

STEERING TOWARDS NEW FEMINIST HORIZONS

STRATEGIC PLAN
2021-2023



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

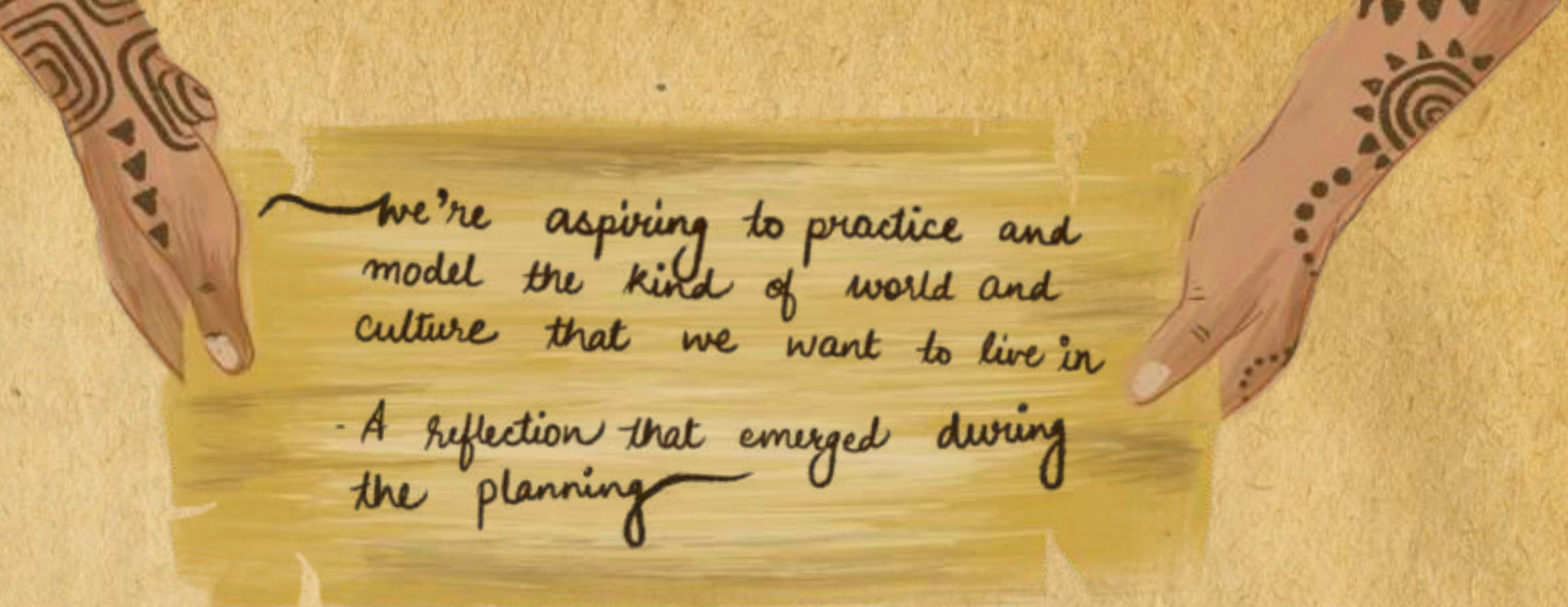
A Note of Gratitude:

UAF A&P would like to place on record its gratitude to the Board and the team for undertaking this strategic planning virtually. Special thanks to the Board Chair, Kamala Chandrakirana and Devi Leiper O'Malley – members of the regional board for being part of the reference group that steered the process. We would also like to thank Pramada Menon and Michal Friedman for stepping in to support the facilitation of the strategic planning and the learning questions for the teams, and Deepthy Menon, who developed the learning framework based on emergent learning to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this plan. A big shout of appreciation also to the illustrators and documenters of the various processes we undertook virtually to clarify our thinking and evolve this plan. And finally, thank you Shawna Wakefield for skilfully bringing it all together into a succinct, cohesive report.

