

* The Living Edge *

Cultivating Pacific and Asia Feminist Futures Through Change

UAF A&P Annual Learning Report 2025



Prologue

Intertidal zones are where land meets sea. They are places of constant movement, shaped by the ebb and flow of the tides. Life thrives here not despite change, but because of it. Much of our work feels like this. We work at the intersections of movements, communities, and ideas, where uncertainty is constant and relationships matter most. Our Annual Learning Report 2025 is an anthology of short essays on what we learned from working at this living edge and how these lessons continue to guide us.

Intertidal zones are also home to a remarkable diversity of sea creatures and micro-organisms. Much like human rights activists and defenders across our regions, they are vital to the health of the wider ecosystem, even when hidden in plain sight. At low tide, these zones emerge; at high tide, they disappear beneath the water, revealing different rhythms of activity and allowing different creatures to take over in ‘shifts.’ There is a similar rhythm to the work of human rights activists and defenders. As some step into the frontlines, others hold space for collective care and rest, creating the conditions for people and movements to restore, regenerate, and return. Some of the essays in this anthology reflect on these different forms of work, and on how they sustain one another.

In a world increasingly threatened by extractivism and commodification—whether through land reclamation that takes over intertidal zones or private capital taking over political systems—it is more important than ever to support diverse forms of resistance: physically, materially, and

emotionally. This means paying attention not only to those at the frontlines, but also to the quieter, often unseen work that sustains movements: the everyday acts of care, the creation of spaces for rest, and the careful, continuous nurturing of relationships. Together, these are what allow an ecosystem to thrive—and what make it possible for us to build and sustain one, together.

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Beyond Scarcity: Feminist Questions on Money, Movement, and Governance

By Dana, Board Member

Money has never felt neutral in feminist and queer lives. Many of us grew up being told to keep our distance from it. We weren't encouraged to see ourselves as people who could shape wealth, manage resources, or make decisions about our financial futures. More often, we were expected to stretch what little we had, justify every need, or go without.

For many women, queer, and trans people, money appears as a limit rather than power. Some learned early that money belonged to fathers, institutions, or experts. Others found that access could disappear if we became too outspoken, political, gender-nonconforming, disabled, or simply too visible. For women with disabilities, especially, financial agency is denied through assumptions of incompetence, control by others, or being seen as a burden instead of a contributor. These private lessons follow us into movement spaces as well.

We're bold when we talk about violence, authoritarianism, backlash, reproductive justice, and collective survival. We know how to name systems and challenge them. But when it comes to money, we go quiet. We skirt around it. We shrink the conversation to fundraising, and put off harder questions about governance. Most often, we only talk about money when there's not enough.

This pattern has become even clearer in the past two years. With major donors pulling back from feminist work and private philanthropy hesitating, our movements are surrounded by panic about scarcity. Scarcity is real, but what happens when it becomes the only reason we talk about money? What politics do we lose when every financial conversation starts with an emergency?

Beyond survival, do feminist and queer movements need a healthier relationship with money? Not just with funding, but with money as structure, governance, infrastructure,

and power. What would it mean to see money not only as denied, but also as something we must learn to shape, politically?

That question opens many others.

Where does money come from? Feminist movements have mostly been recipients of other people's money, not actors shaping wealth, holding assets, or making investment decisions. But major gifts, such as those from Mackenzie Scott, have enabled some organisations to hold assets in new ways.

What does it mean for movement organisations to own assets, not just receive grants? When groups build reserves or investments, how are these resources understood?

For Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific, these questions are not theoretical. As we make decisions about holding assets, seeking advice, choosing institutions, and keeping adaptive in our investment approach, we are learning how to integrate financial practice with feminist politics. ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) guidelines can be useful, but require scrutiny. Can investing itself become part of feminist activism: a way to support sustainability and positive change, rather than letting financial institutions profit from our money while we lose autonomy over how it is used? Our learning is evolving, but it raises a broader question: how can feminist organisations steward resources to strengthen autonomy, resilience, and accountability to movements?

Another question is - how does money move? Financial infrastructure wasn't built with activists in mind. Often, it was built to control us. Anti-money laundering rules, NGO laws, banking restrictions, and compliance systems limit resources, especially across borders. Scarcity isn't just about not having enough money; the system itself helps create it. What alternative infrastructure have movements built to keep resources circulating? What can we learn from feminist funds and fiscal sponsorship models that have long worked in these gaps? And have we failed to treat financial infrastructure as a political issue until access tightens, transfers are blocked, and a crisis makes it impossible to ignore?

Then there's governance within our own organisations. If feminist politics are supposed to shape

how we work, what would it look like to take that seriously in our financial decisions, too? Not just in mission statements, but in reserve policies, investment choices, spending priorities, approval processes, and who gets access to financial information. Who makes money decisions? Who's expected to understand the numbers? Whose financial agency is assumed, and whose is questioned?

Maybe this moment is forcing us to face overdue questions about our relationship to money: how do we understand it, govern it, move it, and build financial power differently?



Built to Disrupt, Not Repeat

By Vinita Sahasranaman and Virisila Buadromo, Co-Leads

Every year invites reflection. With the guidance of our writing coach and a handful of curious prompts, several runaway trains of thought about the past year left the station. Their destinations remain unknown, but the journey offered an opportunity to reflect on what has passed and crane our necks toward the horizon ahead—to notice what is already coming into view, what still lingers just beyond sight, and which questions and dreams deserve a longer journey before they reveal themselves.

2025 was a big year. UAF A&P crossed a new milestone in grantmaking. You began tough negotiations for more resources. You tested new programmatic ideas. As you traversed the year, what was the mantra you kept close to you?

Virisila: Our premise and why we exist in this world is how I find my direction when I am surrounded by white noise that is the world today. The premise of UAF A&P—to build solidarity economies—is so powerful, it invites people both within and outside the organisation to participate in its success. Connections become relationships nourished with care, creativity, and joy. The critical feedback we receive comes from a place of love. It challenges us to expand our horizons and address dissonance with action.

The fabric of UAF A&P is interwoven with the collective efforts of activists, visionaries, doers, and dreamers. Activists who articulated that they deserved resources for their well-being, safety, creative imagination, and not just their human rights defence work. Doers who facilitated resources to be moved to activists safely, without red tape and the necessity of a formal funding round. Visionaries who imagined ways of mobilising new kinds of resources, insisting that a majority of it should come from our regions, while at the same time continuing to get funding from the minority world and viewing it as reparation.

