

AMPLIFYING WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CRISES

VOICE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



**We believe in the power of
women and girls as leaders.**

We extend our thanks to Resistance Communications, Jenn Warren, and Gael Gundin for the beautiful illustrations and design work that forms the basis of VOICE's innovative communications style.

Acknowledgments of Feminist Warriors

VOICE's work is possible because of those who came before us. With gratitude, we acknowledge all of the strong and courageous women and girls—and the organizations and initiatives they lead—whose strength, sacrifices, leadership and insight have made our own learning and growth possible, and inform the work we do today. They have paved the way for VOICE to exist; we stand on their shoulders and we continue to work in partnership with them today. We give our respects and pay homage to all women and girls across the world, as we look forward to the world free of violence against us all.

Visual Imagery and Storytelling

How stories are told through imagery and words is just as important as who tells them. We avoid using stock photography of women and girls because these images rarely manage to get informed consent by the individuals and groups photographed. Over time, our aim is to enable women and girls living or working through conflict and crisis to tell and share empowering, enriching, and extraordinary stories. We work with local women photographers, journalists, videographers, and designers living and working in the affected communities. As VOICE develops its own photo and video library in partnership with women and girl creators, we will continue to build on our own creative narrative.

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Welcome from Executive Director



2020 has been a tough year for everyone, but perhaps most distressing for women and girls. At VOICE, we've seen the immense impact the pandemic has had on women- and girl-led organizations around the world, and we've been focused on meeting their needs for support.

This year, VOICE has delivered research, policy, and programming-related support in multiple crisis-affected settings. Our strategic and advocacy work is influencing and igniting new awareness of the need for larger and more thoughtful investments. And our message is getting louder.

We have provided over 100 hours of direct technical support, held 15 different virtual joint learning sessions for over 125 frontline actors, and added over 600 women-led organizations to our network.

We've also partnered with other trailblazers who are committed to seeing the feminist future actualized, and together we're running towards it. Over 300 of you have joined VOICE this year for webinars centering on the experiences of women humanitarians, and addressing the massive issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in this industry.

One of the things I have found most heartening over this past year is how many believers have stepped into our corner, from around the world and across professions. With talented team members, and exceptional supporters, coaches, allies, and donors coming on board, this year has set a high bar!

As we continue into 2021, we will remember to stop and reflect on the horizon, standing shoulder to shoulder with the VOICE team and community who have helped bring us where we are today.

We have so much to look forward to as an organization, and as always, we invite you to join us.

In solidarity,
Mendy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mendy', with a long, sweeping underline.

Acknowledgments

VOICE would like to thank the NoVo Foundation for its ongoing commitment to addressing gender inequality and eradicating violence against women and girls around the world. We were honored to have received generous support from NoVo Foundation for our start up efforts over the past two years and help with our design in becoming a more sustainable organization for the long-term. In addition, we have grown our partnerships and support and would like to thank the Walmart Foundation, the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and UN Women.

We would also like to thank our individual VOICE investors and donors. VOICE would not be where we are today without the support of so many organizations and individuals that are part of our journey.



VOICE Mission and Vision

VOICE partners with women and girls in conflict, crisis, and disaster settings around the world to promote equality, create leadership opportunities, and eradicate the violence they face.

We are confronting one of the world's oldest and most widespread human rights abuses: violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Although such violence is a global epidemic, it is especially prevalent in crisis and displacement contexts, and often perpetuated by the institutions that claim to serve them.

We aim to challenge traditional, ineffectual methods of addressing violence in these settings with a proven but chronically underused resource: WOMEN & GIRLS

