forum, particularly discussions around multilateralism, the 75th UN anniversary and the role of CSOs in the human rights policy spaces.

Participating in virtual calls with Chang Yong Rhee, Director IMF Asia Pacific Department and with Prof Surya Deva, UN Business & Human Rights Working Group, in a policy session hosted by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) on Women at Work: Business & Human Rights amid COVID-19, and the UN Virtual Forum on Responsible Business Conduct allowed IWRAW Asia Pacific to intervene to foreground the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women, particularly with respect to unpaid care work, job losses, disproportionate representation in health sector, and worldwide increases in domestic violence. We also raised issues relating to human-rights-based bailout packages, living wages, and genderjust trade. Other TrEAD activities included co-sponsoring a panel at the Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF) of the World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings on a post-COVID-19 feminist recovery for all, and participating in a teach-in organised by the tax and gender working group of GATJ and the Women's Rights Caucus (WRC) by delivering a presentation on CEDAW and its application to feminist tax and economic justice advocacy demands.

CENTERING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES: PUTTING INTERSECTIONALITY INTO PRACTICE

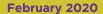
Formerly a programmatic area of IWRAW Asia Pacific, centering marginalised groups has become a cross-cutting area at the core of our work, recognising intersecting forms of oppression which affect engagement and inclusion within and beyond the mainstream women's movement.

organisations within countries up for CEDAW review - Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Nicaragua,



January 2020

Communications officer Nine attended Women Enabled International's regional convening of advocates for the rights of women and girls with disabilities.









IWRAW Asia Pacific signed on to a joint letter by Harm Reduction International and the International Drug Policy Consortium calling for UN intervention to stop execution of drug offenders in Bahrain.

March 2020













As Malaysia entered the first of a series of lockdowns due to COVID-19, communications officer Nine wrote a blog post connecting COVID-19, capitalism, and the impact of the pandemic on marginalised groups, including migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, sex workers, and LGBTIQ people.

April 2020



Programme officer Marisa Hutchinson delivered a presentation at an ILGA webinar on LBTI advocacy at the UN, focusing on CEDAW.

IWRAW Asia Pacific signed on to a civil society statement on_ COVID-19 and people who use



drugs developed by Harm Reduction International, the International Drug Policy Consortium and the International Network of People who Use Drugs; and a statement developed by Amazon Watch in solidarity with Amazonian indigenous peoples facing COVID-19.

May 2020



We participated in the #MigranJugaManusia social media campaign which was initiated by Malaysian civil society in response to the authorities' mass detention of migrants, and issued a reminder of Congolese national Simon Idi's immigration detention experience in 2018.

IWRAW Asia Pacific joined the International Drug Policy Consortium as network members.

June 2020



Programme officer Ishita Dutta presented at pre-AIDS 2020 Conference session 'Onward to Justice: Accountability for Human Rights Violations' on the significance of the CEDAW framework and advocacy space for the rights claiming of marginalised groups of women including women living with HIV, and put forward Ukrainian activist Svitlana Moroz as a co-panelist.





Ishita additionally provided with a set of graphics shared on our social media channels.





IWRAW Asia Pacific published a tweet thread for Sex Workers Day

during the week-long #FeministBailout online campaign, sharing portraits of sex workers' rights activists which were drawn by artist Charis Loke during our December 2019 training in Kathmandu.







Through our Environmental Justice programme, IWRAW Asia Pacific partnered with the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) to prepare a CEDAW shadow report on Norway which focused on women's rights and climate change.





We provided orientation on CEDAW to a new policy officer at the Global Network of Sex Work Projects.

IWRAW Asia Pacific signed a statement of concern to Harvard Medical School regarding a study which promoted closure of India's red-light districts as a COVID-19 response; and an open letter to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation regarding changes in funding priorities which would significantly disrupt global HIV and hepatitis response for people who use drugs.



