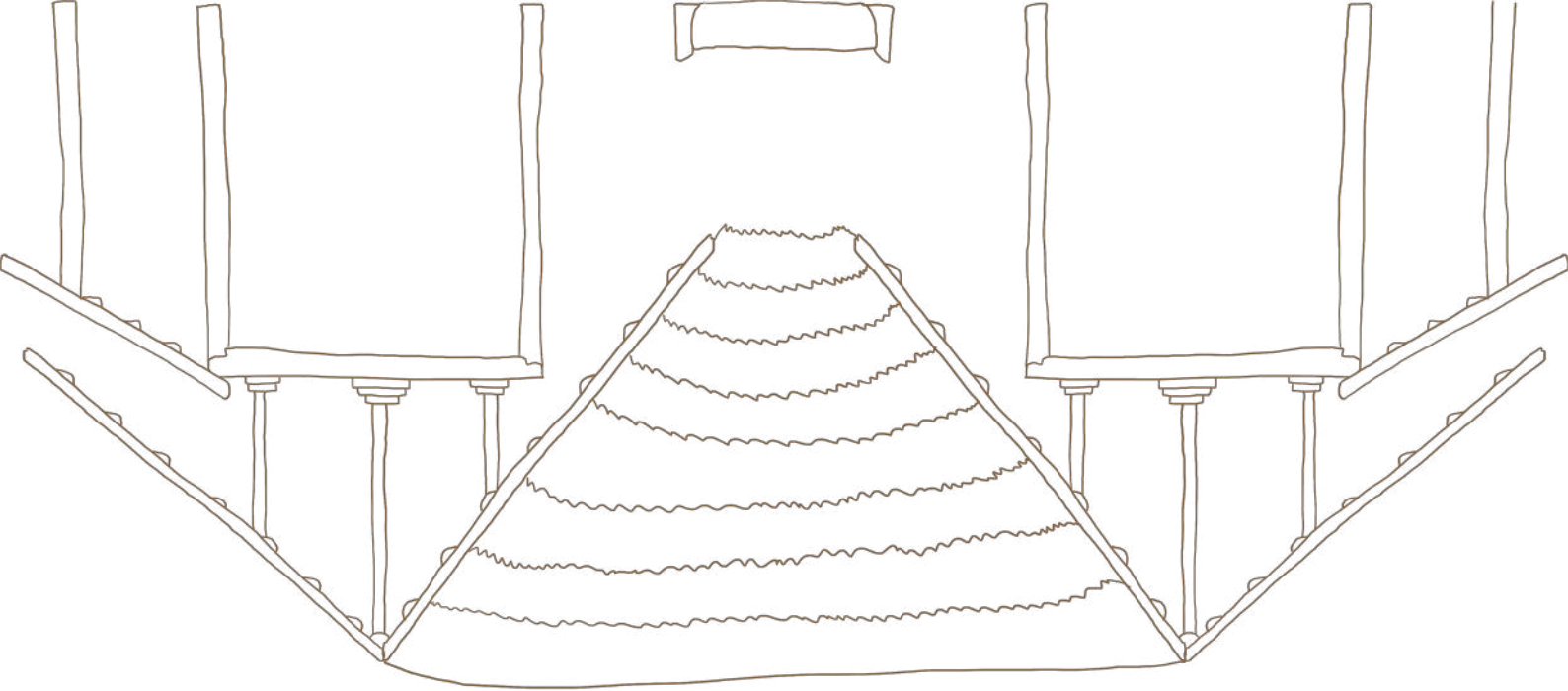




Rumah Kita

The Story of Our
Becoming



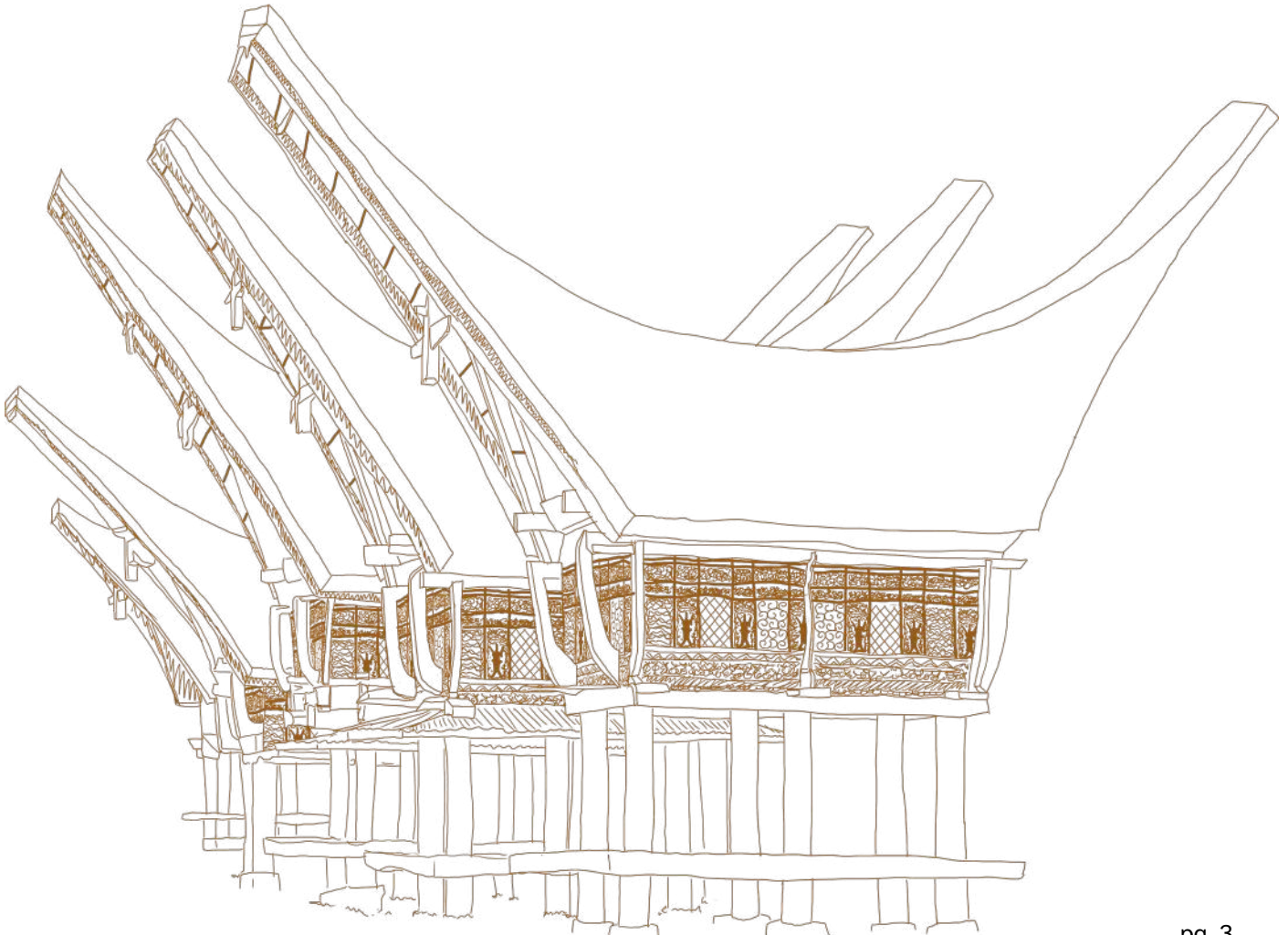
Table Of Contents

Dedication	3
Introduction	4
Views from the veranda	6
Designing the House	9
Conceptualization	10
Strengthening the Sisterhood	10
Geography and the politics of naming	12
Guiding approach	14
Co-leadership	16
Building the house	18
Registration	19
Governance	21
Resource Mobilization	24
Grantmaking	27

Dedication

Built together, by many hands, for many more.

This report is dedicated to the many activists and movements who helped us lay the foundation for Urgent Action Fund-Asia and the Pacific and the countless others who guide our work today. We are grateful for your strategy, wisdom, and testimony.