VOICE Values



Disruptive & Catalytic



Sharing & Shifting Power



Reflective



Unapologetically Feminist



Boldly Political



Accountable

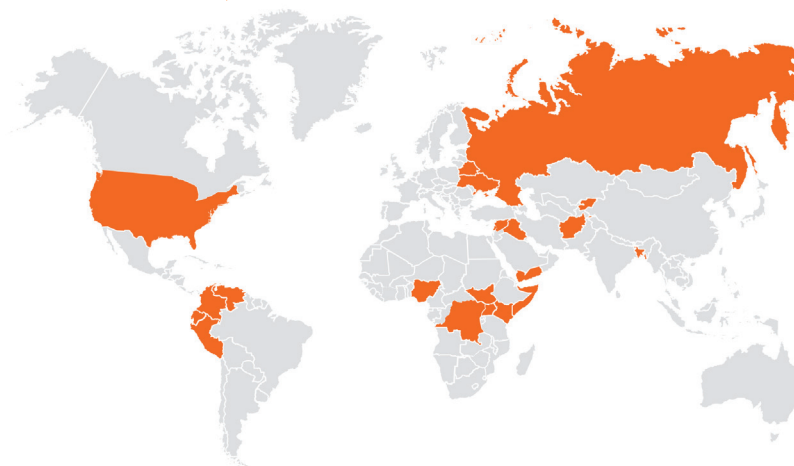
2020 Year in Review

2020 marked a year of growth and expansion for VOICE. Not only were we able to activate much of the critical programming of the organization, we began to truly speak out -- amplifying the voices of women and girls, and the organizations they lead as we held the humanitarian sector accountable for its promise to protect them in crisis settings.

VOICE worked with women and girls to develop locally-created innovations that improve humanitarian actors' conflict and disaster response interventions, making those interventions more effective for, and accountable to, the women and girls they serve.

We established our Global Resource Hub, a network and platform through which women's rights activists, women- and girl-led groups, organizations, and networks can access a range of free resources on combating VAWG, and receive COVID-19 technical support.

GLOBAL RESOURCE HUB



Through these efforts we are:



Providing immediate technical support and information on VAWG and COVID-19 to women- and girl-led organizations; with access to resources and opportunities that benefit their work and activism.



Bringing together individual activists, groups, and organizations, and creating networks and connection at the country, regional and global levels, and in ways that are safe, meaningful, and requested by them.



Hosting contact groups, consultations, and conversations in different languages (including Arabic, French, Kurdish, Portuguese, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish and Tamil), different countries, and regions, allowing these women and girls and the organizations they lead to discuss challenges, share experiences, and strategize on addressing gaps and barriers to accessing VAWG and COVID-19 services.

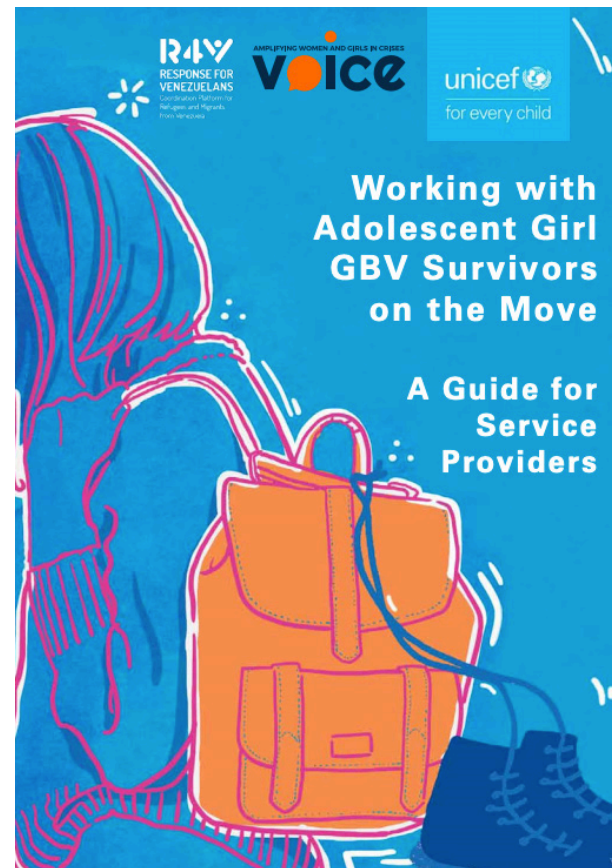


Supporting advocacy priorities by amplifying the experiences and expertise of these women and girls in creative and safe ways, to better address the intersections of COVID-19 and VAWG.

Creating tools that amplify women and girls' voices, and facilitate their leadership

We work on the ground to ensure women and girls are not only included in the decision-making process, but are leading and directing it. This year, we created and deployed tools to improve interventions.

