

Organisational Review

2018-2023



FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
ASIA & PACIFIC



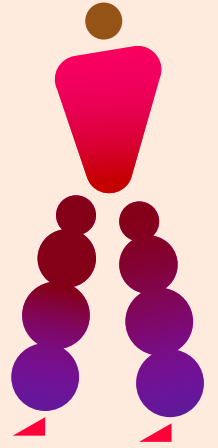
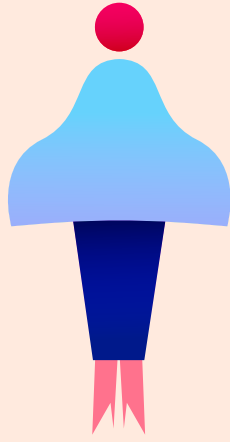
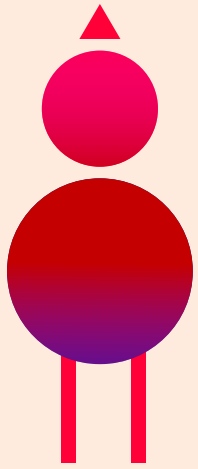
Urgent Action Fund, Asia & Pacific was created in a challenging political context to support the safety and well-being of women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders, and respond to crises with care.

The Asia and Pacific regions have witnessed continuous democratic backsliding coupled with rising militarism. State actors have weaponised laws and tightened surveillance against women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and activists in countries like Myanmar, China, Afghanistan, and India. Non-state actors have weaponised regressive culture and religion, prioritising profits over people, and extracting resources on indigenous peoples' lands. The global recession has exacerbated economic inequality and put many defenders' livelihoods at risk, while well-funded anti-gender movements have eroded feminists' hard-won fights. At the same time, people in the regions, especially the Pacific, have borne the brunt of the ongoing climate crisis and the consequent humanitarian crises. In addition, tight financial restrictions have made it difficult to move money across borders into the hands of defenders and activists. It is in this context that Urgent Action Fund, Asia & Pacific (UAF A&P) was created in 2017.

As we conclude our first five-year strategic plan (2018-23), we re-evaluated what it means to support and accompany women, trans, and non-binary defenders taking bold risks in moments of need.

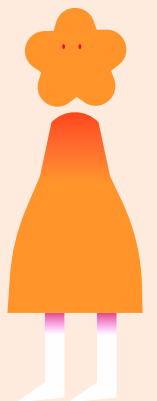
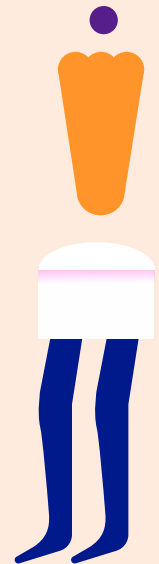
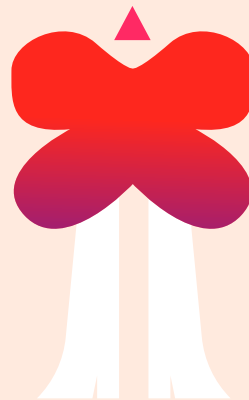
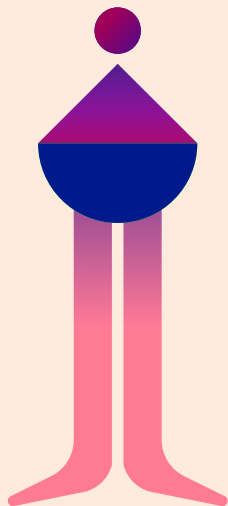
We conducted an organisational review to assess our impact in the last five years. It was designed as a participatory process that included representatives from all parts of our funding ecosystem – from human rights defenders and their organisations and communities, to UAF A&P's advisors, donors and funders, staff, and Board members.

