

# RADICAL GEOGRAPHIES

Navigating The Tough Terrains  
Of Crises, Coups, Political  
Turmoil And A Pandemic

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



**URGENT ACTION  
FUND** FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS  
ASIA & PACIFIC

2021 presented the toughest terrains to navigate - conflicts, coups, political turbulence, amid a global pandemic that left no population unscathed. Even as struggles and hardship intensified for women and non-binary human rights defenders, they innovated on ways to survive, collectivise and draw strength to face adversities. Much like how lichens find way to grow on bare, inhospitable earth, feminist movements sprouted and sustained life even in scorched landscape.

**Radical Geographies** is Urgent Action Fund, Asia & Pacific's annual narrative of learning on how as a feminist rapid response fund we traversed the shaky grounds of 2021. This report takes you through the journey of how feminist grant-making prepared the grounds for human rights defence to spawn and fruit even in inhospitable terrains. How roots of collective care and symbiosis through sisterhood nourished feminist landscapes of Asia and the Pacific. 'Radical Geographies' borrows language and inspiration from the magnificent, but invisible ecologies of fungi, molluscs and lichens to explore resilience, rebellion, care and interconnectedness of regional feminist communities and movements. These ecologies provide a key to understanding the lands on which we live, and the ways we think, feel, and behave beyond oppressive structures that surround us.

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# CONTENTS

- 6** **Growing through Asphalt**  
Struggle for human rights amid entangled crises across Asia and Pacific
- 12** **Spawning and Fruiting on Rocks**  
Letter from the Chair
- 18** **Root-Brain: On Steering with Heart Through Crises and Co-Leadership 2.0**  
Notes from the Co-Leads
- 23** **Spores to Shrooms**  
The story of our journey
- 30** **Enriching Our Soil**  
Feminist Values Nourishing Our Landscapes
- 46** **Our Symbiotic Sisterhood**
- 48** **Scales, Stalks, Leaves**  
Our Books of Account
- 52** **UAF A&P's Living Labyrinths**



“hope is essential to  
any political struggle  
for radical change  
when the overall  
social climate  
promotes  
disillusionment  
and despair”

bell hooks

# GROWING through ASPHALT

6

## Struggle for human rights amid entangled crises across Asia and the Pacific

2021 was a year when human rights violations were globally reported; in Asia and Pacific intersectional crises rocked most countries, affecting the poor and marginalised disproportionately. Already among the most under-resourced regions of the world, women and non-binary activists and defender communities were battered by recurring waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a disproportionate impact on the lives and livelihoods of those in unorganised sectors.

7

With the number of right-wing ultraconservative political parties winning national elections continuing to rise, many democracies too used the pretext of 'national security and interests' to criminalise human rights defense, and crack down on networks and groups. Strictly controlling and monitoring resources flowing to grassroots organisations from charities or foundations abroad were other tactics used to choke their operations.

**Frontline Defenders' Global Analysis 2021 reported that nearly 400 human rights defenders were killed over the year, with India topping the list, followed by Afghanistan, Philippines, and Myanmar and Pakistan.**

Digital surveillance on civil society, government-backed hacking of phones and other digital assets of activists and defenders were methods used to intimidate and falsely incriminate human rights defenders on trumped up charges. **Several authoritarian states tried to curb access to information and curtail collectivising by placing curbs on internet access.**

Many activists and defender networks resorted to sourcing international calling cards and the use of easily available VPN networks to continue their activism virtually.

The February coup in Myanmar led to the violent protests and military crackdown on human rights defenders in Yangon and most other provinces, and led to international uproar. However, few governments took a hardline or announced sanctions against junta. This is a growing trend across many regions, where protecting cultural, economic, political or trade ties have taken precedence over supporting civil society activism and voices of protest on the ground. Arrests and detentions without any sound evidence or access to legal help continues to be the norm in Myanmar. It was not only in Myanmar, but across several other countries of South and Southeast Asia that media houses critical of the state were targeted and journalists arrested, killed or falsely incriminated.

**The political turmoil in Myanmar, and pandemic-related difficulties across several countries of Asia and the Pacific led to the disbanding of many organisations and suspension of activities of others due to censorship, harassment and lack of resources to continue functioning. Over 1300 anti-coup protesters were killed, 11,000 were arrested and 1900 were detained under the military regime.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

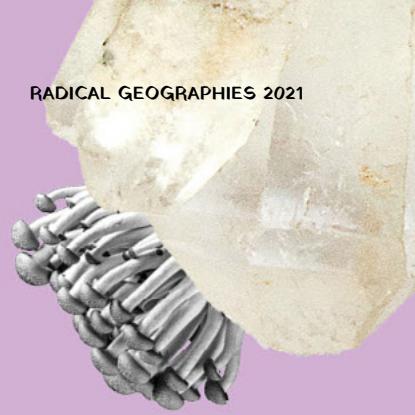
**Across India and Papua New Guinea (PNG), two countries vastly different in size and cultures, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in major chaos – as deaths due to the pandemic rose, these countries went into unprecedented emergency response. Health infrastructures were almost at the point of collapse in many parts of India, and across PNG.**

Several smaller, under-developed countries of Asia and the Pacific that relied on tourism, exports, subsidised imports, struggled with global shutdowns making money and materials hard to come by. Many activists and communities that UAF A&P work with reported livelihood losses, increase in security issues, incidences of domestic violence and increased targeting and marginalisation of vulnerable minorities, such as indigenous communities, sex workers and LGBTQI communities due to worsening socio-economic situation.