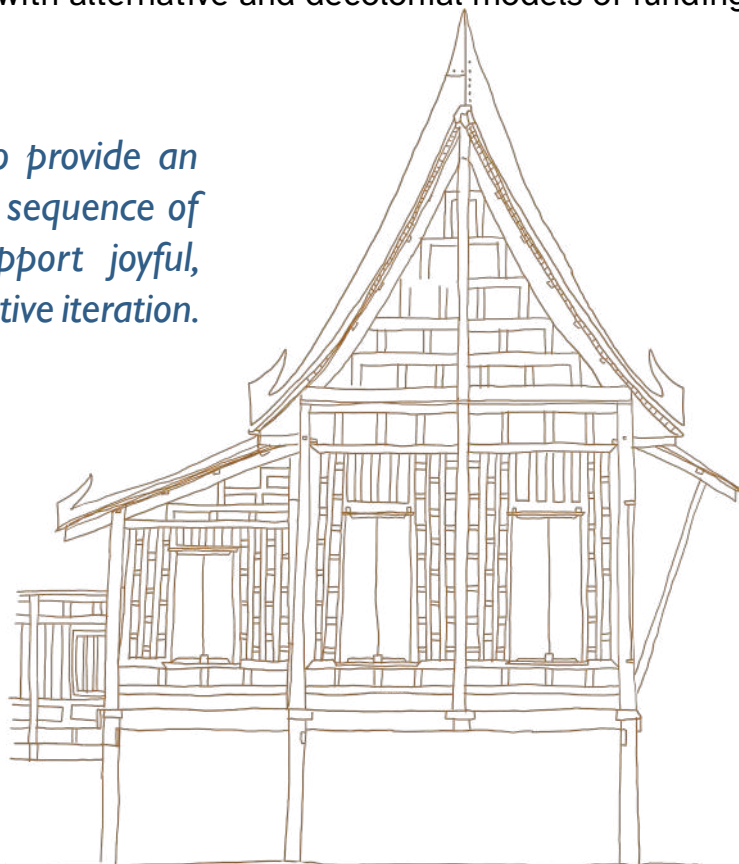
Introduction

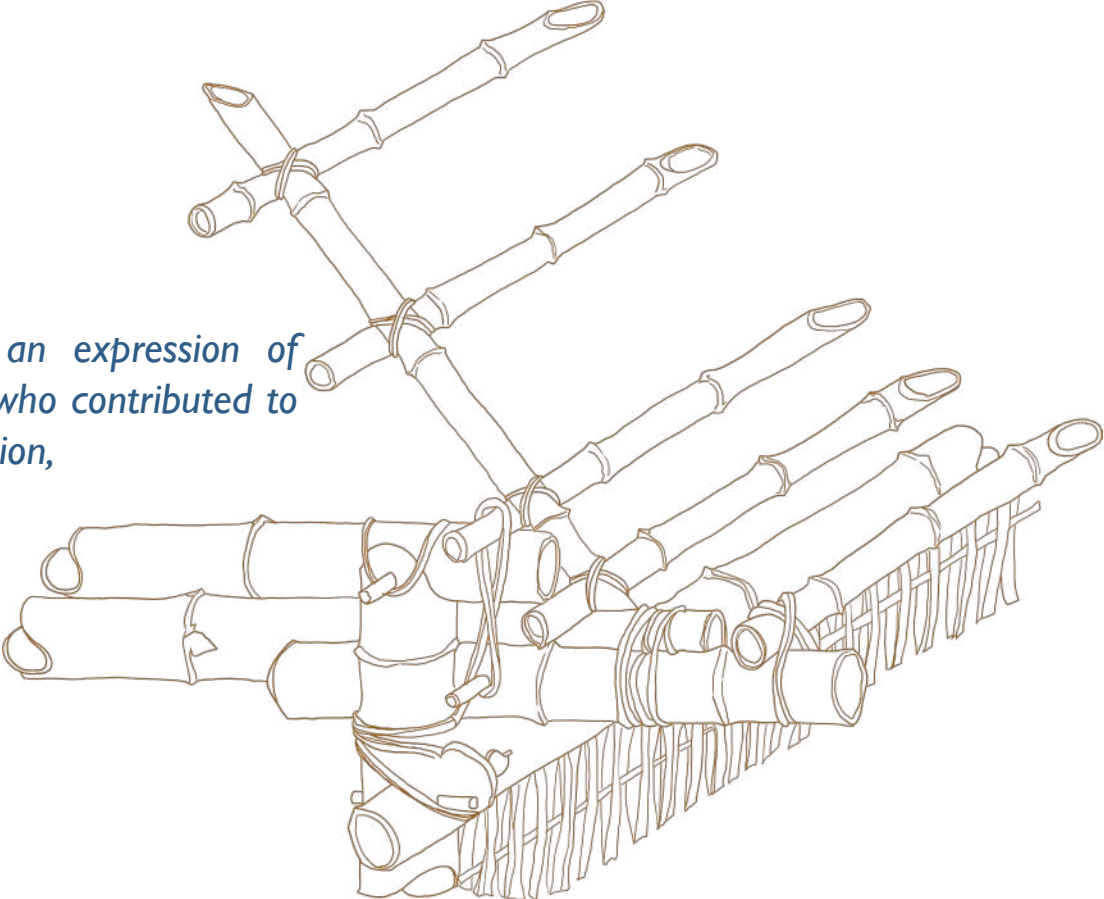
In the tradition of sharing knowledge from generation to generation, this report tells the story of the creation of Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific (UAF A&P). The youngest of the four Urgent Action Sister Funds, UAF A&P is emblematic of the ways that each Sister Fund builds upon a shared foundation and benefits from the wisdom of its predecessors, while elaborating its own distinctive offerings and ways of working.

From the founding of the first Urgent Action Fund in 1997 by a group of women activists, there was always the intention to decentralize the work to promote deeper analysis and greater responsiveness to feminist movements and rights defenders grounded in regional specificities and knowledge, and to shift decision-making power over the use of philanthropic resources. **This approach to decolonizing philanthropy is embodied in the equitable partnerships of the Sisterhood.**

This report seeks to document ‘what happened’ and honor the work that went into establishing this new fund, through both the accomplishments and challenges. It looks primarily at the period from 2014 — when the board of Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism (then known as Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights or UAF-WHR) decided to explore possibilities for a ‘presence’ in Asia — to the launch of UAF A&P in 2017. The hope is that this story helps preserve the history of creating a fund and support political and practical reflection for anyone looking to create a mechanism that brings resources closer to the movements they work in solidarity with. Guiding questions throughout aim to provoke and support political and practical reflection for anyone looking to create a mechanism that brings resources closer to the movements they work in solidarity with: those working in feminist philanthropy, collaborative funds, those who are experimenting with alternative and decolonial models of funding, and beyond.

The goal is not to provide an exact blueprint or sequence of steps, but to support joyful, creative, and collective iteration.





*This report is an expression of
gratitude to all who contributed to
UAF A&P's creation,*

and helped bring/continue to bring a collective vision to life: activists and advisors in Asia and the Pacific, staff and Board members of all four Sister Funds, feminist allies, and fellow dreamers. We have done our best to capture one chapter in a story that UAF A&P continues to write.

There is much more to be said about what it takes to set up a fund and many other organizations in the feminist movement ecosystem who have wisdom and knowledge to share. This report does not touch on every aspect but encourages readers to talk with the people who can share their experiences and learning.

Throughout the creation of UAF A&P, Kamala Chandrakirana, a leader in UAF A&P's founding, often used the metaphor of 'building a house.' This report invokes that same metaphor, drawing on different elements of a house, specifically a house typical of many parts of Asia and the Pacific, which have special features to enjoy natural climates and mitigate against crises.

Views from the veranda



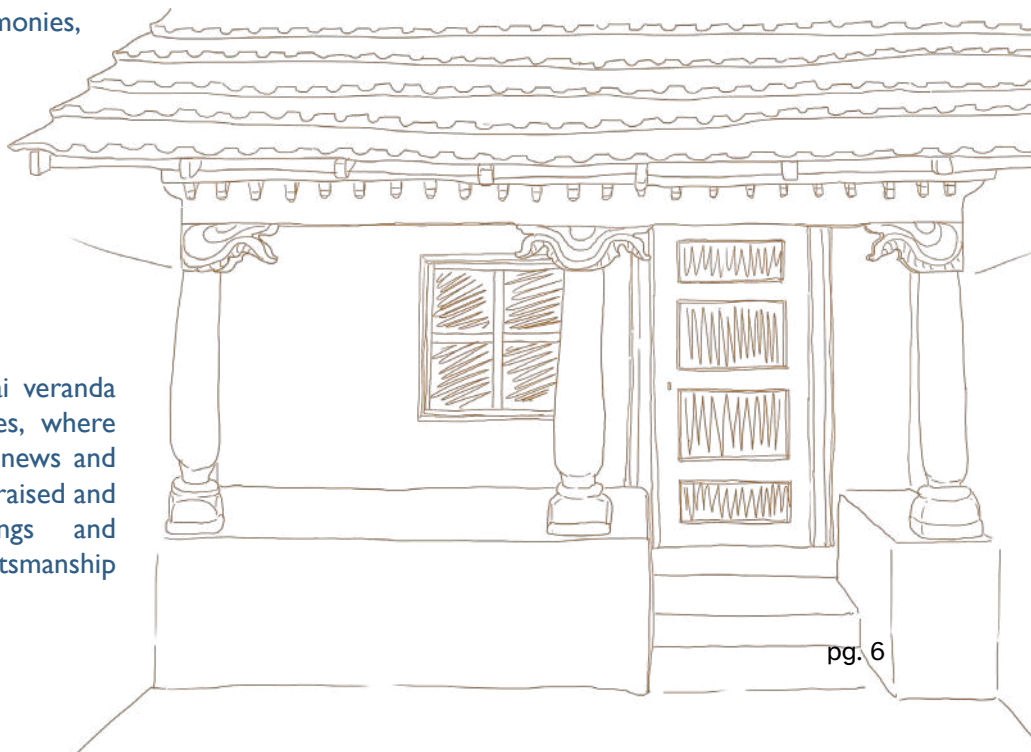
In Japan, the engawa is similar to the veranda: a porch-like space on a traditional house, used to entertain guests and watch the seasons.



Across Southeast Asia, this threshold space is common on traditional houses and can be used for spiritual offerings, ceremonies, and storytelling.

Verandas are roofed, open air porches, attached to houses. They often wrap around the house, running along one or more sides of the house. Verandas are often used to welcome guests in an intimate threshold between the private and public space, and to host casual gatherings while enjoying nature and the view.

In South Indian history, the Thinnai veranda was prevalent in agrarian societies, where neighbours would gather to share news and ideas in the shade. They were often raised and adorned with intricate carvings and embellishments, showcasing the craftsmanship of local artisans.



Several themes emerged in documenting UAF A&P's creation:

The particularities of incubating a new fund.

The process of building a new institution and also transferring relationships and responsibilities from an existing institution is complex. Questions and tensions across all kinds of dimensions abound alongside opportunities for transformation. How can you balance wanting to pass on hard-earned knowledge with maintaining openness around new designs and directions that may be different from original models? How can you ensure generosity and flexibility around the time and space needed for the process while maintaining momentum and working toward a particular launch date? How should the transition be phased — will there be a moment of overlap with shared operational and/or programmatic responsibilities or is the goal for the new fund to launch as a fully autonomous entity? How can you best support the people who, in effect, are straddling two institutions during the transition period and are taking on work on top of their regular job demands? How can you anticipate and address the human and operational impacts to the incubating organization, e.g., fill funding gaps, replace board members who shift to the new entity, or reshape the roles of staff who transition their responsibilities to the staff of the new fund?

Recognizing how the village is changing.

Layered over all of the operational and programmatic pieces, but not always explicitly articulated, are the shifting dynamics between the incubating organization and the new entity. In this case, there was also a shift within the community of Sister Funds as the three pre-existing organizations gained a fourth sister. For the UAF-WHR team — especially the people who held deep, years-long relationships with advisors, grantee partners, and others in the Asia and Pacific regions — transitioning this work to UAF A&P meant saying good-bye and letting go. It is important to acknowledge the sense of loss and sadness that coexisted with the joy of welcoming a new Sister Fund.

At the same time, the emergence of UAF A&P required UAF-WHR to reconsider its own contribution and niche and catalyzed a realignment of relationships within the Sister Fund collective. As UAF-WHR's former Director of Partnerships, Caitlin Stanton, noted, "There is identity work to be done, not just for the emerging fund but also the one letting go. This also shifts the identity of all the Sister Funds — there's new relationships and new ways of talking about the model." At the time of UAF A&P's launch, UAF-WHR was celebrating its 20th year in existence and repositioning itself within a context of rising fundamentalisms and authoritarianism, growing restrictions and threats to human rights movements, and increased displacement and migration due to war, poverty, and climate change. Amidst the challenges, were also new opportunities and the emergence of new social justice and feminist movements. With the new Sister Fund focused on Asia and the Pacific, UAF-WHR deepened its work in the US and Canada, particularly in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and in the underfunded regions of West Asia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

Among the Sister Funds as a whole, the expansion of the Sisterhood of UAFs to include

a fourth fund meant welcoming fresh energy and perspectives and ensuring that they shaped everything from governance practices to resource flows. “Our Sisterhood expanded and this was beneficial for all of us. In our collective decision-making, there were now more voices at the table, speaking from a perspective we had not heard before. And stronger representation from the Global South meant we could advocate for greater resources across all our Funds,” said Ndana Bofu Tawamba, Executive Director of Urgent Action Fund-Africa.

The power and beauty of iteration and Sisterhood.

The Sister Funds have a rich legacy upon which to build. United by a shared vision and approach, each UAF has its own founding story, characteristics, and personality. Every new fund has the benefit of not starting completely from scratch and the opportunity to decide what it wants to keep, evolve, or create. The Sister Funds have also refined their longstanding commitment to abundance and the UAF A&P story is a demonstration of this commitment. Rather than letting scarcity and fear take over, UAF-WHR knew that a new fund would ultimately lead to stronger and better support systems for defenders as well as the Funds themselves.