Since our inception,
we have disbursed \$5.5 million to

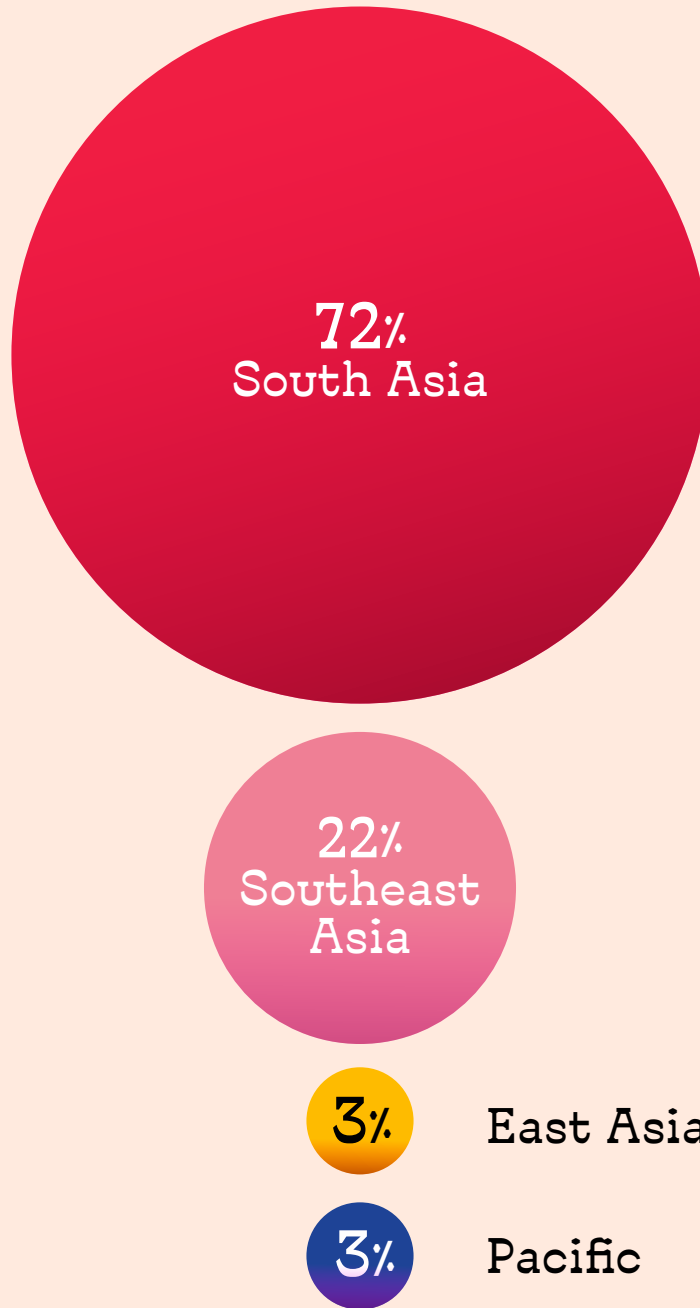


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women, trans, and non-binary
human rights defenders and
organisations in 31 countries
across Asia and the Pacific



Our grants went to



72% of our grants went to South Asia (mostly to Afghanistan), 22% to Southeast Asia (mostly to Myanmar and the Philippines), 3% to East Asia (mostly China and Mongolia) and 3% to the Pacific (mostly to Fiji and Papua New Guinea). More than 95% of our grants went to defenders in countries ranked as repressed, obstructed, or closed by CIVICUS.

In 2022,
almost 75% of our grants went
to organisations working on:

75%

Women's
human rights
activists issues

56%

Youth
rights

54%

Civil and
political rights

40%

Violence against
women

40%

Social and
economic rights

35%

Ethnic
minorities

34%

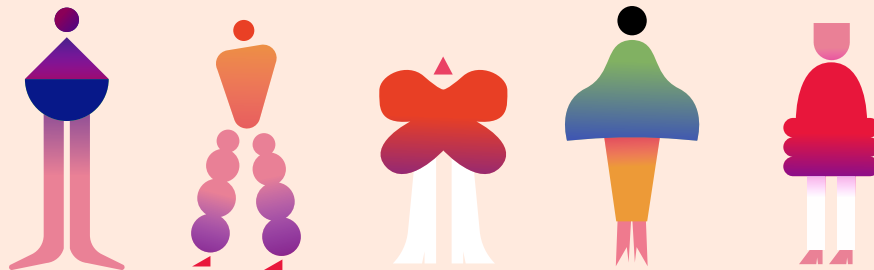
Conflict and
peace building

30%

LBTQI+/
SOGIESC

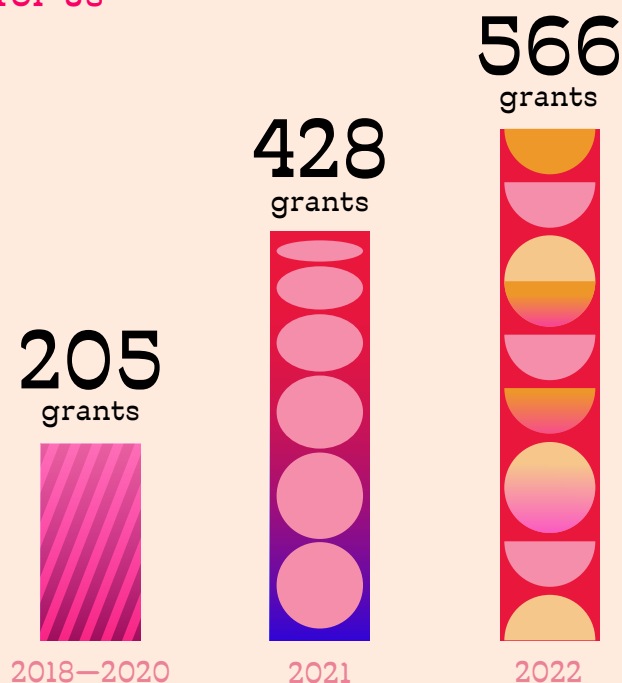
25%

Rural issues



Our database does not track how many organisations of persons with disability or people with disabilities have applied or been successful. However, 14% of our Security and Well-being grants were given to organisations that flagged their work with people with disabilities; and 13% of our Resourcing Resilience grantees and 25% of our Webs of Safety and Care grantees worked with people with disabilities.

The crises in Myanmar and Afghanistan and the COVID-19 pandemic were major inflection points for us



The crises in Myanmar and Afghanistan, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic were major inflection points for us. Between 2018-2020, we disbursed a total of 205 grants. However, in 2021 alone we disbursed 428 grants, more than double the number of grants given out in the previous three years combined. In 2022, this increased by another 32% to a total of 566 grants.

When the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, we were one of the first funds to successfully move \$2.8M worth of grants directly into the hands of activists, not just in Kabul, but also other provinces of Afghanistan. These grants supported more than 2,000 Afghan women, trans, and non-binary defenders, their families and communities, ensuring their safety, security, and survival during this period.

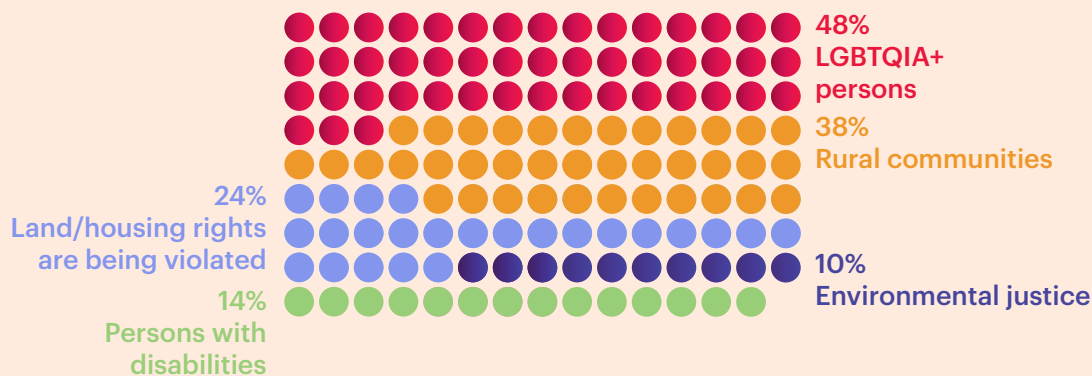
Our work in Afghanistan was informed by our learnings from our response in Myanmar and grounded in **feminist learning practices**. During this time, our grant processing time increased significantly, as we received an overwhelming number of applications that tested the limits of our team's capacity, and we needed to constantly revise our grantmaking approaches based on rapidly-evolving circumstances. Learnings from this process helped us better-respond to the subsequent crises in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