Vinita: So true. I often remind myself of our core value: “Defenders First, Always.” We are committed to the safety of those who extend themselves to fight for the planet and its people on behalf of the rest of us. We are committed to supporting activists. After all, it is people’s activism

that has won countries their independence from colonialism. It has birthed new laws that reorganised power and brought with it a whole array of issues that laid down the foundations of how we live, who we love, what we transact, how we live our lives, and how we move across territories. [Law is the codification of the moral imagination](#) and it is activists who have done this work of imagining a different world order, articulating it in words, and fighting for those rights to be realised for both people and the planet. What would this world be without activism?

What has this work cost the team this past year? What has it given back?

Virisila: I prefer the word choices over cost, mainly because I am uncomfortable with always associating value to commodification. This past year, some of the choices we made meant that we invested more emotional, intellectual, and physical labour in resolving or fixing harm caused by me not speaking my truth.

A clear example of this was at our 'On Crisis and Care' convening in Brazil in May 2025, where we played a role in rescinding an invitation to two activists who we had initially invited to address the gathering. We had our reasons for this, but the decision received a lot of backlash and led to months of walking around on eggshells, and being called out by advisors and feminist allies who reminded us that we were not being true to our politics and were standing on the wrong side of history. On reflection, we recognise that our need to be in formation rather than step out of line meant that, as Co-Leads, we were focused on the rehabilitation of community relations for almost a year.

As time has passed and some repairs have been made, we realise that communities and collectives grow when everyone makes the choice to keep us focused on what matters, and not what is screaming for attention in the moment. We have learned to resolve conflict in kind and generative ways, and recognised that some of the issues will need more space and time to untangle and make sense. We admitted where we fell short and asked for help. Our team and Board responded in solidarity, co-responsibility, and with clarity—helping us identify our blind spots and proposing strategies to minimise risk to UAF A&P and our Urgent Action Funds sisterhood.

Vinita: I think what the past year has given back to us is an enormous amount of confidence.

A colleague of ours is in touch with independent journalists who are reporting difficult truths that would otherwise go unreported and unheard. Through her, these diligent people have found out that an option exists that can support them to bear the financial burden of telling these stories. We have a sense that this work—that is her invisible labor—gives her back a sense of purpose. This is not what her work role requires her to do and we are sure it stretches her day. We also know that it gives her some assurance that as this world erupts in fire, she is watering some corner of it.

The cost of doing this work is felt in our bodies over a long period of time. Even though daily episodes of exhaustion can be overcome by precious naps, time with friends, eating and cooking delicious food, binge watching TV, and swimming, the vicarious trauma lives in our bodies. It shows up from time to time in different ways—intense period cramps, sleeplessness, headaches, joint pains, reduced immunity—all signs of what we carry in our body.

Yet, we can never forget the privilege of our position—that we are not the ones on the frontlines. This thought and reality sits within us at all times—making us oscillate between giving ourselves the care we need and responding to the urgent demands we have to meet everyday.

What does the future look like? Imagine the world you are working towards in sensory terms: What do you see, smell, hear, and feel?

Vinita: I smell smoke. The immediate future does not smell like a bed of roses. I reckon the next 15-20 years are going to be messy and chaotic. The oligarchs will continue to build their empires. The continuing chaos will appear on our timelines. I think there is a whole new world order emerging—I don't know what this is. But I feel the current powers will continue to disrupt and end lives. The collective loss, grief, and rage will fuel (like it has in the past) the demand for an order that makes sense in these times. I sense we are living in an era where some of us have seen fundamental transformations in the world: from monarchy to democracy; private ownership to common good; colonisation to decolonisation and re-colonisation. It has taken centuries for new world orders, or iterations of it, to emerge, stay steady, and morph into newer forms of power and privilege.

What remains central is how we, as UAF A&P, shape-shift in these times. I have known for a while that while our premise still remains relevant in this reckless world, our methods may not take us to our future. In light of this, how do we reorganise our relationship with

capital? How do we disrupt this expansion of the empire? And how do we remain true to our purpose in this world? It's going to be an exciting ride.

Virisila: I can hear the future. She sounds like a roaring river winding down into a crashing waterfall that feeds into different tributaries and estuaries that nourish different kinds of landscapes. They vary from vineyards and olive groves to desert-like mountains and hills straight off a Dune movie set, and in the distance you see emerging ecosystems of thriving communities. I see animals, people, and flora co-existing in interdependence, and yet, seem content to just 'be'. That quiet joy in simply being... smells of freedom and hope. It reminds me of freshly-cut grass mixed with sundried and crisp laundry. As I inhale, a soft smile of nostalgia is quickly replaced by the excitement of uncertainty that the future brings.

What keeps you going?

Vinita: The fearlessness and everydayness of UAF A&P. Our birth foregrounds fearlessness—makes it a pre-requisite. That is just magical. And it flows right through us.

When people show up the way we do at work, it is bound to be audacious. The audacity of work, of excellence, of common sense, of the whimsical. We show up, not as exhausted martyrs but as replenished bodies. Sometimes depleted, mostly joyful.

Virisila: Joy, creativity, and care. Breathing life into a dream is a special kind of joy. Watching the fruits of that work—glistening and ripe -- and ready to be harvested and shared with the community who showed up, stood by our side, and worked with us is so rewarding. Together, we offer our time, care, creativity, and love, because ultimately relationships are both the glue that keeps us together and the fuel that drives UAF A&P forward. That connection and collaboration is how dreams become reality.



