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Programme Voix et Leadership des femmes



WVL South Africa

Formative Evaluation of Women's Voice and Leadership - Desk Dive Summary

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Introduction

The Women's Voice and Leadership project in South Africa is being implemented by Gender Links (GL), a local NGO based in Johannesburg with offices throughout Southern Africa. This is the first time that Gender Links is receiving funding from Global Affairs Canada (GAC). GL has a long history of working on issues of gender equality, but this project marks their first experience as a grant provider.

The project is valued at \$4.1M CAD, and is providing multi-year funding to 20 WROs. At the time of data collection, GL had also disbursed 33 fast, responsive grants through three rounds of funding: the first an open call, the second on COVID-19 response and the third on vaccine justice. WVL South Africa has also supported a variety of movement building activities, from learning sessions and joint advocacy efforts to direct grants to networks.

This case study is one of twelve that were conducted for the Formative Evaluation of Women's Voice and Leadership. These desk-based case studies were conducted remotely by the Evaluation Division of Global Affairs Canada using a combination of data collection approaches. The case studies each contribute information towards the full program evaluation of WVL, and respond to the overall evaluation questions. The "desk dive" case studies showcase WVL projects with high learning potential, representing the diversity of WVL projects and contexts. While this summary was developed as part of the broader program evaluation, it can also be of interest and use to project-level stakeholders.

The "desk dive" case study in South Africa consisted of an interview with the GAC officers at HQ and in Pretoria, as well as Gender Links staff during the scoping and data collection phases. Two WRO focus group discussions were held, bringing together 8 grantee organizations. These virtual focus groups were conducted in English. A total of 13 people were interviewed as part of this desk dive. The review of project documents was extensive and encompassed a wide range of reports and other relevant documents (See Annex).

Project Priorities and Reach

South Africa is an upper middle income country, and the economic powerhouse of the African continent. South Africa is also the most unequal country in the world, according to its most recent Gini coefficient.¹ South Africa has one of the worst rates of femicide, rape, and other forms of gender based violence in the world, an epidemic described by President Ramaphosa as "*no less than a war being waged against the women and the children of our country.*"² This issue has only been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?most_recent_value_desc=true

² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/19/africa/south-africa-gender-violence-pandemic-intl/index.html>





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Given this context, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a prominent theme for WVL in South Africa. Five WROs participating in the project have a specific focus on SGBV, and a further three are focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). SGBV was also a recurring theme throughout the focus group discussions with WROs.

Another major priority for WVL South Africa is forging an inclusive women's movement. The definition of feminism is contested in South Africa, even within the women's movement; for example, the inclusion of sex workers is sometimes questioned by more conservative elements. WVL South Africa has chosen to advance an inclusive vision of feminism, and supports self-led organizations of sex workers, LGBTQI+ women, and women with disabilities, as well as other organizations that work with diverse communities.

WVL South Africa is working with WROs of varying sizes, from grassroots community-led initiatives, to organizations working with professionals in specific industries, to national advocacy movements. The call for applications was widely distributed, and between multi-year and rapid response grants, WVL is active in seven of the nine provinces of South Africa. Informal organizations have been accommodated during the application, but WROs must work towards registration and have a bank account to receive WVL funding. According to Gender Links *"registration wasn't necessary, they could say that they had certain criteria, or say that they would put these things in place. We helped WROs in the first few months with compliance issues. This is a form of exclusion in any mainstream funding application."*

The WVL South Africa project has been a model for inclusivity, though there have been some challenges reaching certain marginalized groups. Some stakeholders suggested that migrant workers could be challenging to reach, especially where their organizations are informal. That said, there are quite a few organizations representing migrant workers in South Africa, some of whom applied for funding from WVL. Ultimately these organizations were not selected, and this is one potential constituency that the project could consider supporting in the remaining years.