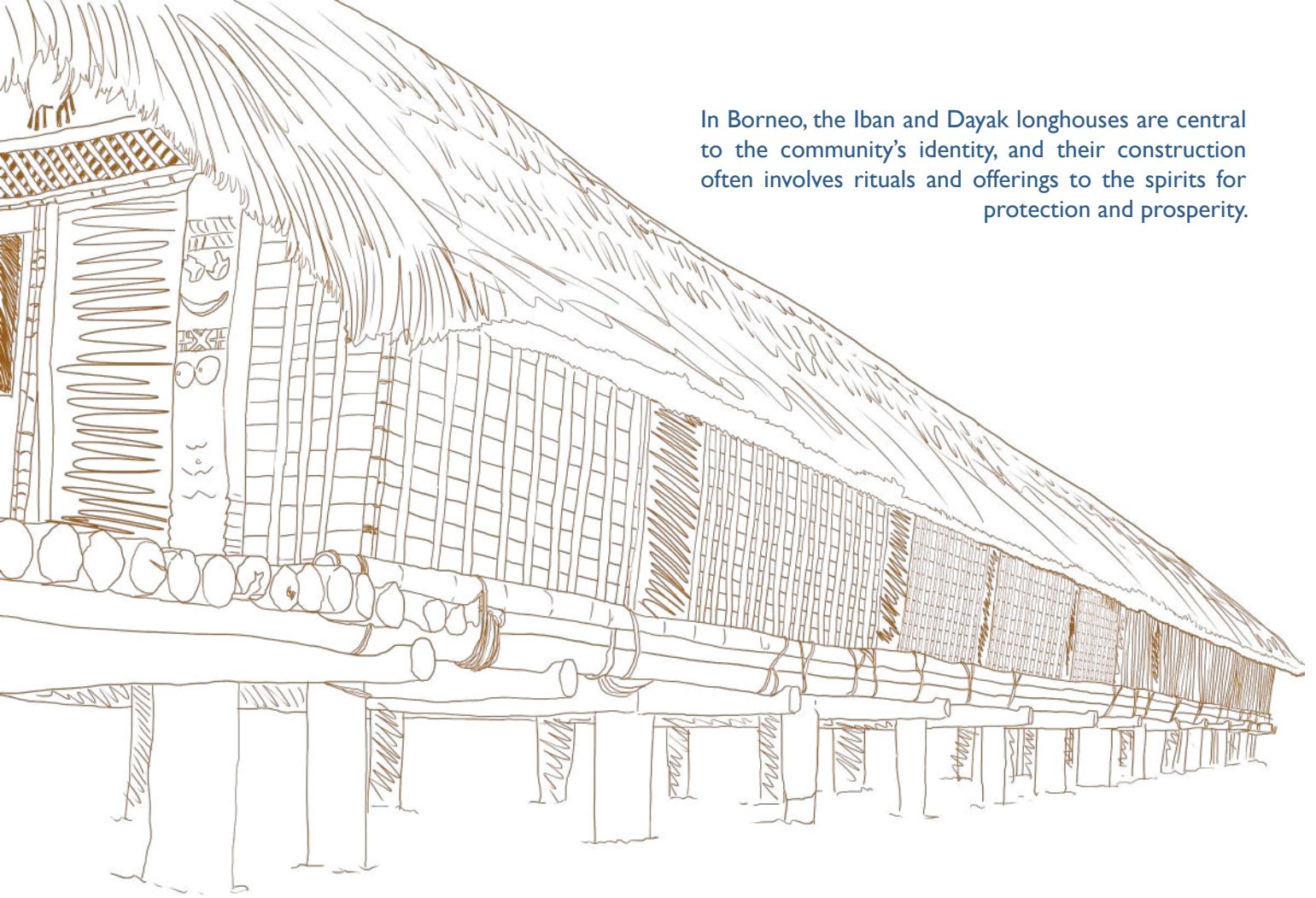
As UAF-FA’s Executive Director Kate Kroeger described it: “There is strength in number and diversity. We mitigate risk, attract greater resources, and ultimately grow and refine the support we provide to frontline feminist activists across the world as a result.”

In today’s environment of shrinking civic space and funding, the Sister Funds are more prepared and resilient because they are able to strategize together and lean on one another. This possibility — to collaborate, to hive, to make new formations — is available for any and all organizations interested in tapping into the benefits and strengths of this model.

Decolonization in action.

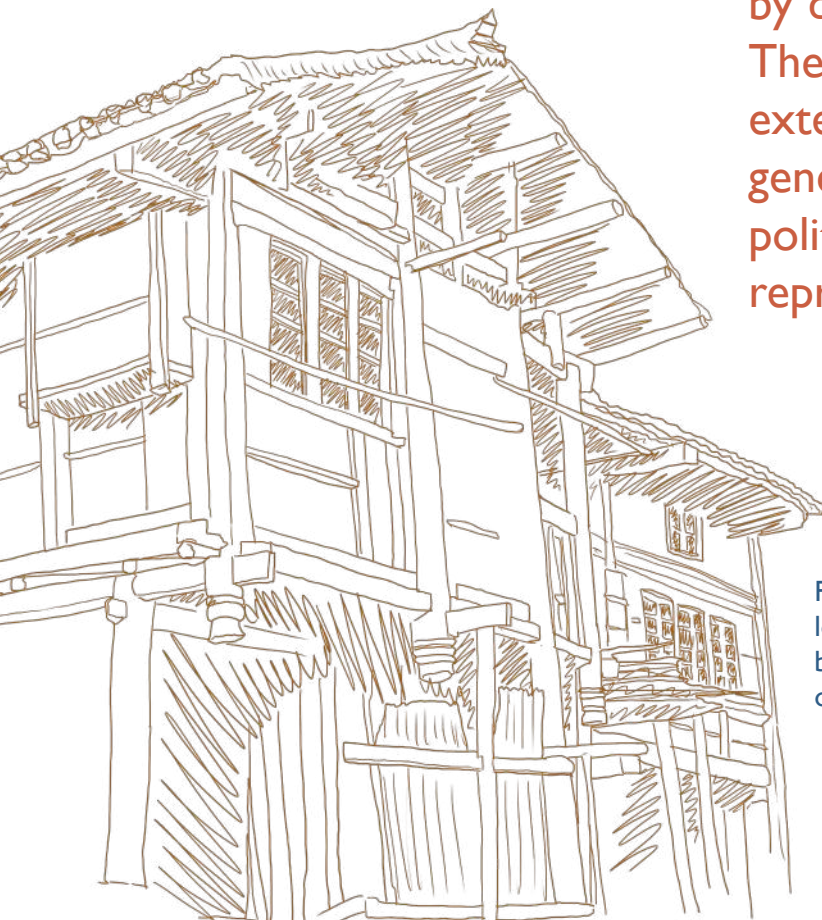
From the outset, UAF’s founders have envisioned funding decisions to be held in the hands of the women, trans, and nonbinary people it serves. Each of the UAFs has sought to embody these values in ways that respond to their unique contexts with UAF A&P being the newest in this evolving lineage. The story told here is one of abundance and disruption: while everyone throughout the process was always committed to the end goal, they were not without anxieties and questions as to how everything would eventually come together.

The emergence of each new Sister Fund is a story of decolonizing philanthropy in action — this report captures what this looks and feels like. As Vinita Sahasranaman (Co-Lead, UAF A&P) says, “When we seed funds in the region they serve, this (re)transfer of many things — wisdom, skill, relationships, money and more — is at the heart of the transformation we want in the world.” UAF A&P’s creation offered the opportunity to re-envision traditional ways of mobilizing resources and the ways that resources are shared with movements in the region. From conceptualization to implementation, UAF A&P has strived to shift power to local communities, practicing consultation and collective learning with the communities of defenders in the regions to inform and guide its work.



In Borneo, the Iban and Dayak longhouses are central to the community's identity, and their construction often involves rituals and offerings to the spirits for protection and prosperity.

Designing the House



Longhouses are large single-room structures for communal dwellings. They are found across different regions of Asia and the Pacific, made by different indigenous communities. They serve not just as homes for extended families of multiple generations, but also as social and political centers, with the longhouse representing the largest political unit for some groups.

For the Mien and Hmong People of Southeast Asia, the longhouse serves as the heart of the village, and the building process is communal, with a strong emphasis on family and clan connections.

Conceptualization

In November 2014, the Board of UAF-WHR decided that given the breadth and complexity of the Asian continent, there was a need to make plans for regionalization in Asia in order to better serve defenders in the region.

At that time, there was not full agreement on what localisation would look like. Therefore, a committee of board members and staff was formed to lead the ongoing discussion and decision-making.

In March 2015, this Regionalization Committee met in Delhi, India to discuss the way forward for greater 'regionalization' in Asia.

After reflecting on the needs of defenders, the challenges they face in their contexts, and what 'Asia' really means, the Committee agreed that instead of focusing too quickly on the 'form,' it was paramount to prioritize a process that would invite the diverse knowledge and wisdom of defenders.

As Kamala described the rationale, "You don't set up a house in someone else's field."

Strengthening the Sisterhood

2016 was a formative year for the UAFs, marking the first time that the three Sister Funds presented themselves as a 'collaborative' with a shared identity. As context to UAFA&P's creation story, it is important to highlight that much of that year had been spent developing a 'Collective Agreement,' among the Sister Funds. This agreement reflected each fund's commitment to collaboration and the values of the Sisterhood partnership. It also recognized that defenders' security in the future depends on the capacity of all the UAFs to achieve greater scale and scope, to invest in building a strong network around the world, and to develop best practices in the field of rapid response grantmaking, among other mechanisms, to support women, trans and nonbinary defenders.¹

Questions about the decision-making and process for creating new Sister Funds were raised as part of the discussions.

Over the course of 2015 and 2016, landscape research and consultations with 163 activists in the Asia and the Pacific regions were held to gain a better understanding of systems of protection and support for women human rights defenders in Asia and the

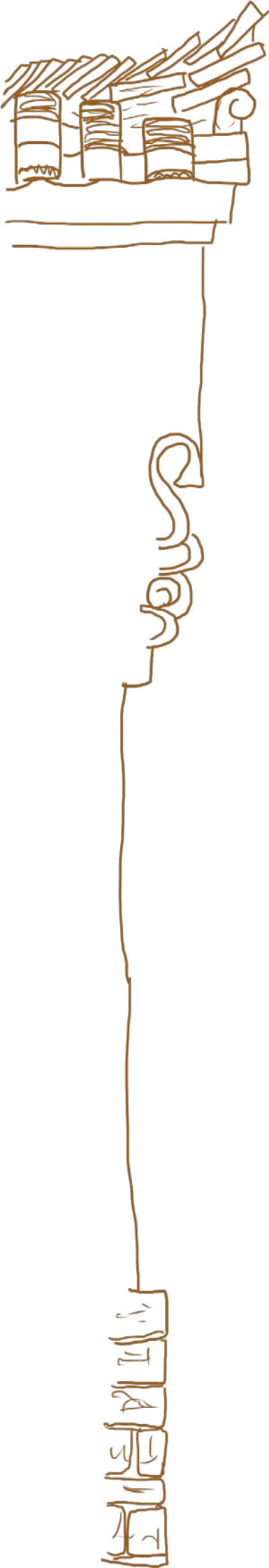
¹ For more information on how the Urgent Action Sister Funds work, see www.urgentactionsisterfunds.org

Pacific, the implications for improving these systems (including in terms of grantmaking and advocacy) and to contribute toward a collective reflection and analysis on women's human rights in the region.² This was driven by the belief and principle that centering the wisdom and experiences of activists is essential not only for decolonizing funding but for achieving real impact. Pranom 'Bee' Sarowong, a participant in the consultations who later became a UAF A&P Board member, reflected that these consultations were "foundational in establishing trust and accountability with local movements" and advised future funds to always prioritize deep listening, make knowledge accessible for different kinds of defenders, and build trust-based partnerships.