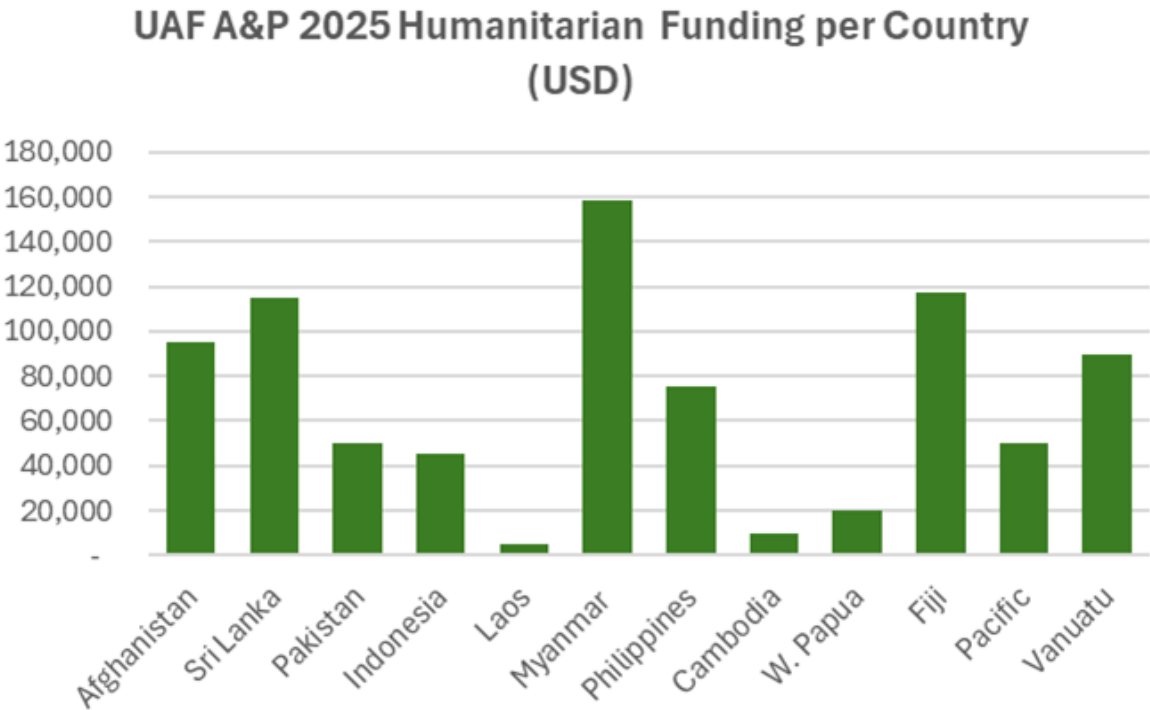
From Relief to Resilience

By Chae Yeon Kim, Data and Storytelling Facilitator and Vinita Sahasranaman, Co-Lead

As conflict, political repression, and climate change intensified in 2025, communities and activists found themselves on the front lines of escalating disasters. Women, transgender, and non-binary defenders, in particular, faced the compounded effects of the climate crisis and a succession of natural disasters that swept through both regions—from earthquakes in Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Vanuatu, to typhoons, cyclones, and massive flooding and landslides in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Other crises compounded to create a disproportionate impact on communities already dealing with ongoing conflict and violence, displacement, climate change, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

In response to this, in 2025, we expanded our humanitarian grants to support communities responding to immediate crises, stemming from our COVID grants and specific grants for natural disasters. We made 99 humanitarian grants to 11 countries, totalling USD 850,755. This comprised a quarter of our total grantmaking for the calendar year.

Our humanitarian grantmaking supported organisations working across diverse movements and on intersectional issues, such as economic justice, Indigenous rights, climate and energy justice, LGBTQIA+ advocacy, and organisations for persons with disabilities.



*'Pacific' represents grants disbursed to a Pacific Islands coalition that includes Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu.

The Impact of Feminist Crisis Response

We embarked on a steep learning curve in 2024 when we began giving humanitarian support. 2025 was a year of putting learning into practice. Drawing on lessons from the Vanuatu earthquake response in December 2024, we were able to mobilise internal resources even more rapidly after the Myanmar earthquake on March 28, 2025, disbursing the first grant within three days to 80 affected women-led households and LGBTQI individuals. In the next 43 days, 20 emergency grants were successfully disbursed to our partner communities in the affected areas.

Feminist crisis response actively shifts power to women, transgender, and nonbinary activists and organisations that have been marginalised in mainstream crisis response.

Activists are working towards transforming relations that make up our current realities—intimate, local, and global—to lead towards a collective liberation. This transforms the very structures that impact how a crisis is experienced, and builds the resilience that comes from showing up for each other with care. Feminist crisis response produces change at several levels, including

short-term crisis response, preparedness and risk reduction, recovery, and addressing structural inequalities.

Our humanitarian grants contributed to strengthened capacities and networks for community-driven disaster response. Grantees noted strengthened safety and disaster protocols allowing for continued organisational operations and strengthened solidarity, allowing for communities to better respond to future crises.

The grants also allowed for community members to temporarily draw back from activism in order to evade risk by providing some of their needs in the meantime. Grantees felt better prepared for future risk and an opportunity to plan for the future by ensuring basic survival needs.

"UAF A&P's grant didn't just provide resources; it restored a sense of safety, connection, and dignity when it was most needed. This grant is more than financial aid—it is a symbol of trust and an anchor for our ongoing efforts to create a future where our community's humanity is recognized and valued." - Grantee from Vanuatu

Grantees stressed the need to reach communities excluded from humanitarian response, particularly for LGBTQI communities and people with disabilities. In Myanmar, we supported an organisation providing LGBTQI survivors of the earthquake with emergency cash support, which was used to purchase basic survival needs such as food and waterproof materials for shelter. In addition to addressing such urgent needs, the grant contributed to the recovery process by enabling the purchase of home repair materials and restarting economic activities. Moreover, the grant provided a renewed sense of identity, dignity, and inclusion, reinforcing that support is available for LGBTQI communities in crisis.

Grantees also felt that they were able to reinforce their mission and find renewed motivation to continue their activism. For some activists, the immediate support received was an affirmation of dignity and inclusion, and enabled them to continue recovery and their roles in community leadership.

Combined with the diverse types of organisations supported across several intersecting movements, humanitarian grants for activist organisations not only has an impact on emergency relief, but strengthening movements and addressing the very structural inequalities that affect how a crisis is disproportionately experienced.

Resourcing Crisis Response

While we navigated programmatic learning and developed our understanding of feminist crisis response, we also embarked on a steep learning curve on humanitarian resourcing.