In partnership with UNICEF Latin America, and the Caribbean Office, we produced the VOICE, UNICEF and R4V Guide for Service Providers: Working with Adolescent Girl Gender-Based Violence Survivors on the Move, which we used to virtually train over 70 frontline service providers who are working to address the unique needs of Venezuelan adolescent girls on the move.



VOICE COVID-19 Response

VOICE holds a deep and continuous responsibility to examine how agencies are distributing resources in a world where needs are urgent and growing. We are partnering with and mobilizing women and girls themselves – a proven but chronically under-used resource – to help aid agencies do better. Through our COVID-19 strategy, VOICE is creating a unique model to help women- and girl-led organizations break free from the current colonial, hierarchical and restrictive funding paradigm, which often sidelines smaller, activist-driven organizations.



1

WE Build and support existing networks to bring needed focus to how the COVID-19 crisis and response are specifically and uniquely affecting women, girls, and women- and girl-led organizations.

2

WE Engage in supportive, feminist research to inform how to best support these groups and respond to such a crisis, both now and in the future.

3

WE Amplify advocacy messages with creative messaging and storytelling from women- and girl-led organizations to facilitate change within crisis response systems, amongst decision-makers, and providing ways for the Global North to learn from these organizations in the Global South.

4

WE Actualize the localization agenda efforts by supporting women- and girl-led organization's access to essential COVID-19 information, knowledge and resources without institutionalizing or instrumentalizing women- and girl-led organizations.

5

WE Promote non-traditional partnership models that illustrate how organizations and donors can thoughtfully break out of the large non-governmental organization paradigm and innovatively foster non-traditional partnerships.

VOICE Survey

VOICE's 'We Must Do Better' research seeks a holistic understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls, on the capacity of women's organizations, networks, and activists to operate; and opportunities for VOICE and others to support. This research aimed to invite women and girls to share and define their own current experiences and to speak to their own needs, not only in this pandemic but also in the context of gender inequality and VAWG more broadly.

23 / 188

Only 23 out of 188 respondents said that they had been **able to access new funding** to respond to COVID-19 by 23rd October 2020.

24

organizations/groups were still waiting for funding decisions.

30%

of the participant organizations or groups were created between 2015 and 2020 and generally remain underfunded and therefore, under-resourced.