Only in 2016 was there a turn toward more operational needs of the fund.

This began with the formation of a Steering Committee for the set up of a fund in Asia and the Pacific in April 2016 to serve as an advisory committee to the UAF-WHR Board pending the formation of a Board of Directors and registration of UAF A&P. The new Steering Committee retained three Asia-based board members from the Regionalization Committee and added four more individuals from Asia and the Pacific, chosen to represent a mix of regional and age diversity, human rights expertise, and knowledge of the philanthropic context. As UAF A&P co-lead Virisila Buadromo recalled, "They became the 'think tank' around how this idea would be operationalized." In January 2017, two co-leads were hired to lead the fund and implement plans for registration, transition of grantmaking from UAF-WHR, and launch of UAF A&P's own programming and operations.

² Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights changed its name to Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism to reflect greater gender inclusivity and a focus on frontline feminist movements, whose activism may include but also go beyond the language/legal framework of human rights in their work to center care, justice, and equity. In documenting the history of UAF A&P's creation, we have quoted the language in use at the time, such as "women human rights defenders (WHRDs)".



Guiding Questions

- Q How much do you know about what the community needs? What do you need to learn?*
- Q Where are you rooting your motivation — is it grounded in the community you are going to serve or driven by others?*
- Q What information and processes do you need for decision-making? How does your approach embody the values and inform the culture of the institution you are building toward?*
- Q How are you learning from others who have come before you? How are you supporting new iterations and evolutions of existing ideas?*
- Q How are you ensuring your process is documented to help build institutional memory for the future?*

In many countries of Asia and the Pacific, there are ancient practices for selecting a plot of land to build on, the orientation of doors, windows, and rooms, and overall layout. These practices can draw on cosmologies, genealogical history, and respect for the land.

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese practice focused on harmonizing individuals with their environment by optimizing the flow of energy.



Geography and the politics of naming



Among Ifugao, Kalinga, and other highland tribes of Philippines, ancestral spirits (anito) must be honored before clearing land.

In 2015, the Regionalization Committee noted that planning had so far been focused exclusively on Asia and that the Pacific should be included.

The leadership and voice of individuals from the Pacific — particularly Virisila Buadromo, who participated in the 2016 regional consultations and became a Steering Committee member and eventually a UAF A&P's co-lead — was critical to the recognition of Asia AND the Pacific. This is in contrast to 'Asia Pacific' or 'Asia-Pacific', which implies one cohesive region and is typically used by international development actors, ignoring geopolitical and other differences between the regions. It was particularly important to name the Pacific because of the ways the Pacific islands and their diversity have been invisibilized, the deep lack of funding for the region, and the huge risks they face from climate change impacts. 'Asia and the Pacific' (or, interchangeably, 'the Pacific and Asia') better represented the two regions and movements, both the tensions and collaboration. The new fund was accordingly staffed to represent both regions in one fund.

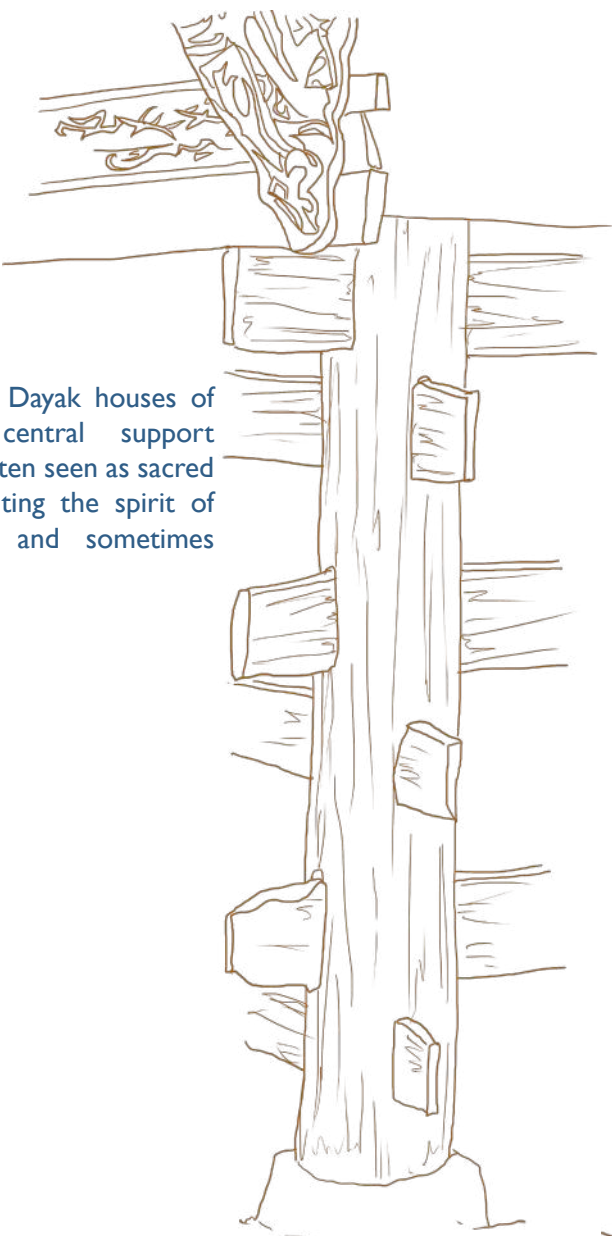
In addition, the UAF-WHR Board ultimately decided that West Asia and Central Asia were distinct for language and historical reasons, and would remain under the scope of UAF-WHR.

Guiding Questions

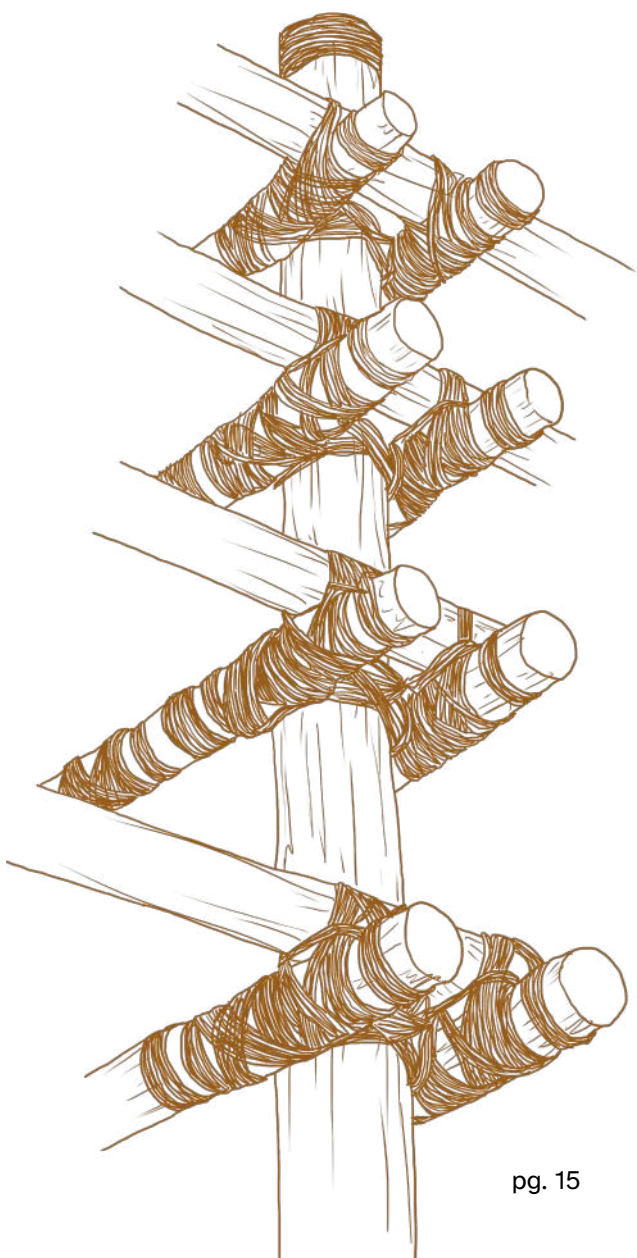
- Q What specific politics underline the geographic scope of a new fund?*
- Q What are the histories at play within and around the geograph(ies) you wish to impact — especially of the social justice movements within them? How will you use this to inform the conceptualization and final scope of a new fund?*
- Q What opportunities are there to shift or correct harmful dominant narratives influencing the geograph(ies) you hope to impact?*

Guiding approach

Pillars are a central architectural and symbolic element in traditional housebuilding across Asia and the Pacific. While they serve crucial structural functions, their cultural, spiritual, and social meanings are just as important — often representing a connection between earth and sky, people and ancestors, or humans and nature.



In Batak or Dayak houses of Indonesia, central support pillars are often seen as sacred — representing the spirit of the house, and sometimes named.



In Samoa, center posts (poutu) hold the roof and symbolize strength, ancestry, and community.

While recognizing that rapid response grantmaking was the ‘DNA’ of the Sister Funds, there was also consensus that it was important for UAF A&P to define its own approach and root its offerings in the articulated needs of the region.

Ultimately, two pillars of work emerged from the consultations with defenders and advisors in the regions.

The first pillar is based on the principle that wellbeing is an aspect of holistic safety and the recognition that activists have multiple existing systems of protection and support that can be reinforced. This influenced a political decision to go beyond the moment of crisis to strengthen **‘Webs of Safety and Care’** to support defenders to access the kind of safety, support, and care infrastructures that would be meaningful for them.