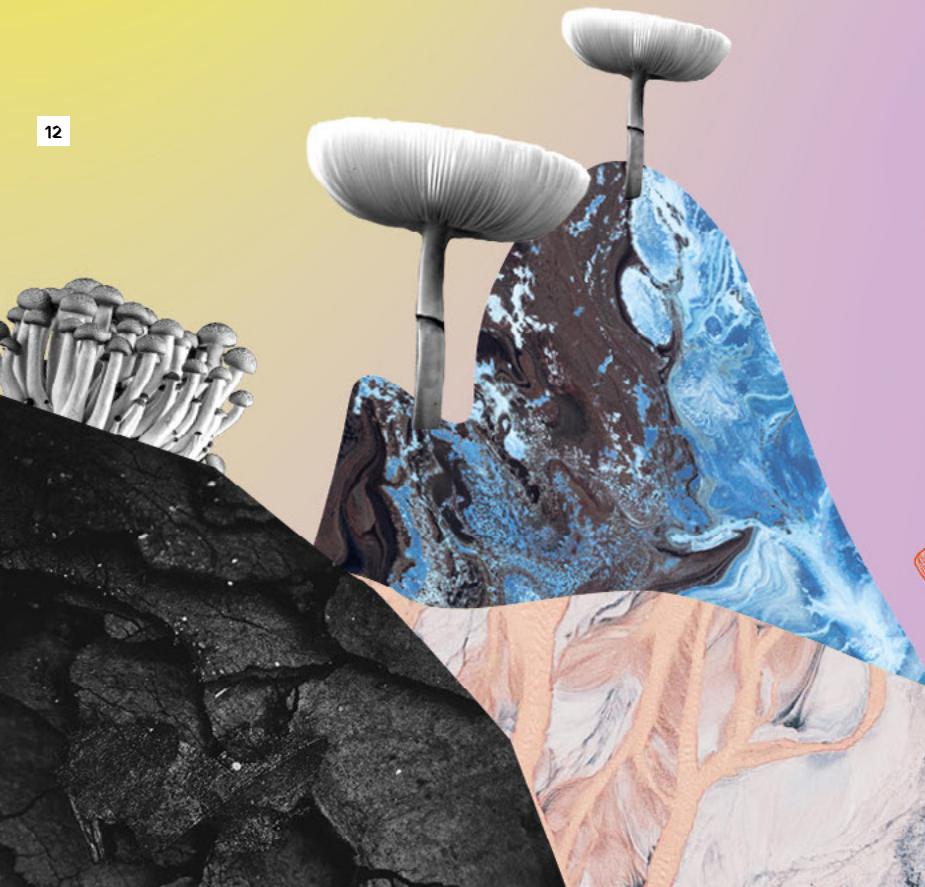
The crisis that beset Afghanistan with the withdrawal of the last American troops and the subsequent overthrow of the Afghan government by Taliban, forced a rethink on when a humanitarian crisis is also a human rights crisis – forcing narrow definitions for the latter to be broadened.

**Framing responses for challenging contexts that were intersectional; and playing out across regions simultaneously, has required flexibility and a rapid shifting of strategies that you will read about in the coming sections.**

# SPAWNING and FRUITING on ROCKS



12



13

## Letter from the Chair

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Having lived through crisis-on-top-of-crisis this past year, we gained insights that made us rethink the way we do our work. At the beginning, we set out to grow an organisation responsive to the needs of defenders at risk due to particular acts of resistance in the face of injustice. During the global pandemic and the massive devastation in Myanmar and then Afghanistan this past year, we were compelled to revisit the parameters of our mandate.

We came face-to-face with the fact that there is a general precariousness of the activist's life given the choice of being the dissident voice in one's community. **We saw how the daily livelihood of defenders were impacted by their activism in a fundamental and general way, not just in response to specific acts of resistance. Even in 'normal' circumstances, defenders must live and act with economic insecurity as they work in and with marginalized communities through organizations and networks with very limited resources.** We knew only too well that social stigma, not just state repression, can isolate defenders from their mainstream communities and contribute further to their general state of fragility. Defenders on the ground inhabit this unequal world in its lower rungs.

Last year, we faced the reality that when massive devastation occurs – be it social or political or both – defenders' needs can be that of mere survival, for themselves, their families and their compatriots. In such instances, as a grantmaker for defenders at risk, it would not make sense for us to associate our rapid response grants only with particular acts of resistance and their consequent risks. In order for us to

stay relevant, we needed to respect their stated needs in the midst of large-scale devastation. So, our grants for Covid-19 and in Myanmar and Afghanistan came to focus on supporting survival. Such support could be seen as humanitarian in nature and outside our mandate, but we understand it to sit firmly within our politics and core purpose of enabling defenders' resilience and resistance.

In particular, the devastation of Afghanistan this past year pushed us, almost overnight, to extend our wings further than ever. We forged new partnerships, entered unfamiliar ground, broke through old barriers, extended our mandate and, ultimately, reached an important milestone in our young journey. At the same time, our grantmaking increased three-fold. Through this, we learned that all was possible due to our most important resource: the trust we earn from defenders, advisors and donors.

**As we continue to do our work, we are keenly aware of the dark times we live in: new forms of authoritarianism on the rise; oligarchies and dictatorships as strong as ever; military build-up in multiple and escalating geopolitical battles; continuing regression of human rights; persistent systemic inequality and injustice.**





Alongside the steady worsening of political and physical risk to activism, we also cannot deny how these realities take a daily toll on our sense of confidence in a just future and, consequently, on our state of mind and well-being. It has become increasingly clear that collective care and self-care as integral to the act of resistance. Our work of co-creating webs of safety and care and enabling defenders must continuously reflect this, taking heed of the challenge from The Care Manifesto (2020) that sees care as **“our individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself.”**

In an ever-changing world, with the stream of new generations of young activists finding their way, we are called upon to constantly review our notion of resilience and what it takes to nurture it in our overwhelmingly diverse and increasingly volatile contexts. Our in-country consultations, ongoing dialogues with advisors and regional exchange forums are crucial for an open organization that continues to ask critical questions, take on bold experiments and, when necessary, make course corrections. It would be a measure of our leadership to be able to generate evolving and contextual narratives on defenders’ resilience and articulate what it takes to sustain them. This is necessary to ensure our diverse activists stay relevant in a time full of unpredictability

and be able to regenerate and thrive for the long struggle for rights and justice for all.