84%

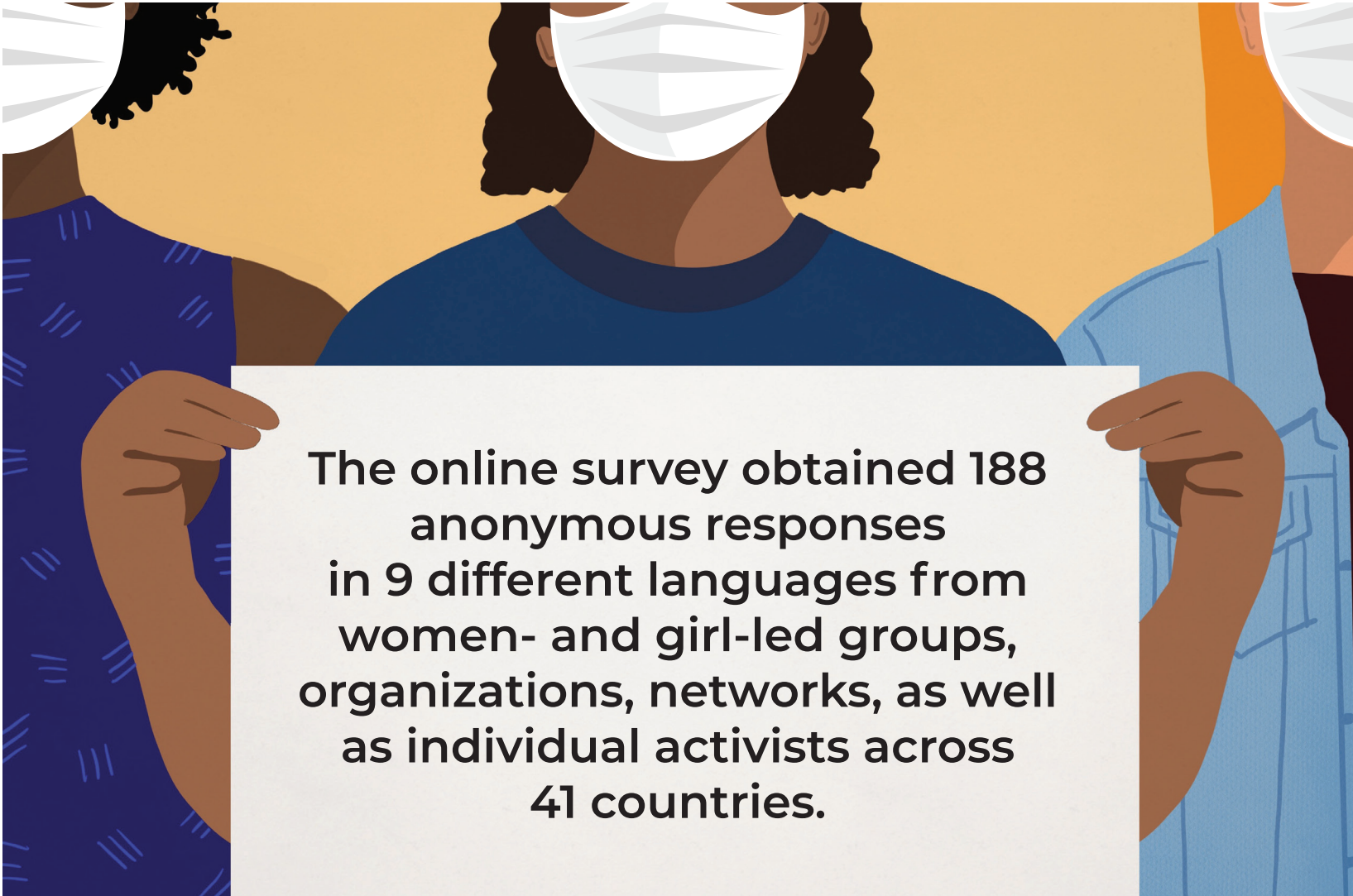
of the organizations working on VAWG in the survey were led by women.



61%

61% of the organizations or groups in the sample have funding of less than \$150,000 and 55% have a team of fewer than 20 members.

55%

An illustration of three people from the chest up, wearing white face masks. The person in the center has dark skin and curly hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt. They are holding a large white rectangular sign with both hands. To their left is a person with dark skin and curly hair wearing a dark blue patterned top. To their right is a person with light skin and long hair wearing a light blue patterned top. The background is a solid light orange color.

**The online survey obtained 188
anonymous responses
in 9 different languages from
women- and girl-led groups,
organizations, networks, as well
as individual activists across
41 countries.**

The final report will be released on the 8th of March 2021 coinciding with International Women's Day. Multiple learning and advocacy tools will be developed to roll the findings out, including through a webinar series.

Pillar 1:

VOICE works with locally-created innovations from women and girls that improve humanitarian actors' conflict and disaster response interventions, making those interventions more effective for—and accountable to—the communities they serve.

Humanitarian Action

Africa

In the wake of COVID-19, local organizations in South Sudan witnessed an increase in levels of VAWG through early and forced marriage, sexual violence, and intimate partner violence. Local organizations highlighted that pandemic restrictions created barriers to providing effective support services to prevent and mitigate VAWG. In response, VOICE conducted two socially distanced training sessions for 24 participants from nine women-led organizations in South Sudan.

VOICE also mapped out a plan to work in Kenya where similar patterns in rising VAWG were

observed. The pandemic and isolation have made it challenging for activists to continue raising awareness against female genital mutilation/cutting. As part of the International Day of the Girl, VOICE joined hands with five Kenyan organizations to spread awareness around menstrual hygiene and COVID-19's impact on adolescent girls.

VOICE is also working with UNICEF to develop an advocacy note detailing pertinent issues around VAWG in South Sudan and Kenya. This note underscores how school closures, increased exposure to abusers at home, restricted mobility, growing household duties, and additional caring responsibilities increases threats of sexual

violence, exploitation, abuse, and early and forced marriage among adolescent girls.