Programme officer Shanti Uprety was invited to deliver a presentation at a webinar entitled 'Indigenous Women's Rights and Struggles: Reflections, Action and Way Forward' organised by Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact. Her presentation, which connected CEDAW with UNDRIP, was subsequently used as the basis of a tweet thread for Indigenous People's Day.



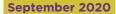
IWRAW Asia Pacific expressed our solidarity with Chepang indigenous peoples under attack by endorsing Nepal

Federation of Indigenous Nationalities' letter of concern.

Intern Natalie Russo contributed to IWRAW Asia Pacific's blog, highlighting gender-segregated COVID-19 responses in three Latin American countries which hampered trans.people's mobility and exposed them to police harassment and abuse.



IWRAW Asia Pacific hosted a <u>tweet chat</u> on drug policy and women's human rights, co-organised with IDPC Asia; and programme officer Ishita Dutta gave a <u>short video interview</u> for IDPC Asia's social media on the importance of CEDAW for women impacted by drug policies.



Programme officer Marisa Hutchinson and intern Natalie Russo coordinated and facilitated training with ILGA Asia on LBTIQ advocacy at CEDAW. The training sought to build the capacity of LGBTIQ activists in South Asia (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) on UN mechanisms.



IWRAW Asia Pacific signed an open letter to the World Health Organization for <u>SOGIESC-inclusive strategies</u> to tackle COVID-19, which received an <u>affirmative</u> response.

October 2020

IWRAW Asia Pacific commenced hosting two remote interns from the Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN) who wrote a CEDAW shadow report on women and drug policy in Indonesia.



Senior programme manager Audrey Lee, programme manager Ishita Dutta and programme officer Marisa Hutchinson facilitated a training session as part of the Asia Pacific Transgender Network's advocacy fellowship programme. The advocacy fellowship seeks to build capacities of trans and gender-diverse human rights defenders on international human rights accountability mechanisms. The fellowship started with an online course (in September - October 2020) which provided an overview of international human rights mechanisms, with a focus on localisation of UPR and Treaty Monitoring Bodies (TMB) recommendations to amplify national advocacy. IWRAW AP developed a module including a pre-training assignment focusing on TMB advocacy, using the CEDAW framework and advocacy space as an example.

November 2020

Breaking Silos, Building Movements, IWRAW Asia Pacific's video introduction to gender equality and macroeconomics, was launched. It featured excerpts of an interview with Eleanor Dictaan-Bang-oa discussing the impact of extractive industries on Indigenous groups.

"I just saw the video and amazing CONGRATULATIONS to you! What a great job, it's such a wonderful tool to help folks understand what we're all working towards.

"I've received some very positive feedback about the video. Congratulations to the team - nicely structured and edited, and kindled warm memories for me of a fine meeting."

IWRAW Asia Pacific signed on to an open letter initiated by the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, asking the government of Bangladesh to protect the Indigenous Mro communities from forced eviction and other human rights violations.

December 2020

Programme officer Marisa Hutchinson wrote for OpenGlobalRights on <u>LGBTIQ+resilience</u> in the face of COVID-19 and climate disasters in Fiji. She also took part in the Outright International virtual OutSummit workshop organised by ILGA World entitled 'Not a Single-Issue Struggle of LGBTI Advocacy: Bringing Race, Disability and Gender to the United Nations', presenting on intersectionality w/in CEDAW with a focus on LBTIQ people.

In December, we organised our first virtual convening of the Global South Women's Forum around the theme of <u>Disrupting</u> <u>Macroeconomics</u>. The forum was held over five days with speakers including LBTQI+ advocates, sex workers' rights activists, Indigenous women, rural women, women working in fisheries and agriculture, and domestic workers.







ADAPTING OUR 2020-2024 STRATEGY

The year started with a team retreat where we worked hard on developing the work plan and budget for the strategic plan, reviewed our current reporting processes and developed a monitoring process to record information against the activities, outputs and outcomes of the strategy's log frame.

