



Women's Fund Asia

Kaagapay Fund

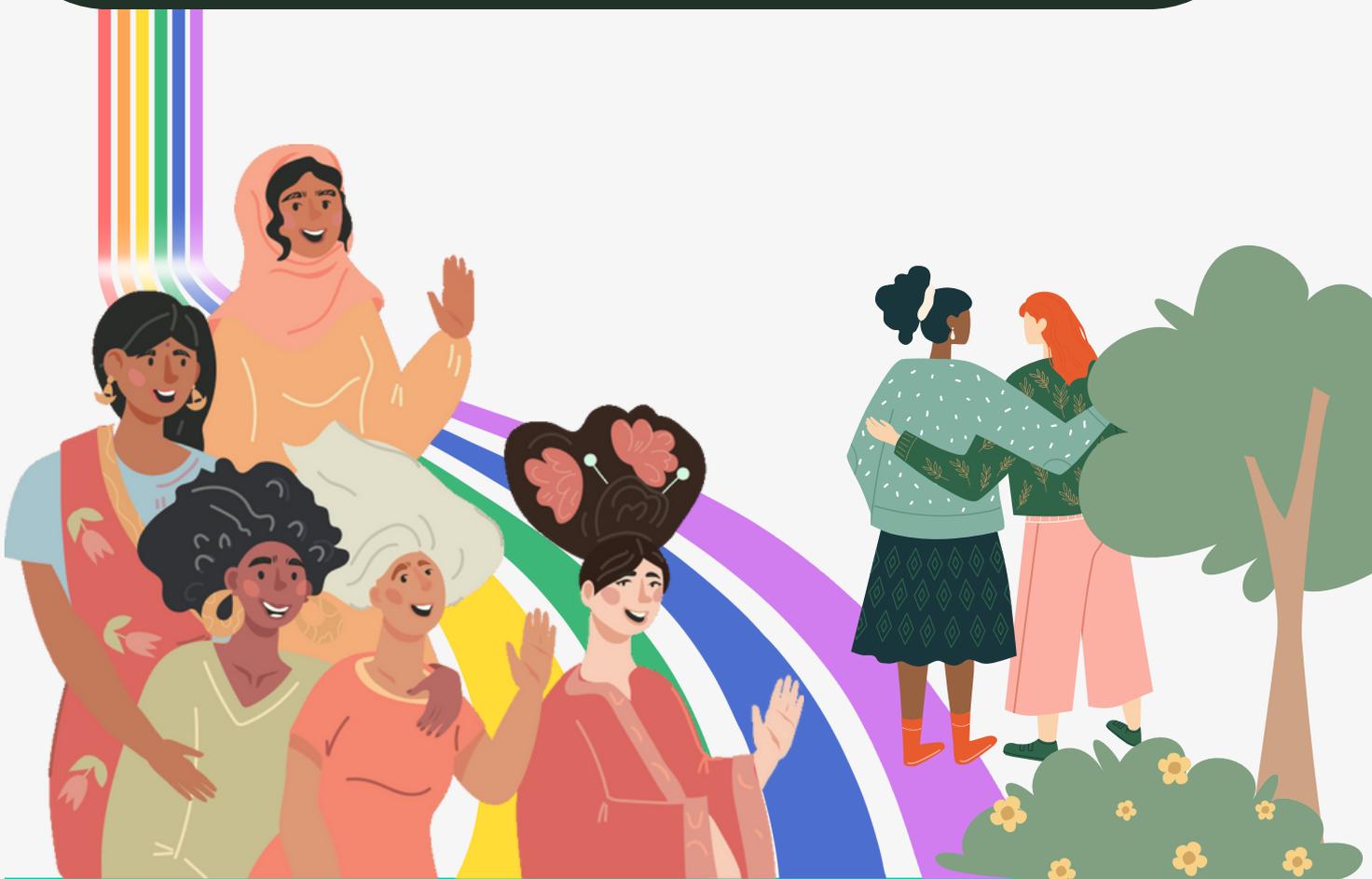
TO SUPPORT FEMINIST RESILIENCE
IN THE FACE OF COVID-19



Standing by Movements during Crisis:
A Review of WFA's response to the
COVID-19 Pandemic