Europe

To gather more information, VOICE turned to frontline service providers in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh,

Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine. Issues shared ranged from service providers being overwhelmed, and severe burnout in activists and women's rights defenders, to gaps in support, solidarity, and regional connections for women- and girl-led organizations. These issues were compounded by a lack of funding to address VAWG and women's rights more broadly. VOICE's response took into account rising trends of violence, and the specific asks made by actors to bring together a wide range of specialists and service providers from the region and beyond in a VOICE webinar, "Violence against women and girls service provision during crisis: security and well-being for women providing the services - challenges, stresses and strategies," that included 56 participants.

Asia Pacific

VOICE developed a country profile that captures the socio-economic context of Bangladesh as it is pertinent to VAWG trends, important contextual information, and history. Through our Asia-Pacific informants we learned that many women- and girl-led organizations in Bangladesh were focusing on the increase in violence experienced during the pandemic. With support from VOICE, women from 20 organizations joined forces to form a network that has held workshops to educate individuals on using social media for advocacy.

U.S./Navajo Nation

Presently, few resources exist to address the alarming concerns being exasperated by COVID-19, natural disasters, and poverty. Over 25% of American women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime, and for Indigenous and Alaskan Native women, the statistic jumps to 56.1%. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a federal mandate, financially sustains initiatives that support challenges facing women and girls, has yet to be passed. To ensure the passage of VAWA, VOICE has begun partnering with organizations that support women and girls including the National Organization of Women (NOW), the Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN), State Coalitions Against Sexual Violence, and other local groups and legislators throughout the nation. Comprehensive research in several states including Alaska, Arizona, Florida, New Mexico and New York has begun to uncover service gaps and compounding challenges as they relate to women and girls across the US.

VOICE is working with the Navajo Nation and Tribal Trust Foundation to map access to resources or the lack thereof, and highlight the voices leading the response to disaster in order to provide creative ways forward. Together, we are working to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the rural community of Kayenta. Native youth in Kayenta are interested in advocacy projects for their community, including economic, and social impacts of the global pandemic, in conjunction with the resilience and continuance of culture despite these hardships. Throughout this collaboration, we aim to develop an understanding of how community inclusion and belonging have shifted



**TRIBAL TRUST
FOUNDATION**

Indigenous Cultures as Living Treasures

given pandemic restrictions on in-person meetings, how disaster preparedness and responses work within the rural tribal community, and address what resource access and service provisions are available or needed, with a keen eye on education and services for women and girls.

We look forward to carrying this work forward in 2021 with creative and sustainable solutions that are developed by and serving Indigenous communities in the United States and beyond.



"I believe our work with the Navajo Nation can be of immense value both in the short term and over time. While our immediate focus is to highlight the powerful stories of resilience, strength, and survival of the people throughout the pandemic, I believe our collaborative efforts can help inform the larger narrative of the Indigenous experience in the US, particularly among Native women and girls. Native women are often the carriers of the culture, ensuring the survival and resistance for the betterment of all. I'm hopeful that through our community collaboration we will be able to gain a unique insight into the lived experience of the Navajo women and girl leaders of Kayenta."

*-Autumn Asher Blackdeer,
VOICE US Program Advisor*



Iraq Middle East and North Africa **Latin America**

In Iraq, local women-and-girl-led organizations made VOICE aware of the perils they faced while navigating social media and other platforms they use to connect. Organizations were constantly subject to hacking and threats in retaliation for their outspokenness on women's issues. Apart from the alarming spike in online harassment, it has also become clear that providing women and girls with remote services through social media platforms during the pandemic has led to more harm than good, exposing women to more online harassment.

Perhaps the greatest effect of the pandemic on women and girls in this region has been the drastic uptick in rates of domestic violence. Calls to national domestic violence lines have increased by 91%. Quarantines have led to women being locked in their homes with their abusers with no option to leave and seek help or escape. With 77% of sexual violence against women occurring in their homes, these confinement strategies have led to detrimental effects on the female population. UNFPA predicts an additional 15 million cases of VAWG globally will

occur for every three months of lockdown.