In the spirit of always evolving, this year will also bring about changes in our Regional Board. I will be among three of the founding board members who will be stepping down to make way for new energy to carry the work forward. The Board is committed to ensure dynamic change while managing healthy continuity in the collective leadership of the organization. This past year, we welcomed the new members in our governance body and our new co-lead, Vinita Sahasranaman, who joins Virisila Buadromo in the executive leadership. Allow me to close by extending my deepest appreciation to all, inside and outside the organisation, who have made it possible for UAF A&P to play a meaningful role in the struggles and resistance of women and non-binary human rights defenders in Asia and the Pacific. I am proud to say that we have built a solid foundation for the next phase of our journey.

**Kamala Chandrakirana**  
Jakarta, 11 April 2022

# ROOT-BRAIN: ON STEERING with HEART Through CRISES and CO-LEADERSHIP 2.0

18

## Notes from the Co-Leads

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2021 has been many years in one – in that, as an organisation, we have witnessed drastic changes both outside and within. It was a year we solidified our belief in co-leadership and shared responsibility, and embarked on a leadership transition – after an intense and thorough recruitment journey, we have begun scripting a new chapter in co-leading UAF A&P through its expansion and consolidation years.

19

We begin by acknowledging and honouring the bold and inspiring work Mary Jane Real began and continued as a founding Co-lead, and her vision and camaraderie until she transitioned in 2021.

We hope to share the new lessons we uncover over this journey, to help and support other sisters who may choose to embark on the co-leadership journey. **Let's begin that process by telling you that co-leadership needs work. And this year, we have both immersed ourselves in finding our own rituals that make us stronger together.** We practice by being clear with each other about our ideas of co-leadership, and how we embody it. We hope that, in turn, it will manifest into power-sharing among team members too. We see it as our way of practising accountability to each other, the team, our board and the movements of women and non-binary human rights defenders we belong to, serve and support.

We also facilitated leadership transitions within the team with many team members taking on new mandates ; we learnt from the transitioning out of two of our team members. We thank them for their invaluable contribution to the UAF A&P mission, and used the insights they shared to make bold changes to our internal systems, recruitment and hiring processes. We witnessed new energy and new ideas as new team members came on board.

In 2021, our response to the multiple crises that unfolded truly underlined our commitment to power sharing and co-responsibility. Starting with the Myanmar political crisis

in February 2021, our team began mobilising resources to supporting advisors and defenders in the country, even as whispers grew stronger of a coup' d'etat. As advisors and activists reached out to our grants team, we rapidly co-created ways of supporting. With the grants team in lead, everyone else stepped up to support grant-making by either moving money safely and urgently, or opening up spaces for women and non-binary defenders to be seen, heard and share their experiences. This learning became our blueprint for our crisis response.

By the time the largest humanitarian crisis in our region broke out in Afghanistan in August, armed with the blue print co-created in April, the team had a sense of confidence and clarity in themselves and each other to step up. We realised that the response to a complex humanitarian crisis unfolding in Afghanistan required us to be flexible, and not apply our grantmaking criteria too rigidly.

Our regional board challenged us to refine our thinking, and supported us in rapidly implementing changes. **Staying true to our feminist values, we reached out to the activists and defenders who advised us on the support they needed, and how to get it to them.** We simplified our grantmaking criteria and processes, relied on existing relationships of trust with networks in Afghanistan to fashion a response that was not just appropriate, but accountable to the defenders, to their communities, and to our donors.

We moved resources safely, supported some activists to evacuate and in collaboration with our Urgent Action Fund Sisterhood and feminist funders of the Prospera network, we raised almost 1.2 million dollars to fund our response. We jest amongst ourselves that this was our “baptism by fire.” With the support of our board members, we continue to leverage our collective connections, skills, experience and ideas for Afghanistan. **A powerful testament of this fantastic teamwork is that at the end of the year, we had re-distributed over USD 1.98 million in the form of 428 grants to women and non-binary defenders across Asia and Pacific. This experience was "co-responsibility and solidarity" in action.**

A deep note of gratitude is also due to three of our founding Board members, including our regional Board Chair, Kamala Chandrakirana, and vice Chair, Ambika Satkunanathan and Ma. Angela Villalba. Their collective wisdom and guidance ensured that we built strong foundations in our first three years of inception.

We are confident and excited that whatever emerges in the new year, we are ready for it and if we aren't then we will learn and adapt.

**Vinita Sahasranaman & Virisila Buadromo,**  
Co-Leads

2021 was a year of phenomenal growth. To understand why we call it phenomenal, it's important to look back to continue our march forward.

# SPORES to SHROOMS

The story of our journey

The first three years of operations as a fund were spent establishing our processes, exploring our organisational values, and cobbling together a small but nimble team of women and non-binary professionals.

Every year we saw growth, in the number of activists and defenders we were able to reach and support, with grants, consultations and convenings that offered them platforms to be seen, heard, and share their lived experiences with us.