Virisila Buadromo

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We're aspiring to practice and model the kind of world and culture that we want to live in

- A reflection that emerged during the planning

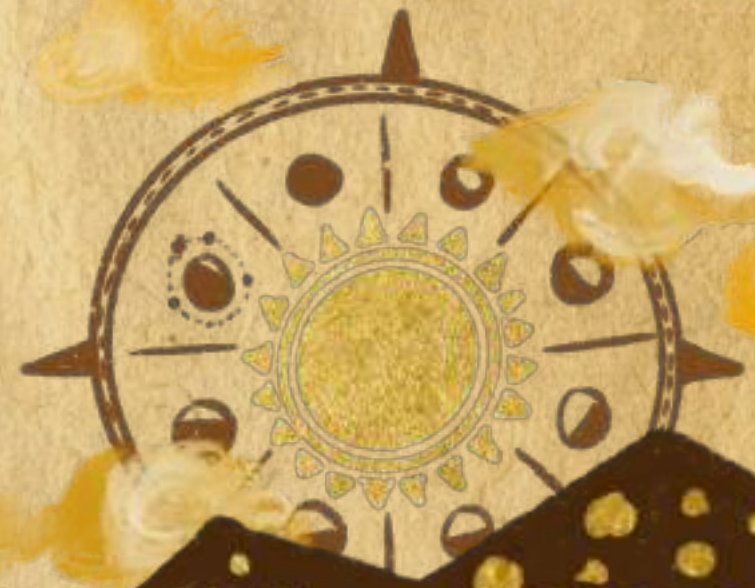


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When Planning Amid Uncertain Times

When we embarked on planning for 2021 and beyond, it was in a world that did not know what lay ahead - a global COVID-19 pandemic. The plan to convene, commune and ideate together was a powerful one, especially since the Boards and team of UAF A&P represent a varied cross-section of feminists and practitioners from different parts of Asia and the Pacific. We hoped to work together to build a vision and roadmap as diverse and inclusive as our lived experiences to lead us into our second phase of existence - consolidation and expansion of our work.

And then the Pandemic unleashed itself in its full form - we moved from seeking the most comprehensive plan, to quickly adapting our needs and requirements to what would become a values guide - a vision and map that would set out our broader goals and direction, offering the flexibility and room to change course, as warranted by socio-political or pandemic changes in our regions.

We began by listening to the community of defenders and their allies, understanding how they framed what made them resilient, exchanging notes on what it would take to ensure their movements not just survived, but thrived. A comprehensive exercise of undertaking a reflective review proved to be a good precursor to our strategic planning exercise. Conversations and joint reflections by women and non-binary activists who made up our feminist ecosystem helped us piece together the journey we had covered since our inception over three years ago. **We understood our place under the sun, the relevance and the need for a fund like us in the regions we worked in, and how we could value add to movement-building and its sustainability.**

When our lead facilitators who had worked with us over the last three years supporting Emergent Learning and Strategy found themselves in inconvenient time zones, we improvised and decided to ***Trust the Process***. We changed our framing of what we expected from the outcomes - **we decided to nail down what our non-negotiables were, and then build a scaffolding of our values around it. We realised that in a time when the resistance and resilience of feminist movements in our regions were fluctuating, as a feminist fund, we needed to be as clear in our purpose, and as flexible and malleable as the activists and defenders we were keen to support.**

We began by bringing in experienced voices from the region to facilitate our virtual meetings. The seamless ways in which they stepped in, and generously shared their learnings and ideas enriched the process far more than we could have imagined. Although, our languages differed, there was synchrony. We were clearly heading in the same direction, albeit by calling it different things. The challenge was to anchor a mixed-method approach - make the core concepts and values talk to each other, for these were arrived at using a Theory of Change approach, Emergent Strategy constructs and an Emergent Learning Framework.

Together, we worked virtually - managing time zones and other challenges in our uniquely intrepid UAF A&P way. Becoming unfazed in the wake of all curveballs coming our way, and recognising our ability to negotiate our path rooted in current realities have been our biggest strengths in negotiating the times of the Pandemic.