VOICE is responding to the complexities impacting women and girls by focusing on the needs women- and girls-led civil society organizations highlight are of critical importance now: 1) influencing the inclusion of women in the pandemic response; and 2) supporting capacity-building efforts in the areas of women's human rights defenders' security. This includes connecting women defenders with security experts to help them contextualize risk management and security plans in both Iraq/MENA region as well as Colombia and beyond. Expanding the network of learning and sharing in 2021 will enhance the security of women's rights defenders at risk in Colombia and beyond.

Pillar 2:

VOICE promotes the use of local, women- and girl-led solutions to addressing VAWG in humanitarian crises. We use research, advocacy, communication, network building, and mentorship to ensure humanitarian actors hear and listen to the voices of women and girls, and recognize them as the leaders they are.

Amplifying Voices

This year, we are celebrating the stories and experiences of women and girls through multiple media and event channels. We create and maintain channels, events, and spaces that actively amplify the voices, experiences, and expertise of women and girl leaders through compelling display and storytelling. Our platforms document the varied instances of violence that women and girls face in every space they move in, including their homes, schools, places of work, and in every public space they must navigate.

Getting #LOUDER



VOICE activated its Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube channels, with a combined followership of over 2,600 to date.

The **VOICE #LOUDER newsletter** reaches over 2,600 people on a bi-monthly basis, with an audience spanning across the globe, including from the U.S. to France, Nigeria, Kenya, and Australia.

VOICE also launched its first branded **#VOICE16DaysofActivism campaign**, participating in the global awareness effort to challenge VAWG. Stemming from our webinar on sexual exploitation and abuse in the international aid industry, the VOICE Marketing & Communications Fellows developed two weeks of content to continue the conversation.

WHAT MADE
YOU FEEL
POWERFUL
TODAY?



In September 2020,
more than 50 women
accused WHO workers
and other aid agencies of
sexual abuse and
exploitation in the
Democratic Republic of
Congo.

- ANADOLU AGENCY



"BUT, SHE WANTED IT."

But....did she?

This may have appeared
to be the best avenue to a
better life for herself and
her family, given her
desperate situation.



Webinars

This year, we held webinars in August and October, with over 300 people joining VOICE for discussions centering the experiences of women humanitarians, and addressing the massive issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in the humanitarian aid sector. Our calls for change are growing #LOUDER, and our mission to amplify the voices of women and girls is being actualized.



Photo: VOICE "It's Not Just A Few Bad Apples" webinar on SEA in International Aid, featuring (L-R) moderator Mendy Marsh, and panelists Doris Saydee, Francisca Vigaud-Walsh, Alina Potts, and Pamela Shifman.



Thank you for such a great initiative of centralizing women in the humanitarian sector. Many women are suffering in silence under the patriarchal leadership, not listened to and so much more.

- VOICE webinar attendee feedback



"I joined the webinar today and I was honestly blown away. It's the first webinar I've joined in a while that my attention was fully caught for the whole hour. I'm really happy that VOICE created the space for the conversation and I would love to see the space grow. It was truly a breath of fresh air in what has been a very challenging year for us all. VOICE truly allowed space for women to speak truth to power in a safe and engaging space."

- Zee Sulaiman, VOICE webinar attendee feedback

Advocacy

VOICE developed its first platforms for advocacy and community engagement this year. We launched the first of many tools to help women and girl-led organizations use their voices and harness their messages.