Global figures on humanitarian aid cuts are alarming. Cuts in international humanitarian funding by many of the top government donors in 2024 delivered the biggest drop ever recorded. Further reductions were announced in 2025, with forecasts of a further contraction of 34-45% in funding. This meant that resourcing grassroots, women, and gender-diverse led organisations have been drastic. Even before the cuts, across all development and humanitarian sectors, WLOs (including Women's Rights Organisations, or WROs) receive just 0.3% to 0.6% of total bilateral allocable aid¹. Reforms to increase effectiveness, such as funding to local and national actors and anticipatory action, have also seen stagnation and reversal—a trend that upcoming cuts may serve to accelerate if left unchecked².

Even though the humanitarian sector committed to a “reset”, there is little progress. Financial pushbacks have watered down these intentions to support women and gender-diverse led groups that do the real work of humanitarian action. Bureaucracy and complex processes behind securing relatively smaller pots of money remain one the biggest reasons.

Feminist crisis response is not easy—it is difficult to do things differently in a world where money reigns, big donors set the agenda, and the mainstream humanitarian sector remains resistant to change. These learnings are critical for us in continuing to make a case for investing into a feminist humanitarian response.

In spite of global funding cuts, we received two grants from two separate bilateral organisations for humanitarian relief work. We were able to respond more efficiently to real-time humanitarian events in the scenario where our donor relationship was backed by trust, non-bureaucratic ways of working, and cumulative reporting of our impact rather than driven by short-term visions and objectives.

¹ [Why Wait? How the Humanitarian System Can Better Fund Women-Led and Women's Rights Organisations](#), International Rescue Committee

² [Global Humanitarian Assistance](#), ALNAP 2025

Continuing the journey

Feminist crisis response is built on strong foundations of trust and care, which allows for a timely and effective response to crisis that enables adaptability, boldness, and risk-taking.

Grantees' existing relationships and networks facilitated the effectiveness of their support for communities, showing the impact of building and maintaining relationships on multiple levels, not only for us as a funder but reinforcing our convening and learning activities, which facilitate relationship-building between movements and activists. Similarly, our own networks of trust, such as with donors, extended to our crisis response operations and allowed us to take risks that otherwise would not have been possible.

So, what if we re-frame the discourse of crisis response into one that is about regeneration and a driver of structural change? Our humanitarian grantmaking shows us that flexible grantmaking to trusted partners not only ensures a timely response to crisis, but also addresses existing structural barriers and inequalities to accessing support, and results in an effective and inclusive response due to already being embedded in the community. This links immediate crisis response with long-term recovery, reinforces the long-term mission of feminist organisations and movements, and strengthens local networks.

We know that humanitarian crises—both in sudden onset of disasters (natural and human-made) and prolonged contexts—will continue in a world where war is becoming normalised, multi-lateralism is breaking down, impunity is pervasive, and the global order itself seems to be unraveling. We will continue to deliver a feminist humanitarian response that is rooted in the ethics of crisis and care and meets the immediate and long-term needs of social justice activists and movements.



Care is Relational

By Jebli Shrestha, Enabling Defenders Facilitator and Maki, Enabling Defenders Associate

2025 has been a year of collective interrogation of what “care” really means for us as a funder and for the movements we resource. In our five years of working with women, trans, and non-binary human rights activists and defenders, we have not reached a set definition of what ‘Webs of Safety and Care’ (one of our grant categories) means. However, one clear message has emerged time and again as we deepened our accompaniment work with our grantees — that **the most critical infrastructure of care is relational.**

It is the web of relationships built and nurtured through trust, shared commitment, collaborative campaigns and programmes, and held with care that form the foundation of all webs of safety and care infrastructure. Deepening this web with our grantees, and resourcing them to extend it to their own communities, has helped us develop a deeper understanding of what relational work entails and why it is so critical today.

Webs of Relationship as Crisis Response Systems

Relational web of care is the infrastructure that springs into action to respond immediately when a crisis strikes, allowing communities to withstand, survive, and rebuild themselves.

Whether it was during the ethnic violence in Manipur, India or the continued persecution faced by Lumad communities in the Philippines, activists and their communities have been supported and protected by their trusted network of family, friends, and community members. Whether it was activists from Myanmar relocating for their safety or those in Hong Kong taking a pause to cope with overwhelming mental and emotional stress, both anchored themselves in the love and support extended by their trusted networks in times of need. It is these webs of relationships that accompany activists and their communities through the journey of healing — the process of

“reclaiming power for themselves”, “exacting accountability” from perpetrators, harnessing the “ability to dream again”, and imagining an alternative world.

We were shred to pieces,
like a raided nest
Some leaders lost, others rushed to
sanctuaries
Where life is not guaranteed,
but at least safety is
We have lingered out too long,
elusive is our return
For Death is a sword over our heads

Yet here we stand, despite the dread,
A force unwavering, Hope never dimmed.
To organisations, we reach with grace,
Retracing our paths to reclaim our place,
Together we rise, stewards bold,
Our voices heard, our Land locked-in-arms
indivisible from our self-determination, our right

Until triumph is ours to hold!

– Indigenous chant from a Subanen tribal community during the safety and well-being assessment part of our Webs of Safety and Care Grant

We realised how little these relationships ask of us to continue to exist, nurture, and sustain themselves. Sometimes they emerge as chat groups formed after an online or in-person convening and become seeds for a longer relational web to take root. Exchanges of solidarity,

resources, advice, and simple reminders to each other give activists the confidence that their peers have their back. However, for these relationships to bloom, more such spaces created with care and trust need to be seeded. Yet, this infrastructure of care is least understood, recognized, and resourced.

We often hear from our grantees that our Webs of Safety and Care grant was the first time they received funding to sit down and talk to each other about their needs—an experience they found profoundly validating.

“Participants shared how grateful they were for these opportunities, which helped them understand the importance of collective care and well-being, and to think more intentionally about their safety as human rights defenders. For many, this was a completely new experience.”

– Webs of Safety and Care Grantee from Southeast Asia

“The hybrid safety and care assessment allowed 30 youth to collectively map their threats, needs, and existing coping strategies. Many of them had already faced red-tagging, threats, displacement, and burnout. Because of this, the safety and care assessment went beyond technical documentation—it became a space of collective truth-telling, healing, and organizing ... of validation, and connection. For many participants, this was the first time they saw their pain and courage reflected back to them by a community that understands.”

– Webs of Safety and Care Grantee from Southeast Asia

“Midwives are used to holding others—holding labouring women, holding terrified families, holding communities when water levels rise or when snow traps them indoors..... The healing circles, story-based activities, and reflective exercises acknowledged that their bodies, too, carry trauma, and that their nervous systems are shaped by the same disasters they navigate for others.”