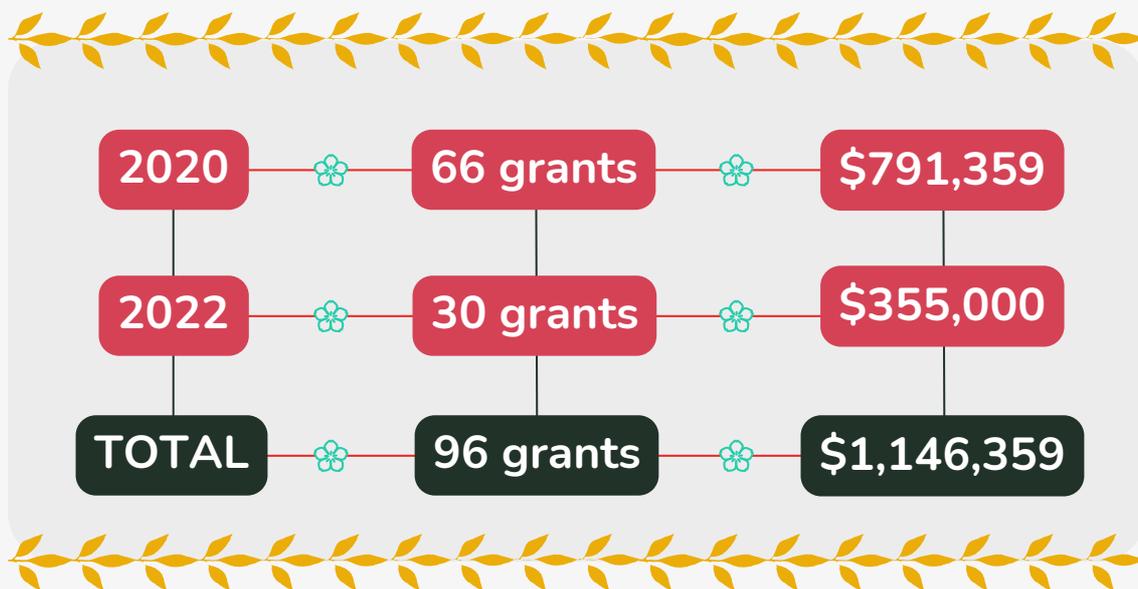
BY NEHA SOOD, KATHERINE (KAT) WATSON

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed - and continues to change - political landscapes and, in turn, the focus and priorities of feminist movements in known and unknown ways. The crises resulting from the pandemic continue to have significant and disproportionate impacts on women-, girls-, trans-, and intersex-led groups and the communities they serve, exacerbating existing structural and power inequalities within Asian societies. Even as women, girls, trans, and intersex people are the hardest hit by the crises, groups they lead are at the forefront of the response. They are critical agents of change and are best situated to respond within their communities.



How did WFA respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Women's Fund Asia (WFA) established a special grants programme: the Kaagapay Fund to Support Feminist Resilience in the face of COVID-19, in the second quarter of 2020. Kaagapay means 'to stand side by side in solidarity' in Filipino and encapsulates the spirit of cooperation among WFA, feminist organisations and activists in responding to the pandemic.



For the first cycle of Kaagapay Fund in 2020, the fund included over US\$100,000 in reallocated funds from within WFA and, eventually, over US\$800,000 in additional funds raised from donors.

For the second cycle in 2022, the fund included USD 355,000 with an aim to support partners' on-going response to changing and emerging contexts around the pandemic given the continued waves of COVID-19 and its impacts on women, girls, trans and intersex persons.

WFA provided grants across four categories:



The Kaagapay Fund provided flexible, unrestricted funding and gave groups a year to allow them the flexibility to use their grants within a longer period and as needed.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt organisationally by Kaagapay Fund grantee partners in terms of their finances, programmes, and ways of working. Many Kaagapay Fund grantee partners did not have the contingency funds to draw upon during the crisis. Many had to shift their programmatic work toward relief efforts to cover the shortfall of government schemes for marginalised women, girls, trans, and intersex communities and, at the same time, train themselves and their community members how to use new technologies to conduct their work.

The Kaagapay Fund responded to this context through flexible and immediate funding. The grantee partners used the Kaagapay Funds to cover a wide range of costs, including for programmes, administration, human resources, and institutional strengthening. The Kaagapay Fund supported the grantee partners to rebuild and sustain feminist movements while creating a blueprint for WFA to respond to future crises.

What was the reach and impact of the Kaagapay Fund?