2018

**US\$ 138,000**

**36 grants 11 countries**

UAF A&P begins grantmaking across countries of Asia and the Pacific, focusing on a smooth transfer of work from UAF WHR in the US, to a new team based across Asia and the Pacific. Apart from rapid response grants, our unique grants and programmes include Resourcing Resilience Grants, and Enabling Defenders programme and Webs of Safety and Care. We disbursed 36 grants even while setting up processes and recruiting team members.

24

2019

**US\$ 220,000**

**53 grants 16 countries**

UAF A&P focuses on expanding outreach to activist and defender communities and laying foundations for our work on supporting resilience and thriving through improving support infrastructure available to them and collective care practices. We also began our journey to develop alternative monitoring, evaluation, learning, and accountability approaches rooted in our feminist values and practices.

2020

**US\$ 495,000**

**116 grants 21 countries**

With the ending of our initial phase (three years), UAF A&P extensively engaged with its core ecosystem of the Board, advisors, grantees, partners and other feminist funds to reflect and review on the foundational years and impact, and uses learnings and critique to chart new strategic directions and work to new feminist plans.

2021

**US\$ 1.98 million**

**428 grants 20 countries**

UAF A&P begins consolidating its practices and processes and expanding work by deeply rooting it to its feminist values – surpassing its grantmaking in the previous three years cumulatively, in the span of a year. Raising and redistributing over 1.98 million in resources to activists and defenders in need across multiple crises and contexts.

25

The incremental rise in grantmaking over the years from  
 2018 < 2019 by **60%** < 2020 by **125%** < 2021 by **301%**

### Security & Well-being



**297**

Grants

**1.36**  
million

Total \$

# 2021 in NUMBERS: GRANTMAKING at a GLANCE

### Resourcing Resilience



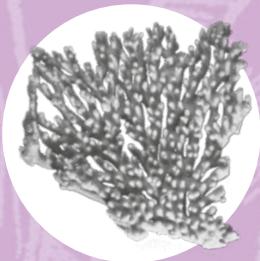
**14**

Grants

**66,278**

Total \$

### Webs of Safety and Care



**2**

Grants

**10,000**

Total \$

### MYANMAR

**US\$ 222,199**



39 Security and Well-being



7 Covid Crisis Grants



2 Wantok Grants



1 Resourcing Resilience

### AFGHANISTAN

**US\$ 1 million**



200 Security and Well-being



2 Resourcing Resilience Grants

### Covid Crisis Grants



**94**

Grants

**426,799**

Total \$

### Wantok Grants



**12**

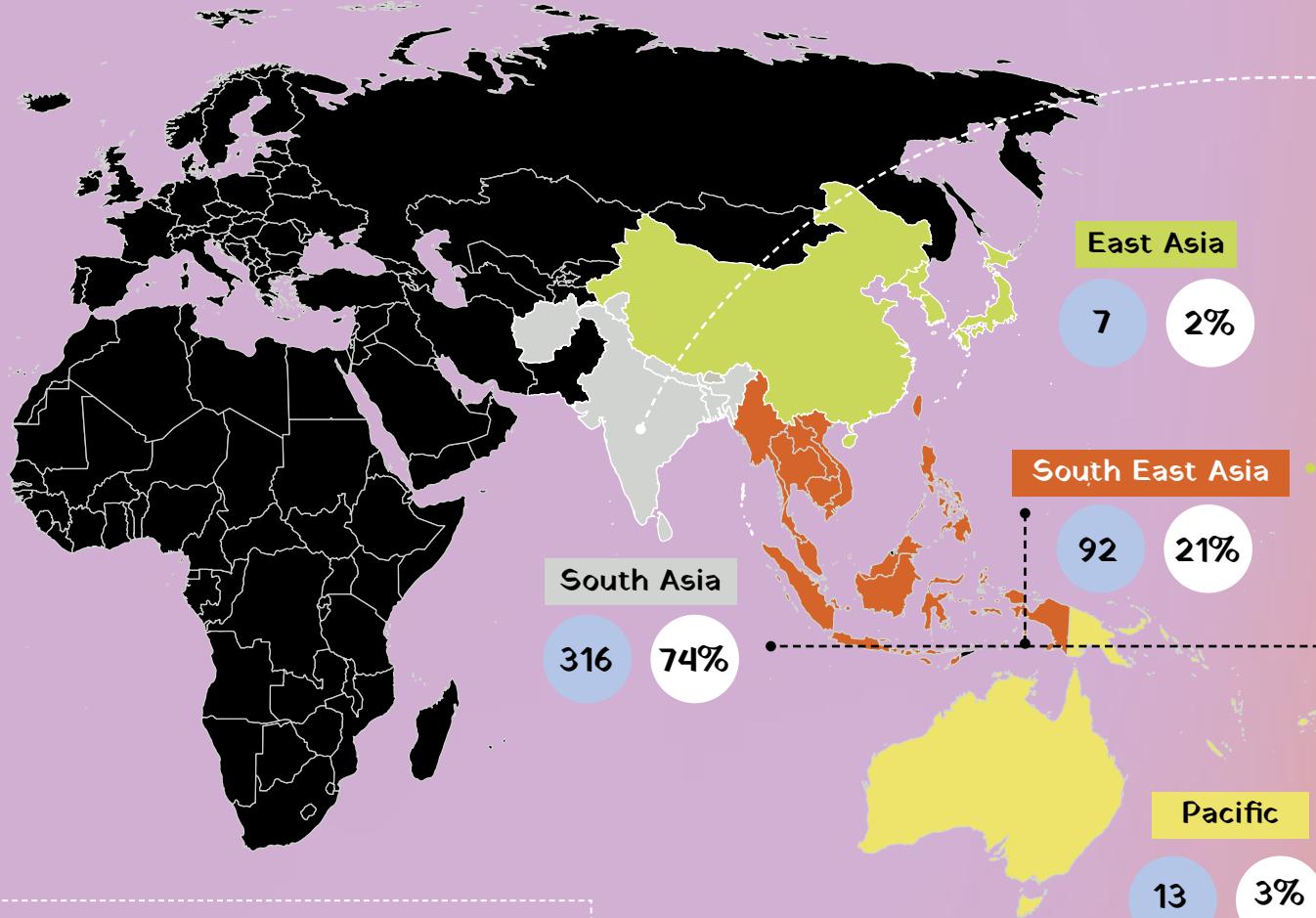
Grants

**60,000**

Total \$

As a crisis response, we added the short-term Wantok grants to better support mutual aid networks to extend support innovatively to activist and defender communities they work with during crises.

# GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD of our GRANTS



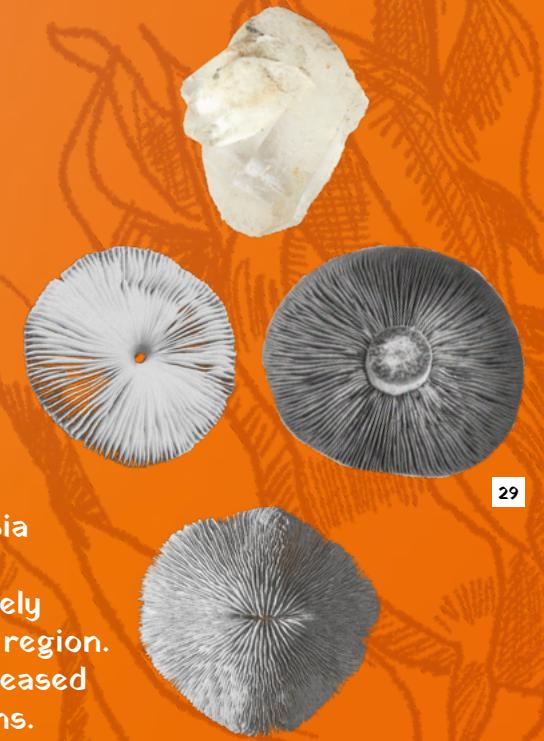
**LEGEND**

2021 grants      2021 Regional %

A big chunk of our Covid Crisis grants went to South Asia - India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, in particular, which were among countries most affected by the pandemic. 22% of our total grantmaking in 2021 went towards Covid Crisis Grants.

The high number of grants to South Asia and Southeast Asia are a testament to the multiple crises that disproportionately affected activists and defenders in this region. The number of grants to Myanmar increased our grantmaking figures in these regions.

Although proportionally grantmaking to the Pacific appears to be just 3% due to our crisis response in other regions, we were successful in expanding our footprint across the Pacific to Vanuatu this year, along with South Korea and Malaysia in Southeast Asia.



# ENRICHING OUR SOIL

## Feminist Values Nourishing Our Landscapes

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30

In our second strategic phase (2021-2023) of our existence, UAF A&P's Board and team members co-ideated and committed to working to a set of core values and principles that serve as our feminist compass in our organisational journey. This annual report is framed as our collective reflection of how we fared in upholding and furthering these values through our work. The stories shared are neither unidimensional, nor narratives that conform to a single value or principle, but resonate and overlap with several others too. We hope this report helps you understand how we collectively embrace a value-based rather than an output-driven way of functioning.

31

- ∞ Flexibility to understand contexts, and activists and defenders; and the support they require
- ∞ Fore-fronting lived experiences of defenders and activists
- ∞ Learning from setbacks to improve and improvise
- ∞ Amplifying and facilitating feminist movements to be seen and heard
- ∞ Relationship building and nurturing trust
- ∞ Learning and unlearning as a way to collaboratively thrive and flourish
- ∞ Intentionally acknowledging our position as a funder to shift power and redistribute privilege



# Flexibility to understand contexts, and activists and defenders; and the support they require

32

## Extending and launching short-term grants

In a year, when the regions we work in were beset with multiple, overlapping, intersectional crisis, we relied on our activist and defender networks to advise us on support they needed, and in what form. As pandemic-induced difficulties multiplied, we extended the term of **Covid Crisis grants**. As needs rose, we launched **Wantok grants** by collaborating with feminist networks specialising in mutual aid to expand the reach of our resources to communities in countries, such as Fiji, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Papua New Guinea.

## Revising crisis response

In August, when the Taliban wrested power in Afghanistan, we rejigged our processes to swiftly move resources into the hands of women and non-binary defenders who were faced with frozen bank accounts, threats of Taliban arrests, and forced disappearances. We explored alternate ways of moving money into the country as banking systems remained inaccessible – using approaches that had worked during Myanmar political coup for supporting some defenders. We also realised ensuring safety and security of defenders require us to offer more than grant support – we worked with newly cobbled consortiums to better support needs, including supporting evacuations in collaboration with other peer donors, connecting to networks that Board and team members were part of in countries where defenders and their families were evacuated to, and also being their friends and contacts online working with several unknown others to curate information, make it available and accessible to as many defenders to move them to safety.

33



## Fore-fronting lived experiences of defenders and activists

34

### Expanding how and what we define as human rights defence

The continuing COVID-19 pandemic underlined how survival of human rights defenders is resistance when economic, social and communal lockdowns ravaged most, globally. Through many crises of the past years, we realised that current definitions of human rights defence and the needs that a rapid response fund for activists and defenders can support are limited. With the pandemic, and then through the political turmoil in Myanmar and Afghanistan, we tried to constantly expand our understanding of intersectional crises and how to recognise and uphold the struggles of many as human rights defence and not see it through the lens of 'humanitarian assistance'.