– Webs of Safety and Care Grantee from South Asia

Those Who Hold, and Those Who Are Held

For many years, we were perplexed by the persistent gap between the clear need for mental health support and the uptake of available resources. To better understand this disconnect, we

brought together healers, mental health practitioners, and our grantee partners. Through these conversations, we explored how the concept of “care” is often narrowly understood as mental health support provided by external experts. While mental health support for defenders is undoubtedly an urgent need, it remains heavily under-resourced and difficult to access. This challenge is further compounded by the stigma that continues to surround seeking such support.

At the same time, the stories shared by our grantee partners have shown us that there is no singular path to safety and care. While recognizing the critical importance of professional mental health services, particularly in times of acute need, we also invite reflection on how we might understand and talk about care and healing beyond the lens of mental health alone.

Care can be found everywhere, not only in professional settings. It can manifest through small acts of self-affirmation as well as collective gestures of support, friendship, and communities showing up for one another.

We were therefore not surprised to see collective spaces for expressions of grief, solidarity, and joy become an oasis where the journey of collective healing could continue. As one participant shared, *“We hold the session for an hour, but even three hours later, people still do not have any intention of leaving.”*

Whether physical or virtual, spaces grounded in trust and care—where people can safely express themselves, share and listen, and reflect on their physical, mental, and emotional needs—are critical nodes in infrastructures of care. It is within these spaces that trust takes root, peer support emerges, and webs of care are built. Resourcing those who hold these spaces—as healers and facilitators of care—is integral to strengthening the web of care, and the broader ecosystem that sustains activists and their movements.

Many of those who hold space as movement healers often find themselves isolated in their own healing journeys. Despite the critical support they provide to activists and movements, they are rarely resourced for this work. Many step into these roles because of their position within a community or the skills they possess, and may not even identify themselves as “healers.”

As one participant at our second healers convening shared, *“Care work is automatically allocated to feminist activists in social movements, which [then] becomes a double burden for them.”* This highlights how the responsibility of caring for others often falls on those who are themselves navigating significant personal and political demands.

There is a clear need for healers to have spaces held specifically for them—spaces where they can share their experiences and needs, learn from one another, exchange tools, and find community.

Investing in Ecosystems of Care

As feminist movements face multiple and overlapping crises, from political repression and climate change to internal movement challenges, sustaining those who care for and heal activists is itself a critical task. Investing in the spaces, relationships, care, and resources that support healers is essential to strengthening the broader ecosystem of care that sustains movements.

As another healer shared, *"I have a real feeling of sadness for the fact that we want to connect, but we don't have the time or energy to do so"*. Their reflection captures a difficult reality: the very conditions that make healing work so necessary—crisis, conflict, under-resourced movements, and systemic violence—also make it incredibly difficult to sustain the healers themselves.

Resourcing spaces like these for activists and healers, as well as the broader ecosystems that sustain movements, generates impacts that extend far beyond any single event. It is an investment in relationships, the often-invisible labour of care, collective dreams and aspirations, and the possibility of imagining a world centered around care.

Ultimately, what we choose to fund shapes what becomes possible. The priorities we resource today help determine the kinds of communities, movements, and futures we are able to build tomorrow.



Reclaiming the Stories We Live By

By Deepthy Menon, Strategy and Narratives Facilitator

Waves of colonisations, forced migrations, and assimilations have shaped distinctive cultures, but it's come at a steep cost – erasure of Indigenous cultures, traditional practices, and ways of being and knowing. Along with the erasure, came the stigma of othering, of being on the wrong side of practices that were first introduced and then imposed by foreign colonisers. Cultures of the land transformed over years and centuries, and our languages became living witnesses, the scars that healed during adaptation and adoption of new identities and ways of living.

Working with artists from across the Pacific and Asia committed to documenting that which has been erased, forgotten, censored, or cast aside has been an uphill task of rebuilding trust and resourcing communities at their most vulnerable and sensitive intersections.

However, it offered us a glimpse of what it takes to support communities to bring alive their resilient roots to hold humanity together when political, ecological, and social crises threaten to upend our very existence.

Seeking roots for stability amid chaos

We are still in the process of figuring out new grammar and lexicons – the *'what it takes'* to live amid genocides, political coups, and wars. Add ecological instabilities to all of the above, it creates impossible conditions to survive and/or thrive. Over the past couple of years, our resourcing experiments that embed art, care and embodied knowledge in communities reveal that there are ways back to the forgotten roots that have kept communities resilient. Roots, that like the undergrowth in dense jungles formed the solid base on which grew massive trees for hundreds of years, which then tangled and intermingled to offer nurturing canopies for all forms of life to thrive.

Artists of our Shift the Narrative fellowship are doing the deep work of examining the forgotten roots of practices, and bringing back the wisdom and deep communal care that got lost along with the ceased practices.

A fellow in the Philippines is exploring how memories reside in the body when the mind forgets. What new meanings emerge when forgotten songs and poems resurface and are re-learned?

“Cultural work is never neutral. It is situated within a broader field of political struggle, where questions of identity, representation, power, and access are constantly negotiated....[we are trying to see] how memory can resurface and be reconstructed within the community through the re-learning and re-embodiment of sounds and music, including those accessed through recordings.”

Another fellow working in a very restrictive context where queer activism remains entirely subaltern relies on the strong networks that allow for queer communities to find joy in the shadows of activities that are conventionally accepted and publicly visible.

“This is also about preserving memory, rather than being entirely dependent on algorithms, censorship, and platform logics. And more importantly, it’s about protecting our labour. When carefully written and designed work gets deleted without a trace, it’s not just frustrating; it’s one of the reasons many activists feel exhausted. For us, this is also a form of ‘memory infrastructure’ under platform authoritarianism.”

In the many tongues and forms of our ancestors

A few fellows from Southeast Asia went back to the Indigenous communities of their lands to learn more about the practices of their ancestors, which many keep alive by passing it on orally from generation to generation. Across Indonesian and Malay Bahasa, it is referred to as *Gotong Royong*, a way to jointly share burdens in mutual assistance and cooperation, while working towards a common goal.