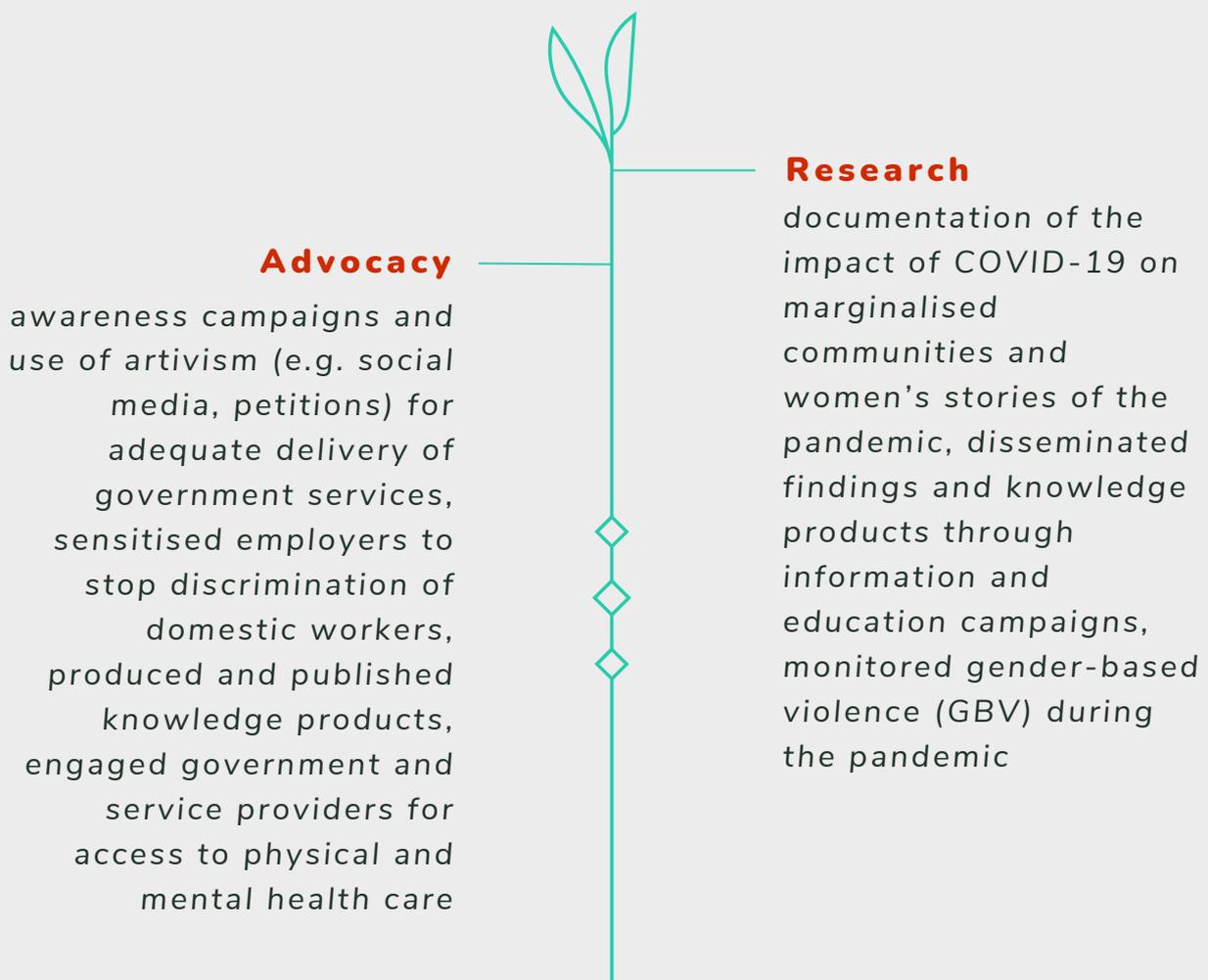
Over two years of the Kaagapay Fund, grantee partners came from 13 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste.



Most of the grants supported people holding an intersection of identities. This includes ethnic and religious minority communities (e.g. Dalit, Adivasi, indigenous women), LGBT people including trans women, women with disabilities, domestic, migrant and informal workers, sex and/or entertainment workers, women agricultural workers and farmers, women human rights defenders, young women, gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, and women living with HIV/AIDS.

Along with reaching the most marginalised communities, grantee partners also developed a diverse range of interventions from providing direct relief during the pandemic to advocating for long-term solutions.

Interventions supported through the Kaagapay Fund in 2020 and 2022:



Legal aid and paralegal support

provided legal aid services and paralegal support for case monitoring and interventions

Emergency Relief Activities

provided food, medicine, cash transfers, room rent support, running shelters and quarantine facilities for returnee migrant workers, and COVID-19 - related items (e.g. face masks, test kits, sanitizer)

Capacity strengthening

trainings for women to organise digitally, women workers to be able to use their phones for documentation, held skill-building sessions to regain people's livelihood, linked people (e.g. female sex workers, domestic workers) to government schemes and benefits

Self-care and well-being

supported grantee partners and communities they work in with online and offline psycho-social counselling, mental health workshops, and group support system meetings





What did we Learn from the Kaagapay Fund?