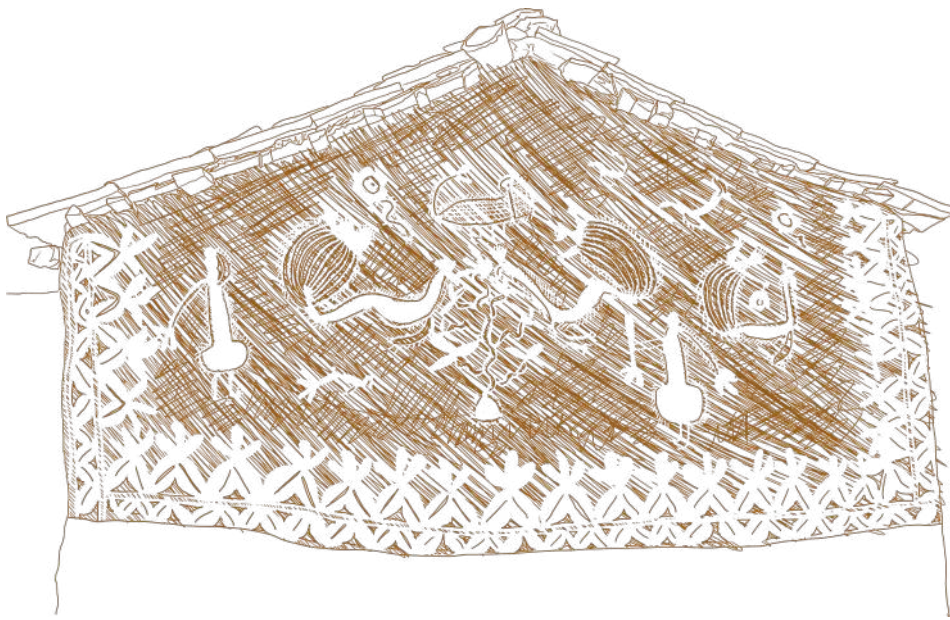
The second pillar was **‘Resourcing Resilience,’** rooted in the idea that defenders’ work can become more sustainable when built on a ‘solidarity economy’ committed “not to occasional donations, but long-term (lifetime) investments and collaborative ventures.” Resourcing Resilience is fundamental to UAF A&P and has found expression in multiple ways across the fund’s work. It serves as a guiding principle for changing the culture of giving to one of sharing. It also means a commitment to bringing in new resources and identifying alternative ways of resourcing, especially from within Asia and the Pacific. It has also shown up in grantmaking as a dedicated grant type to support innovative approaches, creative ideas, and “unfolding situations or unanticipated opportunities for the protection and support of women and non-binary defenders.”³

Guding Questions

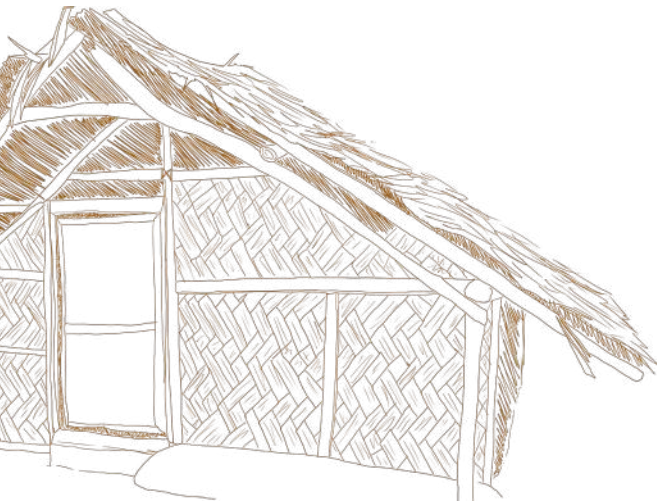
Q What are the unique foundational pillars that speak to the context of your community and hold up your mission?

Q If you are iterating from existing models, what is most important to retain and why? What elements are critical to adapt to the specific contexts and needs of the movements in the region?

³ <https://uafanp.org/resourcing-resilience-grants>



In many rural areas, especially in Punjab, Sindh, and Rajasthan, women build walls using cob (mud mixed with straw) or adobe bricks. They can also have the role of creating decorative patterns (e.g., Mandana art in Rajasthan or wall frescoes in Sindh).



In Vanuatu and other islands in South Pacific and North Pacific, women lead the thatching of roofs as well as walls and partitions made from mats.

Co-leadership

Women and nonbinary people may play important and sometimes pivotal roles in traditional housebuilding across Asia and the Pacific, though their contributions are often underrepresented in formal narratives that focus on male builders or elders. Their roles vary by culture, but they are frequently central to the symbolic, social, aesthetic, and even structural dimensions of the home.



Fa'afafine in Samoa often play central roles in family and communal life, including caring for elders, organizing events, and sometimes coordinating communal building projects. They may not be structural builders but often organize logistics, food preparation, or rituals around building a fale tele (communal meeting house).

While the other Sister Funds practice different forms of collective leadership, UAF A&P was the first of the UAFs to officially have co-executive directors (called co-leads).

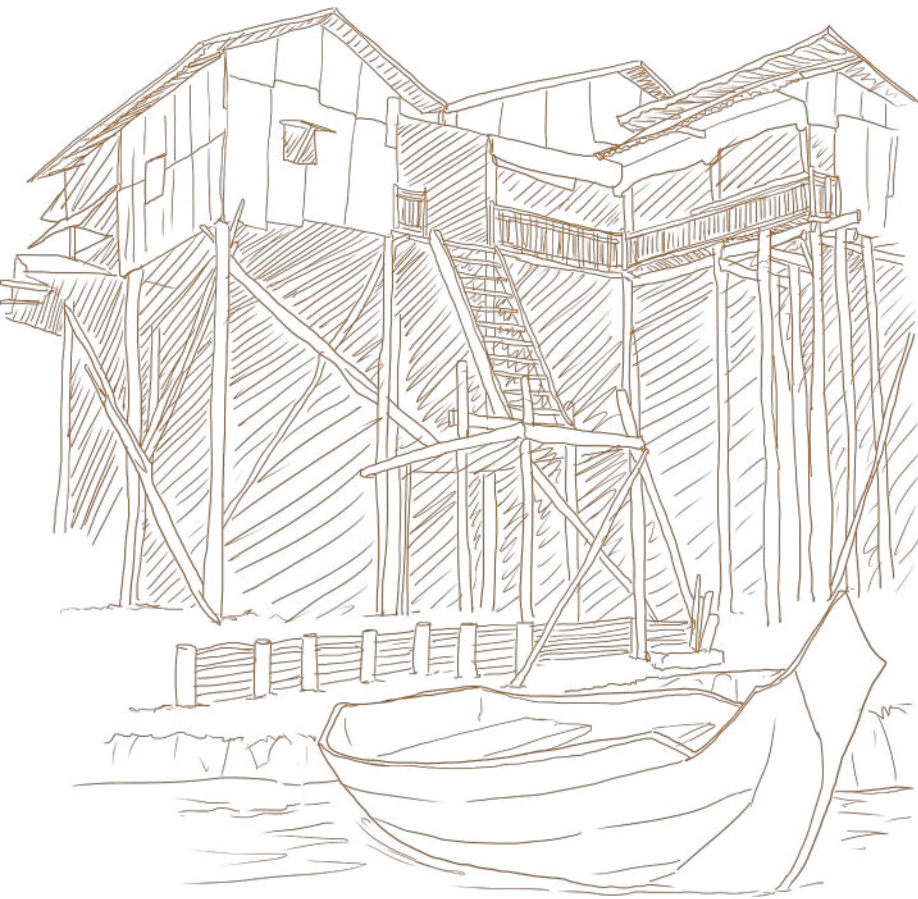
There were several factors that contributed to this decision by the Steering Committee. First, following the decision to include both Asia and the Pacific in the new Fund, it was agreed that its leadership also needed to reflect the two regions. Second, with co-leadership models slowly gaining popularity in the feminist space, the Steering Committee articulated its desire to test this model as a practice of ‘well-being’ and ‘self-care’ to avoid burnout. Third, the co-leadership model supported the idea that the new fund would have two distinct programmatic areas of work. The Steering Committee understood rapid response grantmaking and resourcing resilience as two distinct areas of work and wanted to create dedicated leadership in both areas.

Ultimately, the Steering Committee decided to hire two of its own members to be the founding co-leads: Mary Jane Real and Virisila Buadromo. Hiring two existing members of the Steering Committee helped maintain a steady pace in setting up the fund. These members had already been selected for the Steering Committee for their reputation in the regional movements, leadership experience, and commitment to resourcing. Fortunately, there was an existing relationship between these two members through their previous work and a foundation of trust that contributed to the Steering Committee’s confidence in this decision.

The interest in and commitment to co-leadership continues today. Following Mary Jane’s transition out of the fund in 2020, there was a successful co-leadership recruitment of Vinita Sahasranaman in 2021. Co-leadership is also being practiced at other levels in the organization, with co-managers on staff and co-chairs on the Board.

Guiding Questions

- Q How will the leadership of your fund reflect your values and support the work toward your mission? How will you care for and support the first leadership of the fund as they navigate and build new terrain, relationships, and systems?*
- Q How will your leadership reflect the communities which you will serve?*
- Q What skills, knowledge, and qualities of leadership are most important in the beginning phases of a fund, and how might these change over time? How will your leadership demonstrate these skills and be open to evolving?*
- Q What are the pros and cons of recruiting leadership from within your existing network?*



Whether on the Tonle Saap lake or Lau lagoon, stilt structures over water are often called 'floating villages.' Across the regions, you will find houses, gardens, and shops built on stilts.

Building the house

In many tropical, flood-prone, and coastal regions of Asia and the Pacific, houses are built on stilts as protection against flooding and pests. In many places, the raised house also then has more ventilation and shade for the hot climate and storage underneath for livestock and cooking.



In the delta regions of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, stilt houses help people cope with cyclones and water logging.

Registration

Early in the three-year incubation process, the Regionalization Committee conducted research into the regulatory environment of six countries in Asia to assess options for possible registration. The research looked at legal registration requirements; operating regulations and office costs; banking systems, taxes, and ease of receiving and sending funds; labor laws and ease of recruitment and hiring; accessibility of the geographic location; the political environment; and the human rights track record of the country.

Having seen regional organizations forced to close because of restrictive laws, and in light of generally weak infrastructure for secure financial transactions across national boundaries, the decision was made to register in multiple countries.

This would provide more flexibility and enable the new Sister Fund to continue operating if one location had to shut down. Reflecting the Fund's regions of operation, the intention was that registration would be in at least one country in Asia and one in the Pacific. This would also increase UAF A&P's reach and visibility.

A priority was registering in a country that was representative of the movements UAF sought to support. Historically, the greatest number of applications from the Asia region to UAF-WHR had been from the Philippines. The country had a clear regulatory framework designed with civil society participation and more international and regional organizations were moving to the Philippines. In addition, Co-Lead Mary Jane Real was from the country, which made registration easier and faster.

Among most Pacific island countries, banking regulations proved too challenging, which left Australia and New Zealand as the remaining options. This prompted deep discussion about the implications of registering in a country that operates more as a Global North country, which was contrary to the fund's principle of decolonizing philanthropy and moving funds closer to communities. However, the Australian government, as a bilateral funder, was one of the biggest funders in the Asia and Pacific regions, making it an important possible source of funding. The decision to register in Australia was understood as a reflection of the socio-political environment of the regions and the difficulties of setting up a rights-based organization there. (See the Governance section for more on how UAF A&P developed structures to mitigate against potential power imbalances linked to registration location.)

After three years, the political environment in the Philippines became too challenging and the decision was made to shut down, which revealed the complexity and expense of closing down a board, bank account, and filing the needed legal paperwork. In addition to the logistical challenges, there is also the emotional dimension of shutting down, and grief among the community members that held this registration place. The lesson here being: know your exit plan and be prepared to undo whatever you set up. Bigger picture, the issue of registration has highlighted the question what it means to be and act as a truly regional fund if there is no safe home in the regions.