In the Pacific, Fijian Indigenous groups call it *Solesolevaki*, the value of reciprocity that guides the give and take that happens within the community, which governs the spirit of communal bonds. The same sentiments of community solidarity and kinship reflects as *Fetokoni’aki* and *Tauhi Vā* in Tonga, and in Vanuatu pidgin as *Kastom* and the *Wantok* system. Tracing back along the Austronesian migration lines to the Pacific, the community spirit, when spoken of in Tagalog becomes *Bayanihan*—the unspoken unpaid ways in which community members come together to

serve and support one another or Saluhan, a concept that connotes having each other's backs, catching one another, gathering, and sharing.

In Khmu, the language spoken by an Indigenous community of Laos, it's referred to as Ruam Raeng Ruam hrung yeuom yor, that loosely translates to solidarity among community members, and unity of heart, the term used to encourage each other and unite as a group to strive for a communal goal. In Myanmar, the Karen communities live by the deep value of Huu Huu Poe Poe (ဟူဟူပိုးပိုး), and the communal spirit မာတုကီးတၢ်လၢတၢ်သးတဖျါၣ်ဃီ - Ma Tha Koe Talel Ta Tha Ta Palel Kaw that has seen them through hard times traversing coups and earthquakes, and loss of various kinds of freedoms.

Many of these words don't translate well into English, for the sentiments and the community values it stands for are deeply contextual, smell of the lands and people they belong to. Communities that are far from urban centres and/or have their distinctive language or dialects still preserve and transfer knowledge across generations through embodied practice, songs, dances or other cultural practices. From Malaysia to West Papua, the work of these artists with community members are now ensuring the communities are able to revive and document collective memories of how strong the roots go, and the stories that tell them where to prepare ground, and plant new seeds and when.

The deep interlinkages of principles and values, and the soft power of art was summed up thus by a fellow from our cohort, *"These modes offer indirect yet potent ways of engaging with oppression and repression, particularly in contexts shaped by militarisation, where both communities and cultural workers are rendered vulnerable to harm and danger."*

The contexts that most of the artists' work in ironically is also a unifying factor. Scarce resourcing from the state or other community bodies, limited severely by censorship and oppression if the storytelling does not align with state-sanctioned versions, and all of the above compounded by physical and ecological precarity. Safety nets are hardly available, and the canopies seeded by the struggles of generations that preceded us rapidly dwindling. But the roots still hold memories of how to nurture, and build up from ground below—from the invisible to the visible.



Tōzhamai: Words, Memory, and Resistance

By Ila Reddy, Strategic Communications Facilitator

At a time when our right to freedom of speech and expression is increasingly under threat, authoritarian governments, oppressive regimes, and capitalist forces are employing all kinds of tactics to suppress voices that challenge the status quo. These manifest as censorship, intimidation, legal repercussions, communal violence, and societal pressures, aiming to stifle dissent and maintain control. Writers, poets, and journalists find themselves at the forefront of a critical battle to preserve fundamental rights and ensure that strategically underrepresented and undervalued voices are heard. Their work has the power to influence thinking, challenge dominant narratives, foster empathy, and add nuance to our understanding of the world.

“The writers I love most are almost always on a mission. To save the world one sentence at a time. To redeem us and rescue back our righteous minds. These writers risk not only the criticism of their peers (as earnestness is said to ruin art) but also the possibility that their words will be mangled and misunderstood. Still they offer up their gifts, hoping, as the brilliant Black feminist Audre Lorde has hoped, that their words can close some of the gap between blindness and our better selves. In other words, these writers do language, but they also do battle. And the battle is on.”

- Julian Aguon, *No Country for Eight-Spot Butterflies*

Writers help us trace the emotional and political landscapes of our times. They capture what it means to live through injustice, displacement, violence, ecological collapse, resistance, solidarity, and hope. In doing so, they create living archives for future generations—archives that carry not just facts, but feeling, context, and humanity. Especially within feminist, queer, anti-caste, Indigenous, and other liberation movements, writing has long served as a tool to reclaim narratives, assert agency, challenge systems of oppression, and imagine more just futures.

Over the past year, we have heard time and again the need for a space to rest, process memories, and write in community. To get away from the day to day and find solace in the written word.

“At this moment in my journey, I need a space to breathe, to process what I have lived through, and to articulate it in ways that can serve both personal healing and collective remembering. I hope to draw strength from the stories of other feminists, and to contribute my own—knowing that our words can be both a balm and a form of protest. ”

- Activist from the Philippines

The act of writing can be deeply personal and restorative. It allows people to process experiences that may otherwise remain buried under silence, shame, exhaustion, or fear. To write is to make sense of ourselves and our place in the world; to name what hurts, what sustains us, and what we long for. In communities shaped by resistance work, where burnout, grief, and urgency are constant companions, spaces for reflective and creative writing become especially vital. They remind us that movements are not sustained by strategy alone, but also by memory, imagination, care, and the ability to tell our own stories in our own words.

“Writing feels like a way to both process and share: to make sense of what I’ve done, to pass something on to others who might walk a similar path, and maybe to uncover what kind of work I want to grow into next.”

- Activist from Taiwan

At our inaugural feminist writing retreat, *Tōzhamai: Words, Memory, and Resistance*, last year, 25 women, trans, and non-binary feminist activist-writers came together to reflect, process, and write about their journeys, joys, fears, dreams, challenges, and learnings as they go about defending both people and the planet.

“I long for a space where my feminist voice, as a Papuan, a writer, and a believer, can breathe without fear. So much of my writing is done in isolation, surrounded by conflict, silence, or resistance from within my own church and society. I see this retreat as a rare moment to rest, reflect, and reconnect with others who share the burden and the beauty of feminist work.”

- Activist from West Papua

Tōzhamai is a Tamil word that signifies friendship, camaraderie, and solidarity. True to this spirit, from the onset of the retreat, participants spoke openly about identity, trauma, loss, political instability, conflict, and insecurity. They held space for each other and listened deeply. They made each other feel seen, heard, understood, and valued.

“When we write together in a safe community that offers acceptance without judgement, we find that we are able to access stories we didn’t know we knew how to tell. Craft gets honed

and we discover our unique writing voice as our most tenacious fears begin to loosen their hold over us.”

- Natasha Badhwar, Writing Retreat Facilitator

Writing is more than an act of self-expression; it is an act of witnessing, remembering, and resisting. In a world that constantly attempts to erase uncomfortable truths, distort histories, and silence those at the margins, writers play a crucial role in documenting what must not be forgotten.