Most defenders and activists drew strength from the communities they belong to or affiliated with, so our resilience work has been focused on figuring ways to address the needs of communities that we support too. We supported many historically oppressed communities, such as Dalit collectives across India and Nepal and trans communities of South Asia and Pacific, during this time, with survival support and access to medical needs. During political crises, we took cognisance of the fact that defenders will not feel safe or cared for, if their immediate families or networks are not included in the safety net.

35

# 3 Learning from setbacks to improve and improvise

36

## Using indigenous practises of resilience

The networks and communities that we worked with also demonstrated how they pursue resilience in hard times, by modelling how communities come together to support each other. During the pandemic, several groups, across multiple countries, such as Fiji, India and Sri Lanka, used resources we provided to set up food banks, and community kitchens, or procure seeds to grow their own food to supplement the meagre rations (if any) made available to them by the state. Our analysis show that in many cases and contexts, the resources we provided helped sustain communities through the pandemic induced economic and social hardship, by ensuring food on the table, access to medicines and masks and other COVID-related hygiene paraphernalia, and ways to commune and collectivise.

## The power of collective thinking

The Covid and Myanmar crisis better prepared us for Afghanistan crisis – we were prepared to look beyond what we can individually do to cobble together a more strategic response that includes more partners from within our funding ecosystem to be more impactful and support more people. We partnered with peer donors, such as Frontline Defenders to use their expertise in evacuation to bring in the additional resources to support more evacuees. We also joined together with sister funds, Global Fund for Women and Equality Fund to rapidly raise more resources needed to support Afghan defenders in need. Many of our Board members also used their experience and might to support us in figuring out alternative ways of putting money into the hands of defenders in their time of need, and also to figure out relocation and resettlement for those facing threats from Taliban.

We used the collective might and connections of our Board members to support us in moving programmes that hit roadblocks due to the pandemic. For instance, our experiment to configure alternate resources for communities through the Sustainable Livelihood programme hit an almost dead-end due to the pandemic and related restrictions. Collective brainstorming helped us understand our limitations, and we are now embarking on reshaping this experiment to better understand how care economies work, and to understand its interpretations and adaptations that are already present across our regions.

37

# 4

## Amplifying and facilitating feminist movements to be seen and heard

38

### Centering messages of the invisible

At several international forums, such as the inaugural opening session of the UN CSW in March, our Co-Lead Virisila Buadromo brought global attention to how invisible Pacific islanders are, esp its women and non-binary human rights activists in global feminist narratives, as also the dearth of resources for feminist movement building available in the region. Through this year, we realised how mental and psychological support was perceived as secondary and not urgent by many communities ravaged by the pandemic or political crisis, with priority placed on ensuring physical survival and security of their extended communities. During the political crises of 2021, we focused on making connections, helping activists to be seen and heard at international forums by leveraging the power of the collectives that we are globally part of, such as the Human Rights Funders Network, the Feminist Advocacy for Afghanistan, among others.

### Offering virtual oases of reflection

As a women's fund investing in the regions, we convened and facilitated conversations with activists across countries and contexts to ensure we were responding to the needs on the ground. Conversations that we had with indigenous communities and groups of Myanmar and with various activists in Afghanistan in the months leading to the Taliban takeover helped us be prepared to mount an urgent response.

In October, we hosted our first Oasis of Reflection, a convening that brought together activists and advisors from over six different countries, especially those that were in environmental, pandemic and/or political crises. We curated a safe space for them to not only feel seen and heard, and enjoy two days of respite and wellbeing practices, but also to share stories of resistance and resilience with each other, to inspire and motivate each other.

We recognise the power of convening to bring awareness to, and centre attention on the human rights situation and contributions of feminist movements to sustaining human rights defence across Asia and the Pacific. We are committed to creating an annual convening that brings together our network of advisors, board and team to collectively learn from our lived experiences in the regions we serve and work in. More importantly, we acknowledge this as a strong loop of accountability to activists, communities and movements that we work for and with.

39

## Connecting, convening and facilitating brave voices

We launched our new website that visually embodies our feminist values, and offers advanced accessibility features to defenders and activists with disabilities. We have also been intentional about language justice, and the need for activists and defenders to access information about our relevance and support to their life's work in languages that they speak and engage in. We currently have information accessible in 9 languages, including English, Filipino, Fijian, Hindi, Indonesian, Khmer, Nepali, Pidgin and Thai, with many more as work in progress.

40

## Shifting narratives and using the power of storytelling

In 2021, we also embarked on a new programme direction of shifting narratives prevalent in our regions, or among donors to retake the narrative of resilience, privilege and thriving. We continue to advocate for avoidance of victim language or other boxes or stereotypes human rights defence is thrown into by state and non-state actors.

# 5 Relationship building and nurturing trust

## Co-creating spaces of care and wellbeing

With every space that we convened, we brought defenders from similar or different contexts together to help them learn about each other's activism and resilience paths, and become a small chain in facilitating feminist solidarity and movement building. Every space that we curate or create are co-creative spaces where we learn from the activists as much as they are inspired or informed by the participants they interact with. For instance, at the Oasis of Reflection that we curated for defenders as a part of the Webs of Safety and Care programme, activists facilitated well-being spaces for others, and volunteered to give other participants a peek into their resilience practices, transforming the virtual space, and imbuing it with vigour and vitality of convening in the same space and time.

## Strengthening work through our champions

Through convenings, and shared spaces, we have focused on building trust with and among the communities and networks we work with. Our advisor outreach in 2021 helped us significantly expand the number of activists working with us as focal points or connectors to the movements and communities we want to reach. Our analysis of 2021 grants show us that over 67% of grantees were referred to us by colleagues or peers, or UAF A&P's advisors most applications have been the direct outcome of and becoming the link as a women's funds between donors and grassroots movements.