An outcome of the fifth strategic area, ensuring the sustainability and relevance of IWRAW AP, is that organisational structures and processes reflect IWRAW AP's feminist values and ways of working. We discussed this at the retreat and agreed that it would require reviewing a number of our existing procedures and developing new ones. These included:

- Women Human Rights Defender Protocol
- Workplace Code of Conduct & sexual harassment policies
- Internship Policy
- Risk Management Strategy
- Digital Security
- Safety and security of team and partners
- Review operations manual
- Develop TORs for all team members
- Review financial policy to ensure reasonable accommodation of marginalised women, and clarify discretionary spending.

As COVID-19 lockdown measures, border controls, and travel restrictions emerged, a different way of working was required which in turn required us to revise our budget. Some of the adaptations to our working practices will remain long-term even as movement restrictions are lifted. Where processes are useful to the future of the organisation and in line with our feminist principles, they should be incorporated into our standard operational procedures.

In the second half of 2020, we gathered again for a mid-year reflection on our work and ways of working. The ensuing discussions prompted a much-needed look into IWRAW AP's organisational stance on anti-Black racism. We considered our positionality as a Global South feminist organisation committed not only to being in solidarity with global movements for racial justice but also to holding itself accountable - internally and externally - for perpetuating anti-Black racism.

The mid-year reflection also brought to light the pressures of working from home that the IWRAW AP team had been experiencing but powering through for the earlier half of the year. Following this, we collectively came up with ways to stay better connected with each other, proactively offering and asking for support, and made space for wellness sessions.





THE TEAM

IWRAW AP decided to continue working from home as a default option even when restrictions were lifted in Malaysia, finding that it worked quite well for most of the team as well as being advisable from a health perspective. Many of us however missed the collegiate atmosphere and the ability to work together, bouncing ideas off each other. While we tried to do this remotely using online platforms, it did not fully replace the working atmosphere of the office. The Board decision to provide counselling support to team members was very welcome and the team looked at different ways in which to enhance our wellbeing. An open-air Tuesday team meeting in Kuala Lumpur's Lake Gardens was one such attempt - complete with a treasure hunt designed by our executive director!

Mid-2020, Nadia Mohd Rasidi and Lee Yi Ting were welcomed into the team as short-term consultants to support our communications. Both worked on developing the webinar series for the FIRE project. Thanks to the Digital Defenders Partnership, we additionally benefited from a Digital Integrity Fellow with a mandate to support us in developing internal capacity to work securely online. In the final quarter of the year, we also welcomed Rachel Ong as our online conference manager for the first ever virtual covening of the Global South Women's Forum, which brought together a range of activists, academics, artists and practitioners from the Global South, along with partners from Global North, for five days of learning, strategising, and celebrating feminist visions for economic justice.

Working from home was particularly challenging for the finance and administration team whose locus of work had always been the office. Sadly, the challenges of 2020 led us to lose our administration and finance officer Hemanayagi Gopal, who resigned not long into Malaysia's first lockdown; and our finance and administrative manager Loo May Kuen resigned from her position later on in the year after successfully completing the annual audit. Their departures account for the only staff attrition during the year. IWRAW Asia Pacific owes a huge debt of gratitude to Phang Lai Yoong and Zahirah Zainal for holding the fort, working as always to ensure that the office space and systems were maintained and that we did not fall short of our legal and statutory obligations; and in late 2020 we welcomed Evelyn Loh as our new finance and administrative Manager.

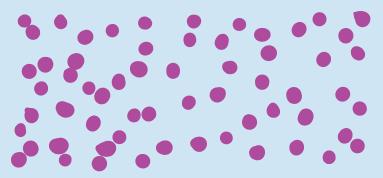
The shift to home-based work and the stresses of coping with the pandemic required us to rethink our team support policies - we revamped our communications and local travel allowances to make them more appropriate to the situation, and included reimbursable counselling support for the team. The capacities we created in 2020 to strengthen our working-from-home capabilities - upgrading our computer hardware, establishing systems to remotely access the archives as well as some of our internal communications - would go a long way to support a system of remote working that could become the organisational practice of IWRAW AP in a post-COVID-19 world.