The Strategic Plan that we are developing truly reflects the times that we are in, and the adaptations that we felt were necessary to navigate the obstacles that came our way. If the plan were to metamorphose into a person, the garb of Theory of Change drapes effortlessly over the strategy and outcomes body that was sculpted by Emergent Strategies practitioners, which will survive and hopefully thrive in a being whose lifeblood is Emergent Learning practices.

Virisila Buadromo
UAF A&P Co-Lead

Reflecting On The Fundamentals

Firstly, congratulations on having a clear and comprehensive draft to build on! This strategic framework for 2021-2023 aims to help guide our resourcing, community building and influencing work in a way that is flexible and adaptable to emerging conditions for the months and years to come. In my opening notes, I have focused on four key ways in which UAF A&P stands distinctly separate from other women's funds working across Asia and the Pacific.

When UAF A&P was still embryonic and living in our imaginings, we were clear that, in order to secure our autonomy and sustainability, we needed to address the gaping hole across these regions in terms of social justice and rights-based philanthropy, let alone a feminist one. We envisioned breaking new paths and engaging with enlightened champions from within the region. This is why we chose the word 'activating' rather than simply 'influencing' philanthropy, as, to us, the word implied generating something new – new spaces, new champions – which is much more than trying to influence and change existing structures and status quo.

Having ensured a seamless transition in providing Rapid Response Grants to defenders in Asia and the Pacific from our USA-based sister fund, we now are in a position to articulate the distinctiveness of our rapid response grantmaking in our specific contexts. In my view, there is a narrative waiting to be made about what 'urgent action' looks like on the ground in the diverse defender communities of Asia and the Pacific and how UAF A&P sees its role in this landscape.

We envision our grants for webs of safety and care as basically providing spaces for learning, exploration and alliance building to ensure longer-term resilience that

could lead to thriving among defender communities. So far, UAF A&P's experience with these grants has demonstrated that they challenge defenders to develop a new mindset that looks at and addresses risk and insecurity in a more holistic and long-term manner.

One of the exciting ideas we started with was to explore the solidarity economy as a possible pathway towards sustainable resourcing for defenders. **This is basically an intention to move beyond the field of philanthropy and the regime of development assistance by envisioning and developing parallel spaces where we can be relieved from the power dynamics that underlie these two dominant worlds.** This is a new frontier area that requires study, contextualisation and experimentation. If successful, this could be a game changer with transformative impact.

As an organisation that sees itself serving the movement from within, UAF A&P will conduct its explorations and innovations in collaborative spaces with defenders on the ground. UAF A&P would do well also to develop and apply its method, mechanism and tools for accountability to the communities that it belongs to and actively builds.

As we embark on carrying out our new three-year plan, we look forward to leadership from a new team at the helm of UAF A&P as Mary Jane Real leaves us for new challenges beyond and Virisila Buadromo steps forward in sisterhood with a new Co-Lead. We remain hopeful and excited as we embrace change and challenge.

Kamala Chandrakirana
UAF A&P Regional Board Chair





Looking Back, Looking Forward

This is a pivotal moment in the Asia & Pacific region and in the world. We are in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic and the work of activists and defenders agitating for human rights is both more vital and more challenged. We are called more than ever to mobilise and navigate towards the visions of caring, peaceful, resourced societies that we know will sustainably protect and nourish our people and our planet.

The rise in violations against human rights defenders, of authoritarian governance and far right populism has been particularly dangerous and polarising for our communities, underscoring limitations on our physical movement and connection. And yet the tools of oppression keep expanding - fake news, new and digital forms of psychological and physical harm and draconian anti-terrorism bills that target activists and social movement leaders. Mass evictions of migrant workers, criminalisation of defenders, sexual and gender-based violence, militarisation and enforcement of lockdowns have exacerbated economic inequality and poverty. Even movements where we seek solidarity can be unwelcoming to the particular needs and interests of women and non-binary human rights defenders and activists.

Amidst these challenges, women and non-binary activists keep mobilising. Our funding and movement community must recognise, support and celebrate how they are building solidarity and leading transformation, adapting in the face of uncertainty, rooting into indigenous practices of sharing and caring, feminist values and leadership. We are learning the value of pausing and reflecting in feminist community, where our hearts can soften together and we can see each other in our full humanity.