41

# 6 Learning and unlearning as a way to collaboratively thrive and flourish

42

Every crisis, and internal and external changes left its indelible mark on how we proceeded – offering not just learnings, but opportunities to unlearn. By successfully piloting our feminist approach to learning and integrating emergent learning into our monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL), we are proving that there are alternate ways of imagining and implementing processes, which allow for participation and agency among team members to explore and experiment.

## Breaking silos

With responsibility for progressing on organisational goals being shared by many team members, the onus of success or failure is also collectively owned – we have found that this breaks down ‘silos’ that exist in organisation, and encourages collaboration rather than competition. At a team reflection, one team member remarked how over 2021, “each team member took on the role of grantmaker, resource mobiliser and communicators”, demonstrating alternative ways of facing and weathering crises.

## Valuing Pause to thrive

In learning ways to work virtually and not merely adapting how we worked in non-restricted times required major unlearning for both the Board, leadership, and team members, and in implementing those learnings, we tried unlearning harmful ways of valorising productivity and overwork that has been ingrained in us over time. Amid unprecedented crises, the Co-Leads took the brave decision of taking a Pause – two weeks, one in May and in December, when to practice collective care and protect the team from overwork, and ensuing burnout, we ceased all activities, including grantmaking and all other allied functions. We also facilitated spaces for team members to ease into a Pause week, without guilt or pressure of finishing pending work, and easing back in to work to affirm collective responsibility and stock-taking of additional work.

43

One of our biggest team achievements was honouring and affirming the roles most team members performed beyond the main tasks, and practising collective care by letting each other know they are seen and heard.

## Recognising and affirming invisible labour

44

We also affirmed to Listen and Speak to each other, to examine assumptions, and intentions that cause friction or misinterpretations, and to support each other through expansions and contractions within the team as well as in our ecosystem during crises, or times of calm. Through our conversations, we recognised the invisible labour of many team members that often went unaffirmed or noticed.

## Learning life lessons from activists

A grantee from the Pacific was forced by the pandemic and lockdown to explore new markets to continue making their livelihood activities viable. They used a grant from us to make them resilient to pandemic-induced uncertainties, and explored online/virtual marketing, turning a setback into a major opportunity to thrive and flourish. Each communicate from them shows new energy, vitality and a will to experiment.

# 7 Intentionally acknowledging our position as a funder to shift power and redistribute privilege

As a women's fund working across two disadvantaged regions – Asia and Pacific, where colonial practises and mindsets still hold sway, we are intentionally focusing on shifting power to those we work with and for; and redistributing privilege in terms of the spaces we occupy and the opportunities and resources we receive.

We recognise that disrupting the funder-grantee equation is important, and therefore all our convenings and processes are intentionally designed to be not extractive or exploitative, and to build capacities and ability to speak truth to 'money power'. We are also mindful about how and who we raise resources from and what we offer in the name of transparency and accountability to our donors. Confidentiality and security of the human rights defenders and communities we work with are always our prime considerations, and therefore, all our processes, including financial and donor-related reporting are structured to accommodate this.

45

# OUR SYMBIOTIC SISTERHOOD

46 Through 2021, we reaffirmed that our biggest supporters and strongest cheer leaders are the Urgent Action Fund sisterhood. Through the pandemic, and the political crises that we weathered, our sister funds, UAF Africa, UAF WHR and UAF LAC stood steadfastly with us in rapidly mobilising resources from big donors or funders in their region, or connected to them, amplifying our statements or messages, and advocating with governments and agencies in their regions to support evacuations and interventions. We were able to do this due to the strong and deep networks of trust and proven track record of moving money rapidly and in its entirety to defenders in need.

47 Over the years, our collective work has expanded significantly – we rely on each other’s strengths and experience to dream and implement ambitious new projects, that resonate with human rights activists and defenders globally. It is the recognition of the need to build long-term resilience that can help human rights activists and defenders brave life-altering situations, such as the pandemic, that resulted in our dream of building a regional infrastructure for collective care and wellbeing – and together we have raised resources for this audacious dream too.

# SCALES, STALKS, LEAVES

## Our Books of Account

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**We received  
a total income of  
US\$3,928,403**

of which a major portion was spent on supporting women and non-binary human rights defenders and activists in crisis, especially through Covid-19 pandemic induced economic difficulties, and the political crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar.

**US\$1,092,418** was specifically raised for responding to the Afghanistan crisis.

We spent over 83% of our total budget on core programme work, that includes emergency grants and resilience grants; facilitating convenings, and

learning and sharing spaces for activists and defenders, and collaborating and co-ideating with them on how to create and sustain safe spaces for them to continue their activism amid lockdowns, political turmoil and other life-threatening crises. This spend also reflects the expenditure incurred to bring in short-term consultants and freelancers to support our goal of making all our convenings and spaces accessible and inclusive for activists and defenders from all regions and/or with accessibility needs. We also recruited more team members, to expand and speed up our grantmaking. The team and short-term contractors, partnered with women and non-binary human rights defenders to co-create and co-design online consultations and learning and sharing spaces with the support of translators and facilitators.

We increased our grant-making four-fold, giving out 428 grants totalling US\$1,986,574.

In response to the Afghanistan crisis, we approved 211 grants totalling US\$1,003,185 and for Myanmar 47 grants totalling US\$212,199.

We continued to expand our Enabling Defenders Programme and our Webs of Safety & Care framework with consultations and grants in Nepal, and the Philippines.

These Grant Making & Resilience Programmes cost US\$3,253,921 which totals to 83% of our total budget.