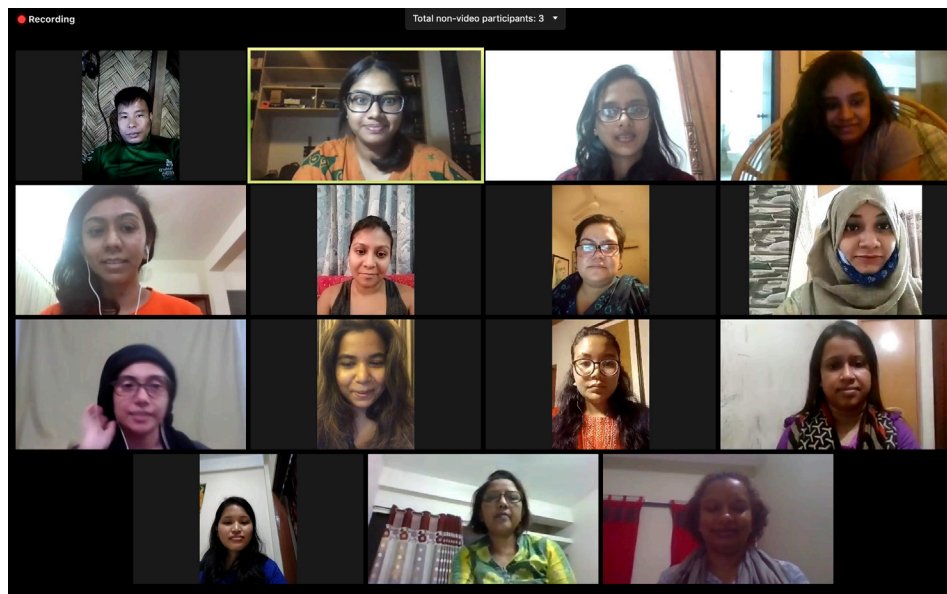


Photo: VOICE Workshop: Social Media for Advocacy and Community Engagement, led by Chiderah Monde and Sharanya Sekaram with a group of organizations in Bangladesh.



Our Communications & Marketing team facilitated a “Social media for advocacy & community engagement” workshop in partnership with our Asia-Pacific regional team lead. Women from 20 organizations in Bangladesh joined forces to participate in the workshop, and gain helpful tips for amplifying their messaging.

As a part of International Day of the Girl, VOICE worked with five Kenyan organizations to share messages related to menstrual hygiene and how COVID-19 has impacted ado-

lescent girls. VOICE also developed an advocacy note outlining concerns for adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene and other VAWG in South Sudan and Kenya alongside UNICEF.

Pillar 3:

We believe in the power of partnership. As seasoned and respected experts with relationships across the sector, the **VOICE** team is made up of trusted advisors with opportunities to influence humanitarian response at the highest levels.

Growing Resources and Partnerships



We are proud to count some of the largest and most influential organizations among our partners in ending VAWG, and we are committed to increasing our reach; in the next two years, VOICE aims to engage in five or more new strategic partnership initiatives to drive change for refugee, displaced, and migrant women and girls.



VOICE partnered with the **IRC** to finalize the ListenUp! Index that we pilot tested in the field in Lebanon, Nigerian and Uganda in 2019.



With **UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean** Office, we produced the VOICE and UNICEF Guide for Service Providers: Working with Adolescent Girl Gender-based Survivors on the Move.



With funding from the **Walmart Foundation**, VOICE works with **Tribal Trust Foundation** and the **Navajo Nation** to conduct participatory research to understand COVID-19's impact on community inclusion and belonging, disaster preparedness, and response.



VOICE launched a large-scale partnership with **UNICEF** headquarters: *She Leads the Way: Revolutionizing the aid sector's approach to VAWG prevention and response by harnessing the power of women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic.*



We also launched partnerships with the **World Health Organization** that will help policy makers understand how women and girl-led organizations would like to be best consulted in the development of policies and tools that will directly affect them, their families and the organizations that they lead.



Two partnerships with **UN Women**, one in Afghanistan that includes the development of a five-year strategy to guide their work and the work of their partners to prevent VAWG as well as the development of UN Women's corporate strategy on the elimination of VAWG, in synergy with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.



And with the **World Bank**, VOICE kickstarted conversations to help large organizations glean new insights into how the leaders of women- and girl-led organizations want to be consulted in policy and programs that will have a direct effect on them as individuals and the leaders of organizations.

VOICE Financials

(non-audited)

In 2020, VOICE moved toward increased sustainability with the engagement of more partners, funders, and donors. We raised and committed funds to serve our mission and respond to the needs across our global network, supporting their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work on building resources has had a significant impact on 2020 and will continue to help build our programs for years to come.