In the years to come, UAF A&P will continue to leverage its distinctive place in the social movement ecosystem as a feminist funder that supports activists' resilience, expanding the meaning of resources beyond the financial and material to include knowledge, networks and volunteerism.

In addition to funding, these non-financial resources deeply nourish activists' and their movements' and their commitment to transformation, enabling them to not only survive different shocks, but to thrive, rooted in a bold and generative resilience.

This UAF Asia and Pacific strategic framework for 2021-2023 helps to guide our resourcing, community building and influencing work in a way that will be flexible and adaptable enough to meet emerging conditions for the months and years to come.



Our Purpose

UAF A&P is a feminist fund that provides urgent grants (through its legacy as a rapid response grantmaker) and also supports longer-term resilience building activities of activists, defenders and their movements. We do not implement programmes or projects directly, rather we provide and leverage financial and non-financial resources for activists, movements and their communities. UAF A&P is part of a movement ecosystem that includes activists and human rights defenders, other funders, organisations, movements, communities and institutions working for systemic change and transformation.

Our founding premise was that UAF A&P could strengthen activists' capacities not only to respond in moments of crisis, but to integrate care and support into the fabric of their activism. While activists' autonomy and choice are fundamental, we recognise they cannot do it alone. It takes multiple kinds of resources to feel safe, secure and connected, to experience wellbeing and joy. It takes courage and vulnerability to move towards love and care, and to continue to activate for change, amidst uncertainty, repression and violence. We view resilience as resulting in activists' physical, material, emotional, spiritual care and wellbeing.

These capacities for resilience are strengthened at not only individual, but collective levels. They are strengthened through solidarity, reciprocity and accountability with communities, organisations and institutions across the diverse ecosystem they inhabit. The state also has a role to play, adopting the sensitivity and responsibility to take a wider lens on what constitutes safety and security.

UAF A&P is as invested in rapid response that meets urgent needs, as we are in supporting personal, organisational and institutional transformation. Relationships have always been at the heart of our approach. By strengthening relationships and innovative collaborations inside of UAF A&P, with diverse activists and across the ecosystem, we contribute to transformation of the conditions needed for activists to experience more care, solidarity and wellbeing.

UAF A&P shares with its sister funds an emphasis on rapid response grantmaking, and we place equal value on other core elements - co-creation of spaces for reflection and rejuvenation, sharing knowledge, activating philanthropy, supporting stronger webs of safety and care among activists, and strengthening the institutional systems and culture we need to resource this work.



Our Evolution

During 2019-2020, UAF A&P undertook a series of consultations and collective reflections, including organisation-wide reflections on organisational culture and progress on our mission, on our communications, with grantees and advisors, environmental justice and disability organisations. From the creative sparks and the feminist herstories that led to the birth of UAF A&P until now, trust, relationships, connection and friendship have been at the heart of the organisation's collective story. As we adapt and grow, we are committed to continuing to cultivate the connections needed to nurture and sustain the fund and our collaborations across the ecosystem.

The reflective review reframed ongoing challenges as dynamic tensions; intentions that have been in conflict with each other. Identifying these tensions allows us to move beyond either/or thinking, guided by purpose, values and strategic questions that will help us navigate the next three years with more alignment, greater solidarity and ease. These included:

Urgent response grants vs long-term resilience support:


Providing rapid response grants to meet urgent needs in 72 hours has always been at the core of UAF's approach. As a new fund it has sometimes been a challenge to put in place systems that deliver UAF Sister Funds' signature rapid response grants while innovating to offer longer term and alternative support. But in our first three years we successfully transitioned from providing rapid response grants via our UAF US based sister fund to providing these grants within the Asia and Pacific context.