With an evolving understanding of resilience, we became more intentional about better representation, accessibility, participation, and care.

In addition to balancing regional and thematic representation in our grantmaking, we tried to make our grant application processes more accessible, and strengthened our participatory grantmaking methods with the support of our advisors network. For better representation, we **dedicated more resources to the Pacific** region by doing dedicated outreach and **disability justice** work. To improve accessibility, we experimented with language justice approaches.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our **Wantok grants** resourced defenders' vital survival needs through a simplified application process and support to nominees. Our **Webs of Safety and Care (WSC) grants** (since 2020) continued to resource resilience of activists by providing high-level accompaniment to diverse communities to strengthening their collective care. Both grant categories grew from two grants in the first round to 12 Wantok grants and 20 WSC grants respectively in the second round, thanks to a simplified application process, high-level accompaniment, and advisory support.

The diversity of WSC grants improved as well, with grants offered to organisations working with:



In addition to grants, we created dedicated spaces for collective care, reflection, and healing, including two virtual **Oasis of Reflection** convenings in 2022 (the second one was specifically for persons with disabilities) and one in-person convening in 2023. These convenings have prompted initiatives around **trauma-informed approaches**, such as including mental health professionals in such spaces.

Centering activists' voices enabled healing, transformation, and shifting narratives.

Beyond grantmaking, our work centred the lived experiences of defenders and activists by ensuring visibility, recognition, respect, and references to their voices. We curated a Feminist Circle of Sharing to elevate activists' work through philanthropic advocacy. We also supported storytelling by 'artists' from communities in Asia and the Pacific regions through our Realms of Kintsugi program and a human library session at Oasis of Reflection convening. Additionally, our digital content, including our blogs, social media posts, and research have been impactful in reaching wider audiences and in strengthening our grantmaking endeavors by better communicating with activists and inspiring more diverse applications.

We advocated for equitable power-sharing between funders, activists, and movements.

We practiced and advocated for a more equitable sharing of power and resources between funders, activists, and movements in the regions. Much of our strength in redefining power, trust, and accountability stemmed from our Urgent Action Sister Funds model. We re-imagined new spaces for conversations, such as the Prospera Asia Pacific Convergence and the collaborative fundraising efforts for the Afghanistan crisis. We also brokered new relationships between funders and movements, supporting the launch of the Pacific Feminist Fund and using our voice in the conversation around risk and accountability with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as part of the Amplify-Invest-Reach Consortium. Donors have, therefore, come to view us as an innovative thought partner sharing expertise in such relationships within philanthropy. We hope to further activate and strengthen philanthropy within our regions for the regions, building on existing experiments.



We built a strong culture of collaboration, trust, and care by evolving our co-leadership model.

We have nurtured collaborative flows among our team members over the last five years, learning from our breaking points and continuously growing. One of the manifestations of this is the evolution of our co-leadership model. By investing time and accompaniment, and a keen interest in meeting each other as humans, the ability to be frank and appreciate each other's humour, our **co-leadership** has moved beyond division of tasks. It is a symbiotic, interdependent relationship that has trickled down from the Board and our Co-leads to other parts of our team.

The findings of our organisational review has informed our **next five-year strategic plan (2024-29)**, which is a flexible framework built on our existing and newly-framed feminist principles of funding. It imagines the world we want to manifest through imaginative resourcing, building collaborations, and supporting women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders and organisations to hold the line against gender and climate injustice, among others.

[Read our Strategic Plan 2024-29](#)