Revenue

Grant Support \$718,000

Overall grant support increased in 2020 to \$718,000 and included funding for general operating needs through Novo Foundation, a new major donor, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, and new programmatic funding for US-based programming with the Navajo Nation through the Walmart Foundation. VOICE's donors also showed their ongoing commitment to supporting our growth and long-term development.

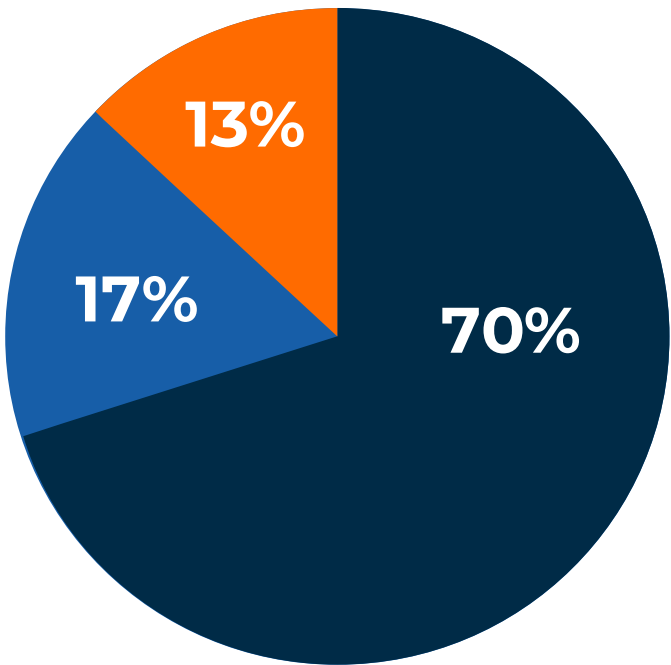
**Total Global Partnership
support for the year
\$821,000**

Total funds for partnership-based programming also increased in 2020, with total global partnership support for the year totaling \$821,000. Partners in 2020 included UNICEF, UN Women, World Health Organization, and the International Rescue Committee.

Expenses

- Personnel \$661,254
- Contracts and Grants \$162,646
- General Operating \$120,333

In addition to building significant grant, partner and donor relationships, VOICE has been able to build our program work and team across 14 countries this year and initiated our US based programming.



The Year Ahead



VOICE Resource Hub

VOICE has started working with the University of Dublin to build the technology of the VOICE platform that we will use to reach women and girls in settings where accessibility is more of a challenge. The Hub will be a safe space for these organizers to convene, find donors, and directly link to influential aid, development, and peacebuilding actors around the world. We are exploring partnerships with international non-governmental organizations and companies for in-kind and back-end technology development support.

We Must Do Better

VOICE will publish its research and advocacy series, “We Must Do Better,” that will document the impact and effects of the humanitarian system’s failure to meaningfully respond to VAWG. The series will explore not only what has gone wrong, but will also detail response services and empowerment approaches that have succeeded. Work for this project is already underway, with a launch date aptly set for International Women’s Day on March 8, and with a podcast conversation series based on the research extending throughout the year.



Guide to the Patriarchy

In 2021 VOICE will also publish its first feminist education project, the “VOICE Guide to the Patriarchy,” aimed at socializing VOICE’s beliefs about the underlying causes of VAWG: the existing patriarchal structures, systems, behaviors, and language. With this art research project VOICE aims to educate and inspire a new generation of feminism that seeks to dismantle the patriarchy by unlearning, and then reteaching concepts on VAWG and women’s empowerment.

VOICE Leadership Program

The current VOICE Fellowship will expand into the VOICE Leadership Program, a division of the organization that is committed to training women and girls, particularly those from marginalized communities in the U.S., to define and identify violence in all of its forms, and understand how it applies to disaster response.

We aim to leverage our distinctly feminist approach and position as a major player in humanitarian response work to build a robust program.

U.S./Domestic Work

In 2021 VOICE will focus heavily on developing a strong presence in the United States that complements and expands on the work we have been doing globally. We will further activate our domestic programming through our Global Resource Hub, as well as supporting U. S. service providers and women- and girl-led organizations. Our areas of focus include the U.S. border regions, partnering with the Navajo Nation and other indigenous and marginalized groups.