Guiding Questions

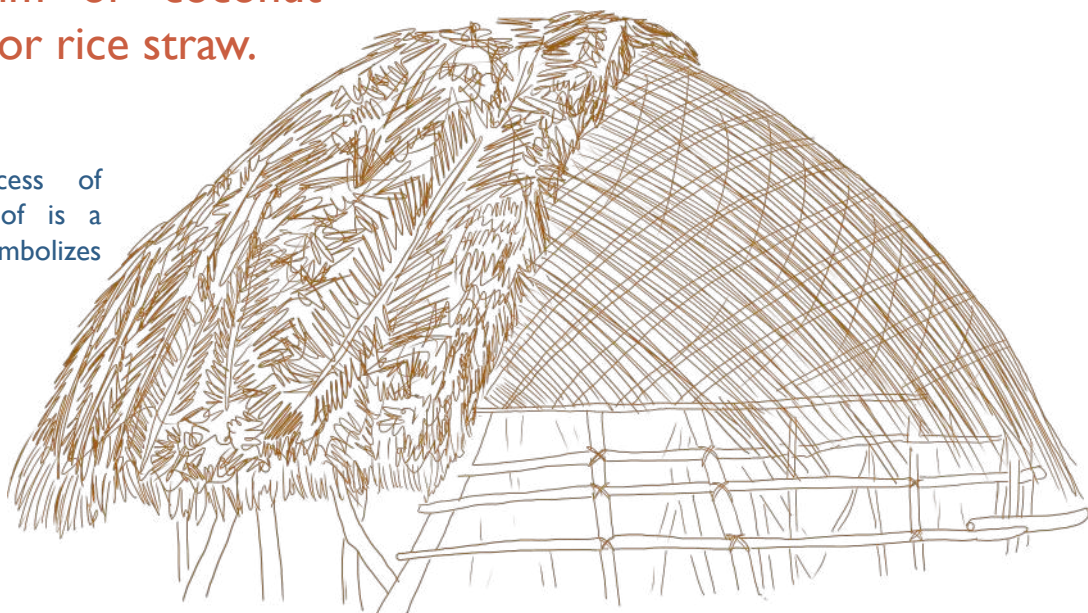
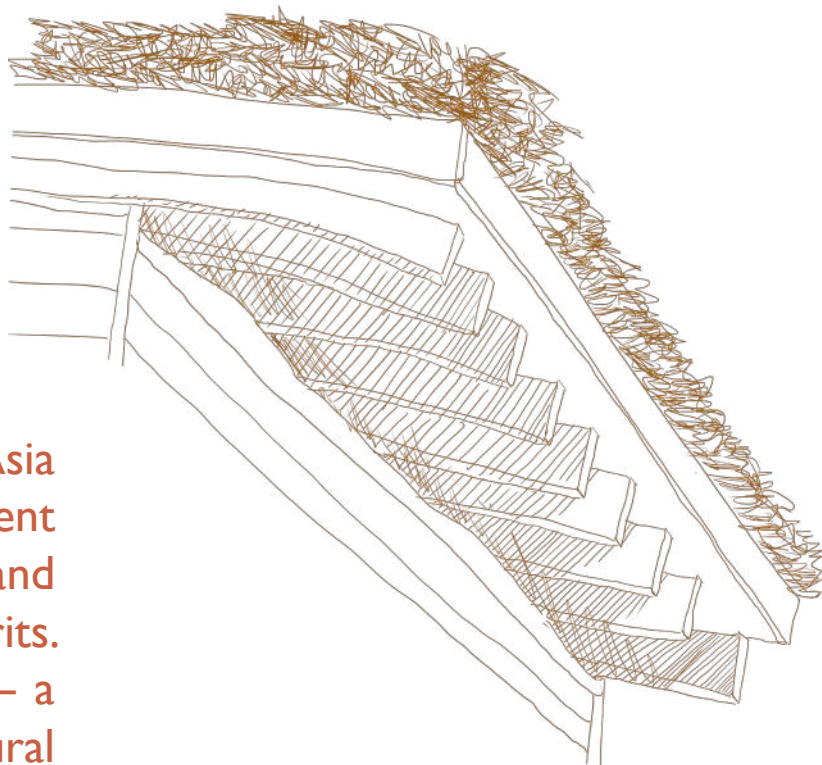
- Q How does registration support your core purpose — practically and politically?*
- Q What is most important for registration to enable in your work? (For example, flexibility around hiring or access to certain donors?) Do all of the institution's needs have to be met by registration in one location? Can multiple registrations serve different purposes?*
- Q How do local registration requirements impact how you would form a Board or approach Board member roles? If you are considering registering in multiple countries, how would multiple governing bodies relate to each other? (See Governance section for more.)*
- Q What are the local compliance requirements and what capacity will you need to meet them over the longer term?*
- Q If legal registration poses risks to the organization's mission, what are other ways to demonstrate and practice rootedness in the region?*

In Southeast Asia, the thatched roof is associated with the idea of connecting the sky and earth, forming a link between the physical and spiritual realm.

Governance

In traditional housebuilding of Asia and the Pacific, roofs represent protection not only from rain and natural elements but also evil spirits. Thatched roofs are common — a technique of layering natural materials like palm or coconut leaves, grass, reed, or rice straw.

In the Pacific, the process of constructing a thatched roof is a communal activity that symbolizes unity.



The history of governance and oversight at UAF A&P is layered and intertwined with the visions of the Steering Committee and the demands of legal registration. On the one hand, the Steering Committee envisioned a Board of Directors that was representative of geographic scope that UAF A&P would cover, and composed of multiple skills and sectors to best serve the governance needs for the fund. It would need an equal balance across identities, nationalities, and knowledge. On the other hand, most countries had registration requirements that would impact Board composition, for example, that a majority of Board members be national citizens of the country. With this in mind, **the Steering Committee decided to 'build' Boards of Directors as needed for registration, fulfilling the composition requirements while maintaining the vision of a diverse Steering Committee that was representative of Asia and Pacific.**

In 2017, as national Boards came into creation in the Philippines and Australia, the

Steering Committee also evolved itself into a ‘Regional Board’. It was envisioned that the national-level boards in each country of registration would hold the actual legal responsibilities for the UAF A&P entity, while the Regional Board would maintain the overall authority and strategic direction (while still helping national boards meet legal requirements).

The Regional Board had immediate questions about the multiple forms and levels of power being created with the different governing bodies. There were real concerns about national boards using their de jure power over the Regional Board’s de facto power, for example, in an instance where a national Board disagreed with a Regional Board decision that it had to implement. It also had to be recognized that the national Board members carried the actual legal risks and indemnification, and would be held to account by the law if UAF A&P did not meet its legal compliances. As the Fund began operating in each of the countries (hiring staff, setting up bank accounts, beginning to make grants, etc.), Board oversight functions and approval systems were also being activated and it was important for each Board to have a clear picture of what every Board, as well as the overall Fund, was doing.

To untangle these issues, **beginning in 2019, the Regional Board set out to develop greater governance coherence through a series of meetings, the creation of a Coherence Committee, and ultimately a Charter that would lay out explicitly the relationships and authorities between the different Boards.** The governance coherence work highlights the boldness of UAF A&P’s founding character. Choosing to establish one Board could have been the easier logistical path but with some compromises on how power is held. **Instead, the founding members decided to embrace complexity, and create a unique governance architecture that could effectively weave together regional representation, operational strategy, and feminist power.** This vision is enshrined in the Charter of UAF A&P, and holds the ‘beams’ of the overall governance structure to ensure coherence of authority, communication, and delegated responsibility.



Guiding Questions

- Q What will governance look like in the early stages of setting up your fund? How will it need to evolve?*
- Q How will the governance body reflect the communities you wish to serve? How open are you to recruiting members who may not come from the community you know or serve, but could help you achieve goals such as registration or network building? Will the founders be members of the governance body?*
- Q How will your governance structure reflect your fund's principles? Are there inconsistencies between these fundamental principles and the practical and legal requirements of setting up a fund? How can you be creative to navigate these conflicts? For example, requirements of particular citizenship or location of members that may not reflect your constituency or founding history?*
- Q Are all the risks clear and held by all members? What are the different appetites for risk amongst your governance members? How clear and open are you about those differences, and how will you foster understanding?*
- Q How will you manage conflict and ensure a code of conduct that reflects your values?*

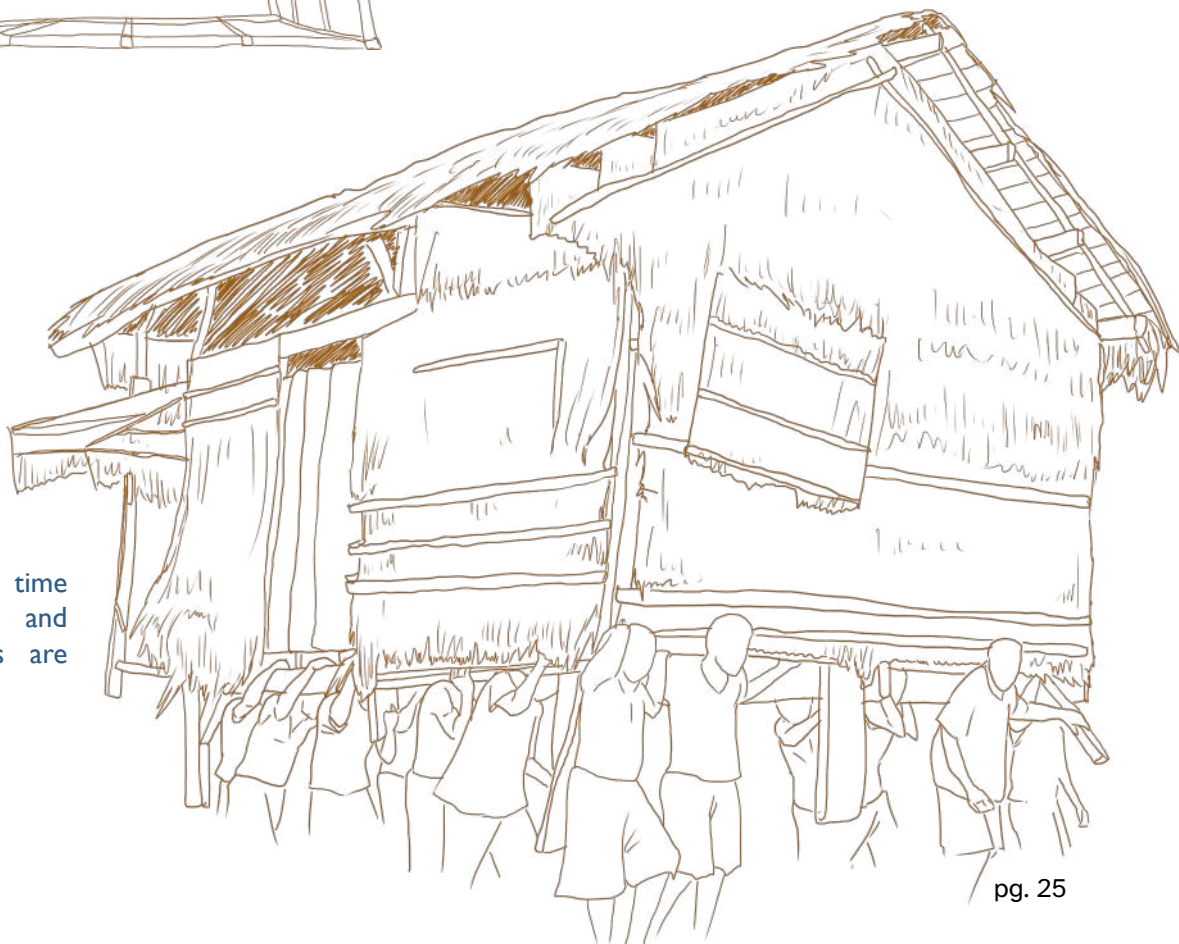
Resource Mobilization

In communities across Asia and the Pacific, building a house is often a communal effort that involves the pooling of resources, labor, and skills from the local population. Unlike modern, industrialized building methods, where contractors and construction companies handle most of the work, traditional housebuilding is deeply rooted in cultural practices, social structures, and a sense of collective responsibility.