We continued our experiments as part of our Activating Philanthropy programme, and exploring alternative ways of raising and redistributing resources, alongside anchoring the process of setting up a Pacific Feminist Fund with peer funders and the support of donors. Our alternative approach to monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) system, based on Emergent Learning processes, continue to keep us on track with our strategic goals and vision identified for the new three year Strategic plan (2021-23) that commenced in 2021. These key programmes cost US\$440,852 which corresponds to 11% of our total budget.

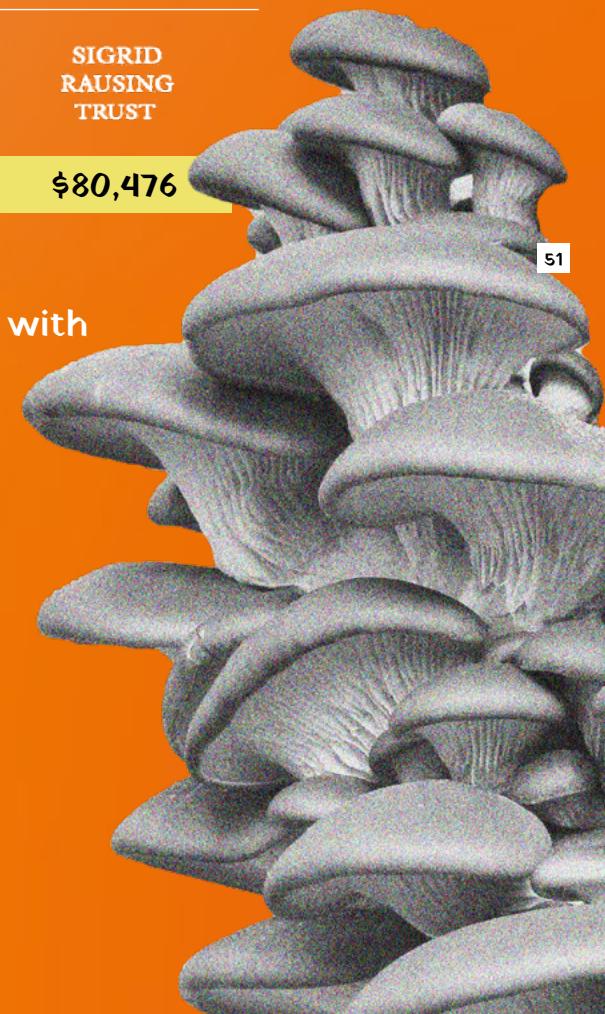
**Our Administration costs** including overheads, such as insurance, rent, board coherence costs, as well as accounting and legal fees associated with governance and compliance in Australia, and the Philippines, totalled US\$261,309 which is a little over 6% of our overall budget.

Funds that directly supported us included:

 <p>AMERICAN JEWISH WORLD SERVICE</p> <p><b>\$40,000</b></p>	 <p>CHANNEL FOUNDATION supporting women's rights around the globe</p> <p><b>\$80,000</b></p>	 <p>Equality fund</p> <p><b>\$100,442</b></p>	 <p>FOUNDATION FOR A JUST SOCIETY</p> <p><b>\$455,000</b></p>
 <p>GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN</p> <p><b>\$170,000</b></p>	 <p>OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS</p> <p><b>\$225,000</b></p>	 <p>Prospera INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN'S FUNDS</p> <p><b>\$24,000</b></p>	 <p>SIGRID RAUSING TRUST</p> <p><b>\$80,476</b></p>

Contributions that we collectively mobilised with our Urgent Action Sister Funds:

 <p>count me IN!</p> <p><b>\$25,000</b></p>	 <p>FORD FOUNDATION</p> <p><b>\$366,160</b></p>	 <p>OAK FOUNDATION</p> <p><b>\$113,750</b></p>
 <p>Sida</p> <p><b>\$594,624</b></p>	 <p>Wellspring Philanthropic Fund Upholding human dignity   Unlocking human potential</p> <p><b>\$595,250</b></p>	 <p>Vanguard Charitable</p> <p><b>\$95,000</b></p>



# UAF A&P'S LIVING LABYRINTHS

## UAF A&P Team

Co-Lead, Partnerships and  
Resource Mobilisation  
**Virisila Buadromo**

Co-Lead, Programmes and Innovation  
**Vinita Sahasranaman**

Executive Support Facilitator  
**Sunayana Premchander**

Strategic Finance Facilitator  
**Fareen Jalal**

Finance and Administration Facilitator  
**Elvira Colobong**

Finance Support Facilitator  
**Stacey Creighton**

Resource Mobilisation Facilitator  
**Noelene Powell**

Urgent Action Funds Coordinator  
**Ava Danlog**

Communications & Learning Facilitator  
**Deepthy Menon**

Digital Communications Facilitator  
**Twisha Mehta**

Enabling Defenders Facilitator  
**Jebli Shrestha**

Rapid Response Grants Co-Facilitator  
**Anna Arifin**

Rapid Response Grants Co-Facilitator  
**Tara**

Crisis Support Facilitator  
**Najiba Sanjar**

Strategic Partnerships Facilitator  
**Jyotsna Maskay**

IT Support Facilitator  
**Esther**

## Regional Board

Board Chair  
**Kamala Chandrakirana**

**Ambika Satkunanathan**

**Devi Leiper O'Malley**

**Roshmi Goswami**

**Ofa Guttenteil**

**Ma. Angela Villalba**

**Praveen Sharma**

## Australian Board

Board Chair  
**Praveen Sharma**

**Kamala Chandrakirana**



**URGENT ACTION**  
**FUND** FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS  
ASIA & PACIFIC

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