We also know defenders – especially ones who are marginalised from mainstream funding mechanisms – need more than their basic needs for survival met. They need support beyond the moment of crisis, so their activism and wellbeing can be sustained. Emergent learning and experimentation helped us to develop a system that meets the context of the diverse economies in Asia and the Pacific. We are redefining what urgent action looks like within our context, providing rapid response grants and expanding our offerings to include grants for webs of safety and care. These vital grants enabled activists to exchange, explore and imagine together the systems of care that would best support them emotionally, socially, economically and politically. They helped strengthen relationships at local, regional and even global levels through physical and virtual space, contributing to a growing set of interconnected ecosystems.

The webs of safety and care grants and supports, combined with rapid response grants all contribute to resilience over time and open up new mindsets among activists, allies and decision makers to look at risk and insecurity in a more holistic and long-term manner.

In the coming years we will strengthen our unique approach, supporting both urgent needs and resource the resilience of activists beyond crisis. **Our monetary and non-monetary support to longer term resilience will help activists and defenders to heal, thrive and keep being leaders in creating conditions for others safety, security and wellbeing. In turn, this hybrid approach will also help UAF staff and our advisor's abilities to adapt, collaborate and improve our ability to respond and engage with potential grantees with empathy and**





care. We believe this is central to the thriving of defenders and their communities over time.

Staying small and nimble vs expanding:

As activists have gotten to know UAF A&P and threats to their lives grow, the demand for our support has increased. We have experienced a tension between the need to increase our organisational capacity to meet this demand and to grow at a pace that allows us to stay purpose- and values-aligned. In the coming years we increase and diversify staff and advisors, who are so critical to developing connections and support to grantees. This will **enable us to increase and make more resources available in hostile countries and communities that are not represented in mainstream feminist activist spaces. Given the Covid 19 context, our grantmaking will account for the reality that much organising and support to movement leaders needs to happen virtually, at least for the next year to 18 months. We will invest helping to close the digital divide for the most marginalised activists.**

Digital security vs connectivity:

The commitment to providing digital security to activists has sometimes led to challenges in easeful communications and access. We are increasing use of digitally secure technology and methods across our work, including outreach and mobilising resources to activists and communities that are most at risk and marginalised from mainstream movements. We are adapting our approach to incorporate dialogue between UAF A&P and actors across the ecosystem to assess developments and risks to activist and defenders' safety, security and wellbeing. This also contributes

to supporting staff resilience and ability to respond to demand with purpose and empathy.

We are deepening our collaborations:

The Covid pandemic rapidly increased demand for our grants and at times overwhelmed our capacity. A key learning was that we increase our capacity to respond when we lean into our core resources – relationships, empathy and care – and increase cross-team work and collaborations. **We will continue to invest in building our culture of care, co-responsibility and feminist leadership by institutionalising cross-team collaborations, within UAF A&P, with the UAF sister funds and in the broader ecosystem.** This will help us to work more effectively towards our overall goals rather than to individual programs, understanding the wholeness of our approach to resourcing resilience and transformation.

The framing question for the creation of this strategy was:

How can UAF A&P use insights from our experience and learning from the first 3 years to inform our strategic roadmap for the next 3 years? This has been iterative process, rooted in learning from the many consultations with activists and allies from across the ecosystem. We held a strategy meeting with staff and the board, began to articulate our team and organisational emergent learning questions and brought these together to refine the strategic goals, outcomes and strategies for UAF A&P. **The strategy is intended not as a rigid map, but helps to clarify our vision, values and strategic intent, so that we can be responsive and adaptive to changing**