These methods reflect the values of cooperation and mutual aid.



In Japan, communal labor is routinely used to build traditional houses, with specialized knowledge passed down from generation to generation. The design and layout of the house may also reflect community preferences and needs.



Across the regions, time and labor exchange and reciprocity networks are common.

During the incubation period, staff of UAF-WHR and members of the Steering Committee — and eventually the UAF A&P co-leads — took on shared responsibility for resource mobilization for the new Sister Fund. This work was a combination of UAF-WHR persuading current donors to support the new Sister and Steering Committee members leveraging their relationships with funders in the region. UAF-WHR relied on its most trusted funding partners, particularly those with a strong interest in Asia, to understand the need to resource the work of establishing a new Sister Fund while Steering Committee members cultivated relationships with Asia-based grantmakers to support the exploration and launch of UAF A&P. Funds were channeled from UAF-WHR's budget while UAF A&P gained the legal and financial independence to accept grants directly.

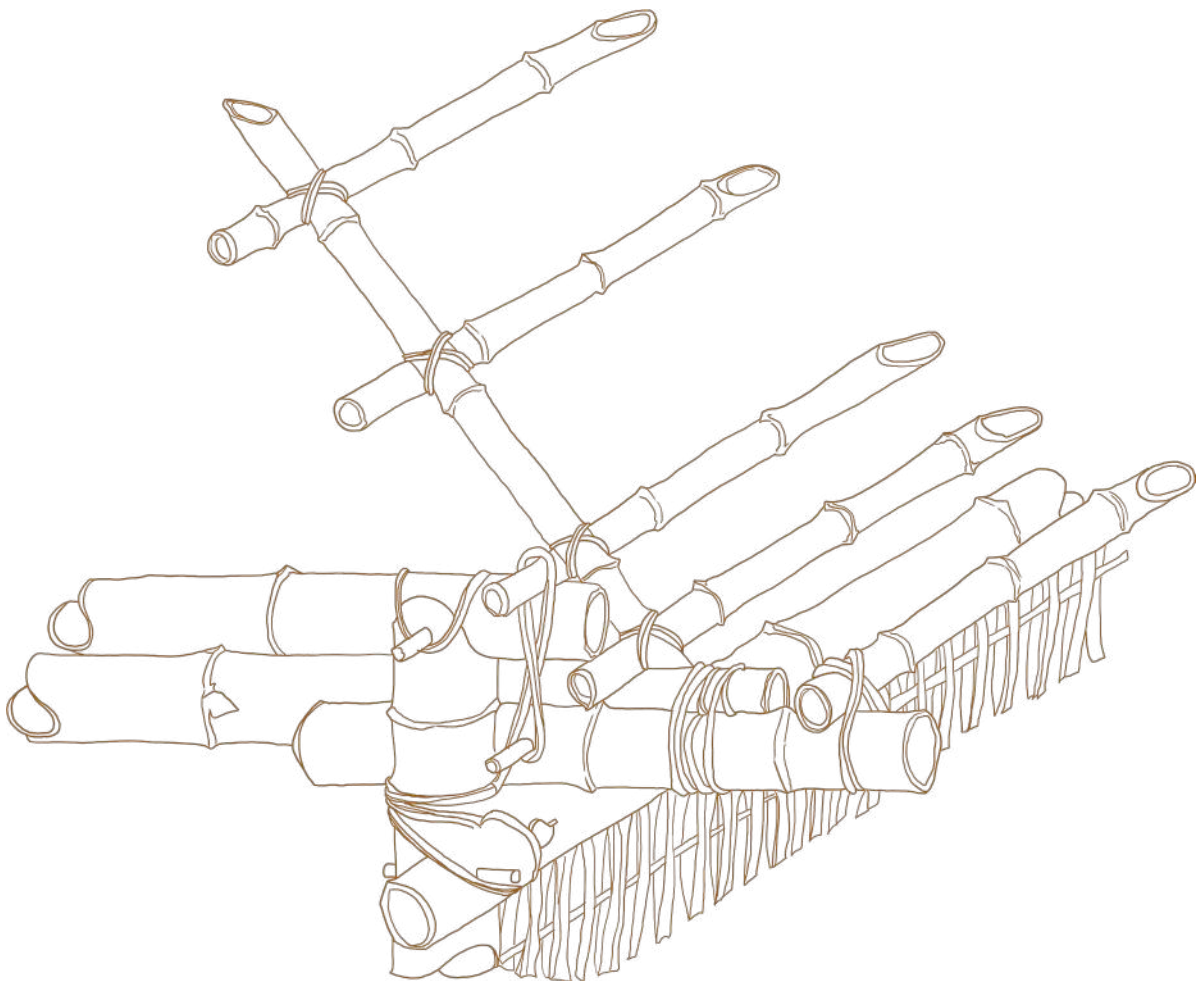
Joint, in-person meetings were one of the most effective ways of transitioning relationships and ensuring existing donors sustained their funding through the transition. These meetings allowed funders to hear about the process from the staff of both funds and built their confidence in the new UAF's leadership. While institutional donors generally were politically aligned with the reasons behind the transition, some US-based individual donors struggled to grasp the idea that UAF A&P would be fully autonomous. One interviewee suggested that the messaging to them could have been bolder, more proactive, and perhaps provided a level of nuance closer to what institutional funders received.

During the three-year incubation period, funds were needed to both sustain UAF-WHR's current grantmaking for Asia and the Pacific and to enable the planning, set up, and operationalization of UAF A&P. At the time, more than one-third of UAF-WHR's budget was restricted to Asia and about half of all grants were being made to the region. UAF-WHR had to balance letting go of the region while trying to avoid a gap in its own funding, and was strategizing about how to build up work in the US and increase funding for other under-resourced regions like Central Asia, West Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe. The 2016 U.S. election galvanized donors across the country and drove funding to UAF-WHR's new Resist & Reclaim Fund, largely filling the funding gap.

Early in the process, the Steering Committee commissioned research on philanthropy for women's rights in Asia, looking at Asia-based philanthropies, giving trends, international funders for Asia, and women's funds in the region. **As the regionalization conversations progressed, influencing the culture of philanthropy in Asia and the Pacific emerged as a priority, along with the need for donor education and advocacy to increase resources for the movement.** Toward this goal, the Steering Committee held a meeting with a group of Asian women philanthropists (high net-worth individuals, senior business executives, and entrepreneurs) in Bali, Indonesia in 2017. This work **led to a deeper understanding that philanthropy in Asia was big but apolitical and risk averse; that seeking funds from non-traditional or new sources requires dedicated resources (noting that individual donor fundraising has been challenging for all the UAFs); and that culture shift is a long-term endeavor.**

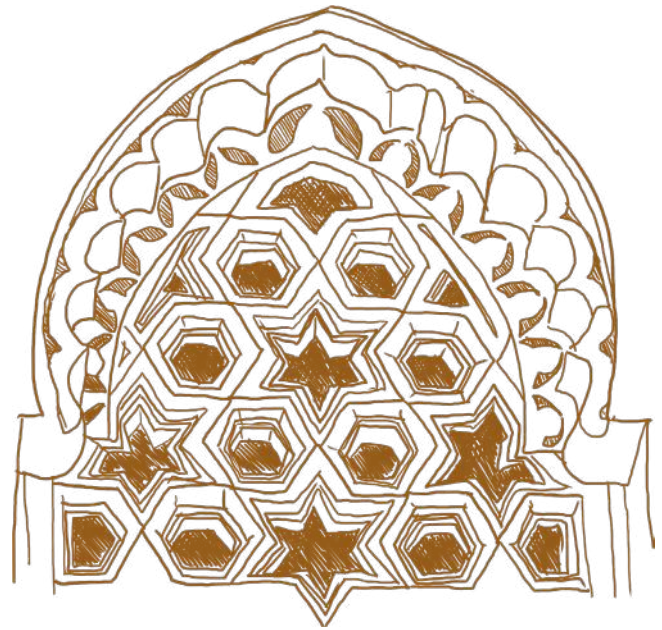
Guiding Questions

- Q What are the resource mobilization needs for creating and transitioning work to a new institution? What kinds of financial impacts might the incubating organization contend with?*
- Q Who should be involved in resource mobilization efforts and why?*
- Q What are the values driving your resource mobilization strategy and how does this relate to the change you want to see in the world?*
- Q What kinds of outreach and messaging make sense for different donors, e.g., institutional donors versus individual donors, donors who are already supporting the work versus prospective donors?*