Crises are not only inevitable, they are becoming increasingly frequent.

During crises, those who are hit the hardest are the poor and the most marginalised communities of people who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Self-led groups and movements who serve these communities are on the frontlines during such crises. There is an immediate need to bolster these groups and movements so that they may stand strong through such storms, whilst saving lives and advancing their human rights agendas at the same time.

Initially, Kaagapay Fund aimed to address the immediate needs of activists, communities, and organisations during the pandemic. However, learnings from the Fund's impact over time reflect the need for long-term grants after relief and recovery.

Through the Fund, WFA has seen the following impact on grantee partners:

01

Grantee partners had flexible funds to provide relevant services to the communities they serve. Grantee partners lack flexible funding but Kaagapay Funds enabled grantee partners to channel their programming into immediate needs. Grantee partners' work during the pandemic strengthened the trust between them and their communities.

02

Grantee partners were able to shift from response to advocacy as they met the evolving needs of the communities after the pandemic. In fact, the request for Kaagapay funds to conduct advocacy-related programmes had increased from 29% during the pandemic in 2020 to 53% after the pandemic in 2022. This demonstrates the changing needs of activists, communities, and organisations to shift in strategies in addressing the continuing and longer-term impacts of the pandemic.





03

Grantee partners expanded their reach, especially among marginalised groups who have faced the brunt of the pandemic. Many countries' social safety nets were stretched by the crises causing marginalised communities to fall through. WFA and feminist funders globally coalesced in support of these communities, prioritising funding for intersectional relief efforts such as Kaagapay Fund.

04

Grantee partners were able to rebuild their financial and human resources that were lost during the pandemic. Grantee partners are incorporating new approaches such as digital technology for their staff and to reach new communities. Grantee partners also recognised the mental health burden of the pandemic on their teams, and the Fund has helped partners integrate mental health and psychosocial support into their programmes.

05

The Kaagapay Fund sparked WFA's crisis strategy to help sustain grantee partners during difficult times. Since the pandemic, WFA has used learnings from the Kaagapay Fund to develop a strategy for emerging crises like floods, insurgencies, and war. This includes putting aside flexible funding for immediate needs but also addressing the communities' long-term needs.





Going forward -
what do we
recommend?

01

Flexibility is the cornerstone of crisis funding. Flexible resources can support movements to come out on the other side without losing years of hard work and progress, standing stronger and more resilient than before.

02

Non-competitive and abundant resources are urgent and immediate to meet the unmet need for resources and address the long-term impacts of the crisis.

03

Trust and friendship between funders and grantee partners lays the groundwork for building a solid collaboration.

04

Care and well-being in feminist movements must be recognised as priorities.

05

Centre marginalised issues and groups. The weak points in existing social safety nets were widened by the crisis, with marginalised communities falling through. In response, feminist funders globally coalesced in support of marginalised communities, prioritising funding for intersectional relief efforts.

06

Support Women's Funds. During times of crisis, women's funds in Asia and the Pacific region were able to effectively course through urgent, flexible and unrestricted resources into the hands of grassroots groups and movements. Moreover, women's funds can amplify their outreach by collaborating and learning from each other's crisis responses and ensure that their efforts are complementary.

Why Women's Funds?



Women's funds have a long track record of knowing where and more importantly how to support feminist movements because they are a part of the communities they support and can respond quickly to what is needed most.



Women's funds also identify and support communities and issues that other donors do not prioritise through flexible funding.



Flexible funding from WFA helps organisational partners to develop intersectional feminist interventions led by women, girls, trans and intersex people that are able to address the multiple marginalisation that communities of women, girls, trans and intersex people face.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged some women's funds to respond to a crisis for the first time and at an unprecedented scale. Although the Kaagapay Fund was set up as an initial response for grantee partners, it has helped them navigate the pandemic's long-term impact on feminist movements.

Women's Fund Asia will scale up these lessons from the Kaagapay Fund to inform its future crisis response and remains committed to sustaining the Fund's impact through approaches – like flexible grants – that strengthen resilience and feminist-movement building in the region.

WFA's Kaagapay Fund has been supported by:

- Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
- Comic Relief
- Equality Fund
- Foundation for a Just Society
- Global Fund for Women
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands
- Oak Foundation
- Tides Foundation

To learn more about our work, please visit our website:

<https://www.womensfundasia.org/>



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