INTERNSHIPS AND ONLINE VOLUNTEERS

The team benefited from the input of several interns. Prior to the implementation of Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO), we were joined in the office by Pravind Premnath from Monash University in Malaysia, who primarily supported IWRAW AP's communications, and Mary O'Callaghan from Monash University in Australia, who supported the From Global to Local programme at the 75th CEDAW.

Our subsequent interns all worked online, joining us from France, Indonesia, Malaysia, the UK and the US. Supporting our various programme areas, their contributions included blog posts, research, coordination, translations and interpretation. As remote internships are a new undertaking for us, we endeavoured to review and implement best practices, seeking our interns' feedback on how we could continue to improve the experience.

Thanks to Oak Foundation, we made extensive use of the platform Catchafire, which connects NGOs with volunteer professionals. This enabled us to develop English subtitles for our videos, and translate subtitles and webpages to/from Arabic, Azerbaijani, Chinese, Hindi, Portuguese and Spanish, expanding our reach to diverse groups around the world. We were delighted that some of these projects resulted in longer-term collaborations.

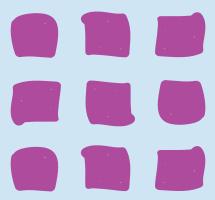


FUNDRAISING

Our core funders, and the donors funding specific project activities, were extremely supportive during the disruptions of 2020, recognising our need to revamp our way of working, and approving no-cost extensions where the reduction in in-person meetings created a significant underspend in our budgets. Both the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and the Open Society Foundation pledged new core funding to IWRAW AP. We also had a strong proponent in VOICE, the innovative grant facility managed by OXFAM Novib and HIVOS, which champions rights holders and groups facing marginalisation or discrimination, and supported our work with the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers through their grant to APNSW.

Team members worked very hard to secure funding from the Dutch MFA for the Women Gaining Ground project as part of the consortium led by CREA, and from the Laudes Foundation to build awareness for the ratification and domestication of norms of C190. VOICE will support our work on intersectionality through the Forging Intersectional Feminist Futures Project due to start in 2021. The Bretton Woods Project that supports some of the activities in the Transforming Economics and Development programme with support from the Hewlett Foundation will also continue their support to us in 2021.

We were able to raise support to start documenting case studies of violations of women's human rights in the world of work in partnership with the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.



ADAPTING OUR COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to the outputs of the different programme areas described above, IWRAW AP's communications strategic area covered different organisational activities, including our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and internal communications. Communications will become considerably more important in a post-COVID-19 climate, and we plan to strengthen this area by bringing in more technical expertise and enhancing our digital security.

Communications Plan

The communications plan prepared for IWRAW AP's Board of Directors' July meeting outlined IWRAW AP's key audiences and messages, and highlighted the need for all IWRAW AP's communications to take into account the challenges that are faced by our multiple constituencies, in ways that embrace the principles of our marginalised women's policy. Our overarching aim is to make our communications as accessible as possible to people with visual impairments and low levels of literacy, people with hearing impairments, and people with varying levels of English fluency. This means the use of image descriptions, voiceovers, subtitles, translations into other languages, and limited use of jargon, slang and abbreviations. We use a range of platforms, social media and ways of communicating. Our messaging is related to the outcomes of our thematic programme areas, but also more generally to developments within the multilateral system, particularly the UN; the situation of marginalised groups of women in different countries and locations; and the status of women's human rights globally. We see our target audience as the women's rights organisations and civil society organisations that we work with, the CEDAW Committee, our donors and supporters, and internally, our governance bodies, the Board and Advisory Committee.