“I carry many stories within me: stories of resistance from Pacific islands facing climate collapse, of feminist organising in shrinking civic spaces, of navigating institutional spaces as a young woman. Yet, too often, these stories remain fragmented, interrupted by deadlines and demands. I am longing for a space where I can write with others who understand — a space where our truths do not need to be translated or justified, where silence can be generative, and where vulnerability is welcomed.”

- Activist from French Polynesia

They remind us that history is not only written in official records and state archives, but also in the everyday experiences, griefs, struggles, and dreams of people.

“I believe that storytelling is a form of resistance—and for communities like mine, it is also a form of survival. As a Hijra activist working with women, sex workers, and gender-diverse individuals, I carry countless untold stories—of pain, resilience, joy, and transformation. This retreat offers a rare space to pause, reflect, and give voice to those narratives in a way that is healing, creative, and strategic.”

- Activist from Bangladesh

Several participants shared that while they had previously written stories of others and for others, the retreat shifted the focus back to them and unlocked a desire to write their own story. They realised that their personal stories are closely linked to their public voice and activism. That sometimes to understand the world around us we first have to understand ourselves.

The Tōzhamai writing retreat reaffirmed for us the importance of creating and nurturing spaces where writing is not treated as an afterthought, but as an essential political and collective practice. Because when people write about their lives, communities, and struggles, they resist erasure. They leave behind traces that say: we were here, we felt deeply, we dreamed, we fought, we survived, and we refused to disappear.



The Thread that Holds: The Power of Transnational Solidarity in an Unraveling World

By Ava Danlog and Celia Turner, Weaving and Activation Team, Urgent Action Sister Funds

When the [Urgent Action Sister Funds](#)³ designed the ‘On Crisis and Care’ Global Convening in Brazil in 2025, we knew the risks involved in bringing together hundreds of activists and donors. Months prior, the Tanzanian government canceled a global feminist meeting just days before it was due to begin. Starting in early 2025, the United States of America weaponized immigration policies, escalated threats against foundations and non-profits working on gender, race, and climate, and dismantled its foreign aid, actions that reverberated to impact social movements globally. With critical safety measures in place, we decided to gather anyway—because in a world that is unraveling, the work of weaving and strengthening connections across borders cannot wait. Crises and threats do not wait.

Our recently launched report, “[Resourcing Strategies in an Age of Permacrisis](#),” a collaborative research project with the [Center for Applied Human Rights, University of York](#), explains the nature of today’s crises. They are continuous, overlapping, and exacerbating one another.

Crises are cross-regional, caused by structural systems that span continents over time, with their impacts spilling far beyond national borders.

We have lived through this during the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent global economic shocks resulting from the war on Iran, for instance. At the same time, threats to activism are also cross-regional. Threats travel as activists move. Authoritarian governments from China to Russia and anti-rights forces share playbooks and coordinate with each other. Meanwhile, the U.S., the Netherlands, and other governments cut funding for gender equality and human rights. These types of tools—ranging from criminalizing certain organisations and identities to digital surveillance, extraterritorial jurisdiction, and cutting off resources—are meant to repress organizing and isolate movements from each other.

³ The Urgent Action Funds is a global consortium of feminist funds providing rapid response grants to women, trans and non-binary human rights defenders. They are composed of UAF Asia and Pacific, UAF for Feminist Activism, UAF Latin America and the Caribbean, and UAF Africa.

If crises and threats are borderless, then resistance and solidarity have to be transnational too.

We recognize that others' struggles are also our own, and that we have a stake in the liberation of others. At the Urgent Action Sister Funds, this shapes how we resource, connect, and show up for movements. For us, relationships (feminist friendships, *acuerpamiento*, feminist accompaniment, reciprocal relationships) are a critical infrastructure for crisis response. Among the eight interwoven types of crisis infrastructure that our report lays out for sustaining movements in the face of permacrisis, solidarity and connection infrastructures are among the most critical, underfunded, and consistently highlighted by feminist activists across regions as priorities. It is powerful, but because it is intangible and hard to measure, it rarely gets funded, and if it does, it gets flattened into something that gets counted, like the number of convenings and participants.

The real substance of solidarity infrastructure is relational and does not show up in a logframe

Trust built over time means a shared vision that lets alliances navigate complexities to move forward, or knowing who to call in Manila or Nairobi when something breaks. We resource spaces where diverse actors—activists, donors, healers, artists—can come together to nurture solidarity and resistance. Feedback from the 'On Crisis and Care Global Convening' shows that participants named the connections formed as its most meaningful outcome, resulting in tangible partnerships and affirming feelings of belonging and solidarity. What we learned is that spaces that nurture collective visioning, learning, and strategizing, as well as shared moments of joy across borders and movements, can be healing and transformative.

We connect activists to each other, to donors, and to other organisations that can provide support that we cannot. We amplify stories from movements to make their work and agendas visible to one another, especially when States and other anti-rights actors try to sever connections. We advocate within the funding sector to shift towards a culture of sharing, to resource collective care, and to build a diverse donor ecosystem that invests holistically in grassroots movements.

Our resourcing follows activists across borders when they are forced into exile. We provide grants, accompaniment, and connections to local resources and communities, so that their activism does not end when they are uprooted. Instead, they grow into a new node, a new

thread, in a transnational network. This takes many faces, and in one recent example, staff members of [Urgent Action Fund for Feminist Activism](#) have formed relationships with activists relocated by Urgent Action Fund Asia & Pacific from Afghanistan to the United States.

This is where the [Urgent Action Sister Funds](#)' solidarity, or our model of relationship—four Funds that are simultaneously independent and interdependent—is also a lasting strength. Each Fund is rooted in their own region, with relationships, trust, and accountability to its movements. This allows us to connect movements, funders, healers, and artists across regions. Four voices, one megaphone, allow us to distribute risks and navigate uncertainties.

It is worth noting, though, that solidarity only holds if there is shared accountability and mutual support. As Sister Funds, we are still learning what that fully means for our relationships with each other and with the movements we serve.

The world is unraveling, and the forces behind this are coordinated, well-resourced, and learning from one another across borders. The response has to be the same.