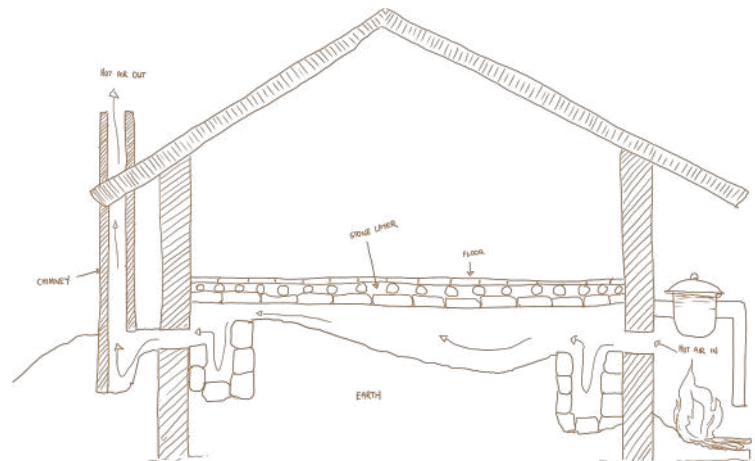
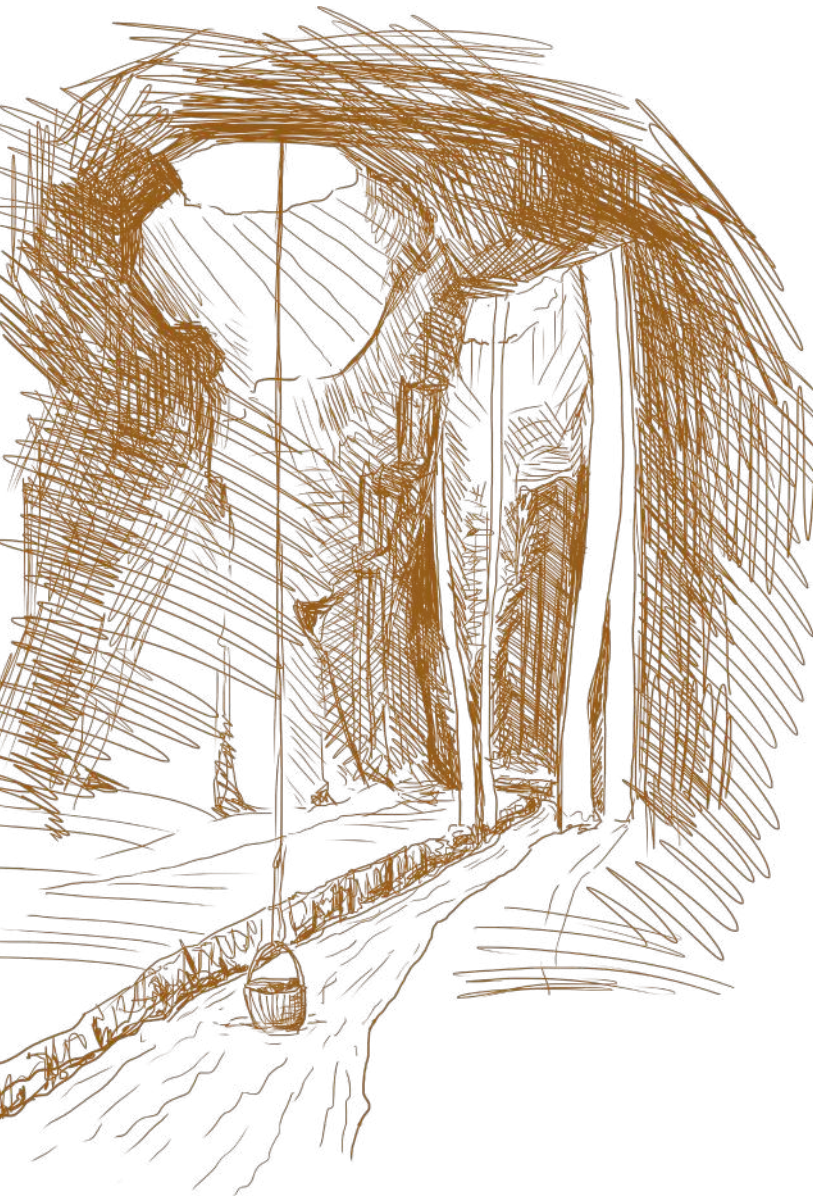


Grantmaking

Asia and the Pacific communities have traditional practices relating to water, heat, and ventilation to ensure the safety and comfort of those in the house. Water is essential for cooking and sanitation, and heat and ventilation ensure the wellbeing of the dwellers against the climate.



Found primarily in India and surrounding regions, jaalis (meaning 'net' or 'mesh' in Hindi and Urdu) are intricately carved lattice screens made from stone, wood, or metal, used for ventilation, light control, privacy, and ornamentation.



Ondol, meaning 'warm stone' in Korean, is a traditional Korean underfloor heating system that has been used for thousands of years.

In Afghanistan, karez or qanat is a water management system used to bring water from underground aquifers to the surface for drinking, agriculture, and even cooling buildings.

Transitioning responsibility for grantmaking from UAF-WHR to the new fund involved transferring information on relationships with advisors and grantees, and communicating about the transition so that prospective grantees would know when and how to contact UAF A&P. At the operational level, preparing UAF A&P to begin grantmaking entailed setting up a bank account in order to receive funds and make grants, hiring staff, setting up systems for the grantmaking process, and developing a grants database.

This knowledge and operational transfer was no small feat since grants to Asia were UAF-WHR's biggest portfolio and the region had the largest body of advisors. UAF-WHR program staff who had been managing grants to Asia and the Pacific supported the team at UAF A&P by walking them through their own grantmaking processes and procedures, and sharing templates and lists of advisors and grantees. A UAF-WHR staff member spent a week in the Philippines to provide more in-depth, in-person training. The UAF A&P team also began its own outreach and creating their own relationships, expanding and diversifying the pool of advisors in the region.

One of the big questions the Steering Committee tackled was about how to structure the transition of grantmaking from one body to the other. As captured in meeting notes from 2017, "Is a gradual transition possible or does it need to occur all at once? If the latter, how can UAF be supportive to ensure maximum effectiveness and least disruption for grantees and donors?" The decision was ultimately to try and stagger the transition, so as not to overwhelm the process.

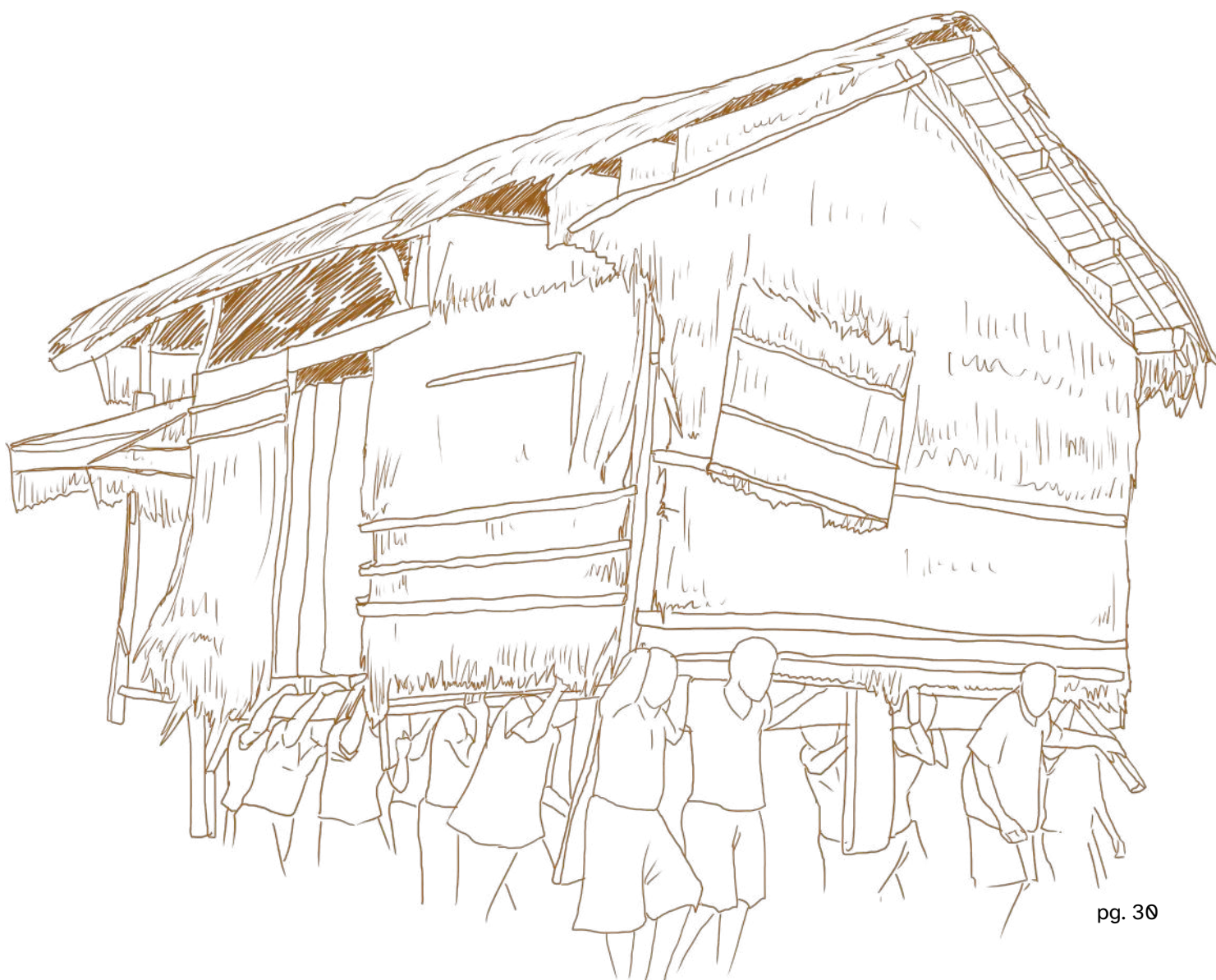
Given limited staff capacity at the beginning of 2018, UAF A&P initially limited its grantmaking to the Philippines and Indonesia, where the team had the most experience and connections. Registering in and leading grantmaking from the Philippines may have sustained the pattern of a higher number of grants being made in the country but also influenced the fund's work more broadly. As UAF A&P Co-Lead Vinita Sahasranaman reflected, "The fund's birth and genesis in the Philippines, has always made our grasp on civil and political rights very, very strong because of the history of feminist organizing around these issues. This flows through today, even as the teams and our work across locations expanded." Through outreach and consultations, and by bringing on new staff in new places, the team gradually built their understandings of crisis and risk in different countries and contexts, and expanded their capacity to support the grantmaking they envisioned across Asia and the Pacific. Diversifying the team diversified the grantmaking.

While the decision to limit the geographic reach of grantmaking initially was a practical one, it was not without challenges. The transition caused anxiety and confusion for some advisors, movement leaders, and organizations. The new sister fund's response time was initially slower. There were gaps in geographic coverage that lasted six months to a year as the operational handover took place. Part of this challenge was that Asia (less so the Pacific) was such a large part of UAF-WHR's grantmaking; more than half of UAF-WHR's grants over the previous years had been to activists in Asia. With the transition to UAF A&P, the number of grants declined before the new fund had the staff capacity and financial resources to enable them to grow again and cover all of the countries previously covered by UAF-WHR. Lastly, several people reflected how important communication is

in transition, especially to the grantee partners and advisors who are also experiencing the handover. These challenges are a reminder that, even when well-planned, there will be difficulties in localizing and decolonizing systems, and that it is vital to share lessons learned from the process.

Guiding Questions

- Q What are your goals for transferring grantmaking responsibilities from one entity to another? What kind of timeline, staff support, and resources are needed to meet those goals?*
- Q What kinds of infrastructure do you need to have in place to start grantmaking?*
- Q What are your goals in communicating with various stakeholders (grantees, advisors, other partners) about the transition? What information do you need to share to manage expectations and anxieties? What forms of communication will feel true to the spirit of the process and reach them most effectively?*



Illustrations and layout by Veshalini Naidu.

Veshalini Naidu (they/them) is a queer, disabled, Malaysian Indian justice-based multidisciplinary artist, designing for advocacy groups and non-profits such as Oxfam Novib, IWRAW, and the American LGBTQ Museum.

[Click here for the full list of design references](#)
or scan this QR code.