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

Be amplifiers and facilitators for feminist movements to be seen and heard

Learning and unlearning as a way to collaboratively thrive and flourish

Relationship building and nurturing trust

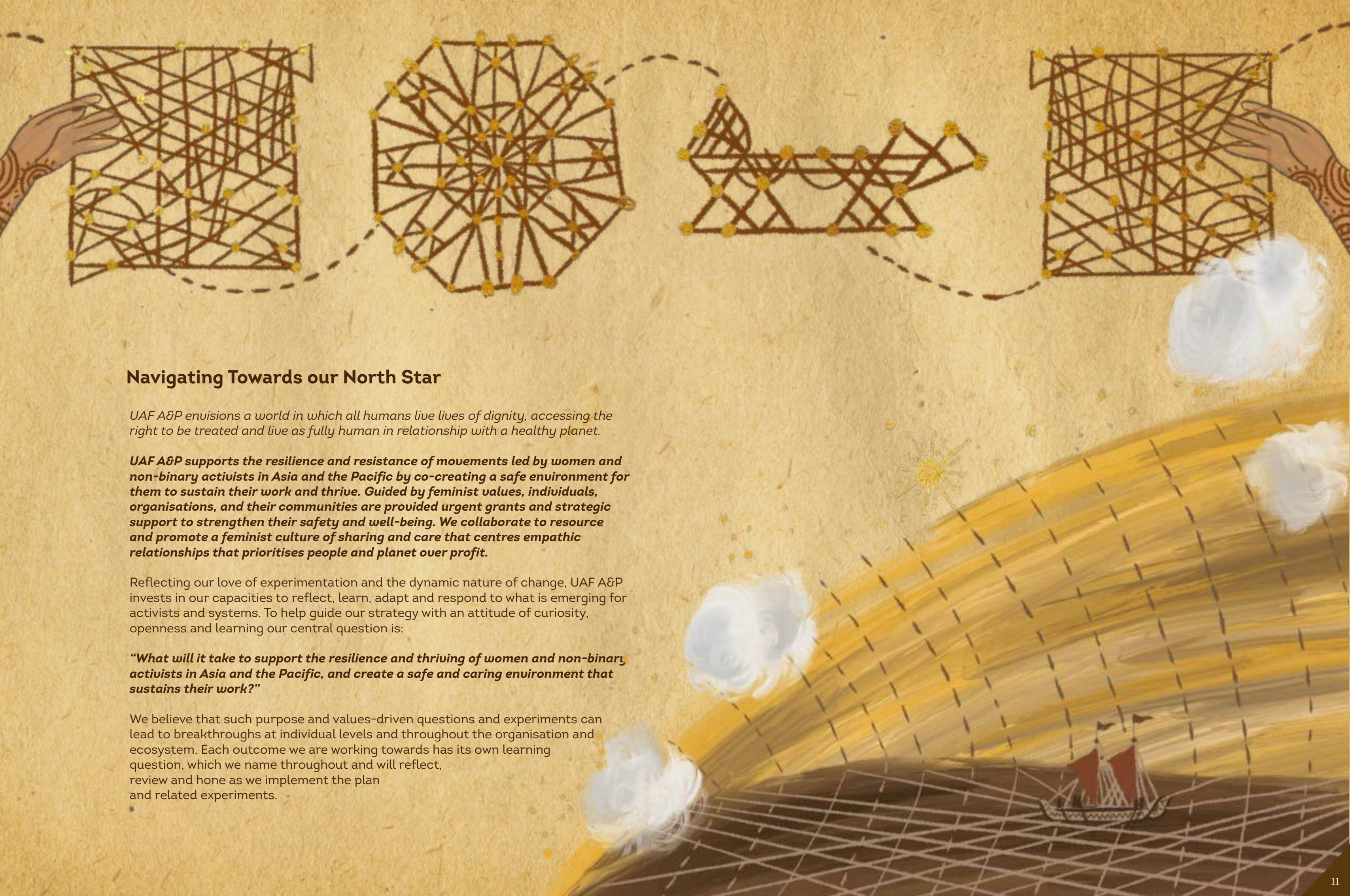
Flexibility to understand contexts of activists and defenders, and the support they require

Learning from setbacks to improve and improvise

Forefronting lived experiences of defenders and activists

Our Guiding Values

As part of UAF A&P's evolution, we have developed a set of guiding values, through experience and experimentation, reflection and dialogue from across the ecosystem - staff, advisors, board members, grantees, UAF sister funds and other partners. **Our purpose and values will guide us to more flexibly respond to community needs, the ever-changing socio-political context and to emerging forms of activism and movements.** These values will help us make strategic decisions that affect our grantmaking and activation of funders and collaborations across our work.