Divide and conquer is an oppressor's tool to isolate communities and weaken resistance. Ours is transnational solidarity—a growing, stronger web of relationships among diverse actors across regions that survive crisis ruptures, continually learning, supporting, strategizing, resisting, imagining, and dancing together. In these dark times, connection is our protection. Relationship is resistance.



How Can I Sing My Song of Liberation?

By Sarah N Kaut, Rapid Response Grants Facilitator

How can I sing my song of liberation today
When all I hear is the sound of guns
With women wailing as they cover their heads in dirt and blood?

How can I sing my song of liberation today
When all I see is the sight of your daughters
Being slaughtered and thrown in dirt and flood?

Some say that the world has forgotten you
But how could I ever forget you
When we share the same roots of our mama land?

How can I sing my song of liberation with pride
When my heart is deeply troubled by the stories
Of your children being separated from each other?

How can I peacefully raise my flag
When your sons are still fighting to raise the morning star?

Some say that we are two different bodies
But how can I agree with them
When my skin bears the weight of the same color you have?

We are no different, we are one I say
Wounds of my wounds, flesh a reflection of mine
My heart carries nothing but grief and pain
As I watch you from a distance
Being hurt over and over again

**How can I sing my song of liberation as I prepare to sleep
When my sister West Papua is still awake fighting for her song of freedom?**



Disbursing Grants in Moments of Crisis

By Anjali, Rapid Response Grants Associate and Noelene Powell, Resource Mobilisation Facilitator

Across the oceans and skies of Asia and the Pacific, women, trans, and non-binary human rights defenders grapple with escalating risks, including increasing under-resourcing, and diminishing civic spaces. In 2025, we saw a major shift in the structures of civil society organisations and their communities caused by major aid cuts to escalating political tensions across these regions. It was women, trans, and non-binary human right defenders who faced the brunt of this turmoil and the compounded effects of the climate crisis that swept through both regions.

To stay proactive amidst intensifying global pressures, we continued to adapt our strategies to enhance our support to movements, prioritising LGBTQI+ rights, climate justice, rapid humanitarian response, and the urgent needs of defenders with disabilities and refugee communities.

Since our inception in January 2018 until the end of December 2025, we have disbursed 2,900 grants worth \$14,309,268 to women, trans, and non-binary human rights activists and defenders in 41 countries of Asia and the Pacific.

In 2025, our grant-making exceeded the previous year's record by 19% (totalling over USD 3.4 million) and we disbursed 627 grants across 29 countries, averaging 53 applications a month. Our reach also widened geographically, where we funded grants to 3 new countries: Japan, Tuvalu, and an Indigenous collective in Hawai'i. To add further context to the picture, we received a total of 1,291 applications on our database last year averaging 101 applications per month, and 23 applications a week.

Grants to LGBTQ+ activists doubled last year, rising to 34% of disbursements from 17% in 2024. This sharp rise reflects the consequences of funding cuts and systemic neglect of this sector. Similarly, grants to climate activists doubled. This shift demonstrates both the unfolding and escalating climate impacts disproportionately affecting marginalised communities in these regions. In 2025, 16% of all grant-making supported environmental and climate justice defenders, up from 8% in 2024.

Support to defenders with disabilities rose by 36% in 2025, reaching 11 grants, with the majority to South Asia and the Pacific. The 2024 landscape mapping of disability groups in Asia has already strengthened our reach in this sector.

In terms of regional distribution, grants to South Asia remained the highest - 46%, followed by Southeast Asia at 34%, Pacific 15% and East Asia 5%. Grants to South Asia rose by 30% year on year, driven largely by increased support to LGBTQI+ communities in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, as well as humanitarian response following the severe floods in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

In 2025, we also disbursed the most number of Webs of Safety and Care (WSC) grants—51 grants totalling USD 481,000 to grantees in 19 countries across Asia and the Pacific, including 8 grants bolstering collective care infrastructure in defender communities.

Across our Rapid Response grants, over 70% of applications received were for Security and Well-being grants (SWB). 86% of these reported life-threatening attacks, including torture, forced disappearance, rape, sexual assault and abuse, domestic violence, and excessive use of force. 77% of SWB applications reported violations on the right to liberty, such as arbitrary arrest and detention or kidnapping. In fact, most of our grants in 2025 reached defenders operating in severely restricted civic environments. According to CIVICUS, 85% of these countries are rated Closed, Repressed, or Obstructed.

Our humanitarian response reach also soared in 2025. Drawing on lessons from 2024, we were able to mobilise internal resources even more rapidly after the Myanmar earthquake in March 2025, disbursing the first grant within three days to 80 affected women-led households and LGBTQI individuals. In the next 43 days, a further 20 emergency grants totalling USD 118,165 were successfully disbursed to our partner communities in the affected areas. By the end of the year, we had disbursed a total of 103 Humanitarian grants to 14 countries across Asia and the Pacific (USD 830,755).

Our adaptable and fluid system allowed us to manage increased grant requests. For the months where we were responding to either a climate or humanitarian crisis, we averaged 33 grants per week, wherein our low periods entailed processing 20 grants per week.

41% of declined Rapid Response grants reflected unmet needs of individual defenders or organisations. As in previous years, most of these applications came from Afghanistan or

Myanmar, and were declined due to no clear pathway for a crisis plan and/or no imminent threat.



Financial Summary

By Fareen Jalal, Strategic Finance Facilitator and Timnat Thomas, Financial Reporting Facilitator

Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Rights, Asia and Pacific
1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025
Financial Summary Report
United States Dollar

Income & Expenditure Statement 2025

Income	8,303,433		
Expenditure			
Grantmaking & Resilience Programmes	4,573,872		71.65%
Other Programmes	1,243,832		19.48%
Administration	<u>565,843</u>	<u>6,838,546</u>	8.86%
Surplus (Deficit)	1,919,887		

Statement of Financial Position**Assets**

Bank Accounts	2,898,368	
Current Assets	186,112	
Fixed Assets	<u>7,325,040</u>	10,409,520

Liabilities

Current Liabilities	513,789	
Donations in Advance for 2026	2,404,145	
Non Current Liabilities	<u>69,109</u>	<u>2,987,043</u>

Net Assets**7,422,477****Equity**

Accumulated Surplus (losses)	6,901,585
Reserve - Statutory Accounts	<u>520,892</u>

Total Equity**7,422,477**



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