Internal Communications

IWRAW Asia Pacific worked on having effective and secure internal systems for sharing information, and selected secure platforms as recommended by digital security experts. Our first virtual board meeting was conducted via Jitsi in February 2020 and was largely successful. Following online training held in May on delivery of webinars, including digital security and pedagogical considerations, we engaged the services of a Digital Integrity Fellow who has been working closely with us on capacity building and continuously improving our digital security. Through our Digital Integrity Fellow we also commenced using Big Blue Button for our weekly team meetings and other internal meetings. After much discussion we agreed to host the GSWF on Zoom because of its interpretation facility and because much of our audience would already be familiar with that platform.

COVID-19-Related Communications

With the COVID-19 pandemic and worldwide variations on lockdown, IWRAW Asia Pacific needed to accelerate its use of digital technologies and get up to speed on delivering webinars. This required looking at multiple platforms and assessing their pros and cons, from digital security to user-friendliness and requirements for downloads and installations.

Virtual events and webinars surged as a result of the pandemic, as did statements from CSOs on various aspects of COVID-19's impact on human rights. Although worthy, content often represented variations on

the same theme, and IWRAW Asia Pacific endeavoured to avoid adding to activist fatigue, opting instead to be concise and selective in our messaging. It was also important to factor language needs, accessibility and digital security into our online training and meetings.

On our blog, we shared a series of posts on COVID-19, starting with <u>Capitalism's Mask Has Slipped</u> at the start of Malaysia's Movement Control Order, followed by a <u>guest post</u> by Fadziso Fadzisai Mawunganidze, who discussed the inadequate support for victims of domestic violence in Zimbabwe in the context of the pandemic. In June, programme officer Shanti Uprety made the case for <u>C190 in a post-COVID-19 world</u>, and in August, intern Natalie Russo contributed a post on the harms caused to trans people in Latin America through <u>gender-segregated COVID-19 measures</u>.

IWRAW AP participated in the week-long <u>#FeministBailout</u> online campaign which mobilised the women's movements to make post-COVID-19 demands, taking the opportunity to highlight issues of equal pay for work of equal value, the care economy, climate justice, racial justice, digital security, migrant rights, and trafficking.

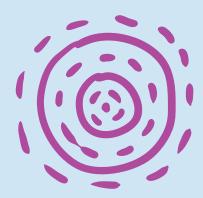


CONCLUDING REMARKS

The disruptions of COVID-19 brought about changes which seem to have enabled IWRAW AP to gain a stronger and more visible position in the feminist movement, while internally pushing us towards the realisation of potentially difficult organisational changes that were envisaged in the five-year strategy. We had pledged in the strategy to review the more conventional and exclusionary organisational policies and procedures and to become more intersectional and feminist in our organisational practice. We had promised ourselves to revisit some earlier discussions around constituting advisory groups, regional representation and clarification of concepts, and to review how we work with our multiple constituencies responding to issues relating to language, mobility, safety etc. We had also asked how we could meet the demands of our international team; how we could reduce our environmental footprint; and how we could take advantage of the various technological advances to ensure a stronger presence of ourselves and our constituencies in agenda-setting spaces.

If we are to seize the opportunity of this state of flux and uncertainty created by COVID-19, and continue to maintain IWRAW AP as a relevant and leading organisation promoting women's human rights, we must have the courage to take IWRAW AP forward into the post-COVID-19 world walking the talk of 'building back equal'. This must mean that the team, the board and the advisory committee work towards strengthening our collective ownership of the organisation; that we together foster an organisational culture that is sensitive to each other's positions and needs, and addresses the issues of everyone who has a stake in our organisation; and that we stay open to being challenged, responsive to change and willing to invest in ensuring a safe, mutually respectful and genuinely collaborative working environment within the core organisation and with our partners and constituencies.

We look forward to your support, encouragement and participation in this journey into a brave new world.



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