Navigating Towards our North Star

UAF A&P envisions a world in which all humans live lives of dignity, accessing the right to be treated and live as fully human in relationship with a healthy planet.

UAF A&P supports the resilience and resistance of movements led by women and non-binary activists in Asia and the Pacific by co-creating a safe environment for them to sustain their work and thrive. Guided by feminist values, individuals, organisations, and their communities are provided urgent grants and strategic support to strengthen their safety and well-being. We collaborate to resource and promote a feminist culture of sharing and care that centres empathic relationships that prioritises people and planet over profit.

Reflecting our love of experimentation and the dynamic nature of change, UAF A&P invests in our capacities to reflect, learn, adapt and respond to what is emerging for activists and systems. To help guide our strategy with an attitude of curiosity, openness and learning our central question is:

“What will it take to support the resilience and thriving of women and non-binary activists in Asia and the Pacific, and create a safe and caring environment that sustains their work?”

We believe that such purpose and values-driven questions and experiments can lead to breakthroughs at individual levels and throughout the organisation and ecosystem. Each outcome we are working towards has its own learning question, which we name throughout and will reflect, review and hone as we implement the plan and related experiments.

Visualising Change

In the face of ongoing threats and risks, UAF A&P is co-creating conditions internally, with activists and communities to flexibly respond to rapid and dynamic change in our environments and to fundamentally transform them. We will draw on a set of intersecting and interdependent strategies or navigation tools that help us to listen and collaborate more deeply with activists and allies in our ecosystem, moving together towards our vision. Our decisions and actions will be infused by shared values, guided by strategic questions, clarifying what we are learning from our mistakes and successes and adapting together as we go.

During our first three years, UAF A&P invested deeply in our own relationships and internal systems, evolving and deepening our practice of feminist values and practice. We looked inside ourselves and our organisation to ensure our staff, culture and systems were holistic enough to support the complex kind of change women and non-binary human rights defenders and activists demand and deserve.


In this next strategic period, we continue to strengthen internal culture and systems as well as utilise our strength to increase our presence, grantmaking and influence in the region. We have chosen three overarching and inter-connected outcomes that help us to expand our work into the ecosystem. Our programmes work towards and are accountable for these outcomes. Our internal outcome will help us inside our organisational structures, systems, culture and collaborations we need to establish, cultivate and deepen to support programmes in the coming months and years. Our work - looking out and looking in - is interdependent, as we must be resilient internally to listen to and support the resilience of activists and defenders with care and empathy.

We will do this by focusing on:

- **Deepening and sustaining resilience of women and non-binary human rights defenders, activists and their movements** through times of crisis, risk and beyond.
- **Growing visibility and community support for women and non-binary human rights defenders and activists** by promoting more awareness, a sense of community and belonging, and ways of self- and collective care in times of risk and beyond.
- **Activating equitable philanthropy** by engaging with funders, social movements and activists to increase share of resources to women and non-binary activists and human rights defenders
- **Nurturing a feminist organisational culture** that is rooted in the realities of communities of activists and defenders we work with, to promote resilience of our team and of the ecosystem we work within and with.

By giving agency to activists, based on their needs, we are creating responses and disrupting power dynamics of the funders





The Guiding Stars

We hope to continue reflecting on our path forward by checking our collective vision against these principles, which we used to support the developing of this strategic plan:

- We paid attention to learning from the past, current realities and future visions for the sake of moving towards collective vision.
- We were flexible (within reason) in accommodating individuals' ideas, schedules, contextual changes, and time-zone differences.
- We prioritised the most vital elements needed to clarify the direction of travel
- We knew that change is constant, and so the process and strategy itself was be designed to reflect fluidity over rigidity and adopted purposeful changes along the way.
- We identified the discussions and decisions most needed to generate a collectively held strategy.
- We included months of consultation and reflective review processes as the basis for creating space for the strategic choices we needed to make now and for the future.
- We understood there are no failures, only lessons that yield insights that clarified the paradoxes and decisions that needed to be taken.
- We considered trust between various people in the UAF ecosystem as a central resource in setting it strategic direction.



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