Supporting women with disabilities has been the other major challenge. One organization of women with disabilities was selected as a multi-year grantee, though there were significant performance issues with this organization that required the cancellation of the funding agreement. To account for this, Gender Links are re-advertised the multi year grants to specifically target an organization of women with disabilities. This is a sensible approach to ensure that women with disabilities will be represented within the scope of WVL.

WVL is responding to critical needs in the country, and according to a GAC stakeholder

it is the only fund right now that is solely dedicated to women's rights in South Africa... It is set out to reach the 'difficult to reach' groups and areas. This has been a critique of women's work – that it is focused in urban centers and doesn't reach rural communities. Two thirds of grantees are rural, which often isn't the case with women's rights work.





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According to the project monitor:

The project is... highly relevant to the South African context and responds to the three biggest challenges facing the country namely high rates of poverty, unemployment and inequality (all of which disproportionately affect women and girls). The collected data demonstrates that the initiatives of the supported WROs respond directly to these challenges, whilst utilizing diverse approaches to do so. The project also responds to the 'funding crisis' in the women's rights sector in South Africa by channelling resources to underfunded organizations and by injecting the investment directly into the affected communities and the South African economy.

How Does the Project Work?

Gender Links was selected as the implementing partner in South Africa following a department-initiated invitation. Discussions between the High Commission and Gender Links began as early as 2017, stemming from a desire to see a locally-based feminist organization implement the WVL project.

As a locally-based NGO, there are no intermediaries between GL and their grantees. Grant arrangements are signed directly with the WROs, and GL provides capacity building and other forms of indirect support like mentorship to the grantees using in-house resources. Both the multi-year grants and the fast responsive fund were issued following a widely shared call for proposals. Under the movement and alliance building pillar, there are specific multi-year grants for networks; three of these have been provided. Gender Links leads the movement building and alliance strengthening activities under project pillar 3 with its grantees, and collaborates with SAWID on networking activities within South Africa and more broadly in the Southern African region.

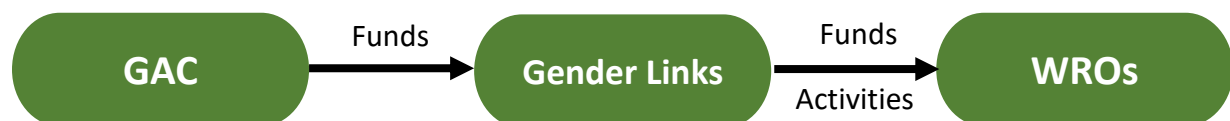


Figure 1: Flow of support

Multi-year grantees for the project were chosen through a far-reaching, open call for applications. The application process for multi-year and network grants was two staged, with an initial concept note followed by a full proposal for shortlisted candidates. Applicants had to meet the essential eligibility criteria and were subsequently judged based on merit.

To promote the call and ensure a diverse range of applicants, Gender Links undertook a “road show” throughout the country to meet with local communities and socialize the call for applications. This included rural, grassroots organizations who are normally passed over for such funding





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opportunities. Multi-year grants are targeted at organizations in the four provinces of Gauteng, Limpopo, Western Cape, and Kwa Zulu Natal. These four provinces were targeted based on their high incidence of SGBV.

While this road show approach was important for ensuring a diverse selection of grantees, Gender Links also used the application process as a form of capacity building. Applications were only accepted online, and in English. These two factors presented potential barriers, a fact that Gender Links was fully aware of. A staff member described how:

We chose to do online applications – this could have been criticized as a form of exclusion. But we made it accessible. We had a 24/7 help desk, advertised through roadshows, and worked with 15 municipalities that provided centers with computers for people to do applications and get support. So the whole application process was part of capacity building... If we are going to build these organizations' capacity to apply for other types of funding, we would be doing them a disservice from saying they can do an oral, handwritten application.

By taking this approach, Gender Links was also able to extend support to unsuccessful applicants, giving them valuable experience for future opportunities. According to the project monitor:

The online application process is one of the strengths of GL's inclusive and effective approach to project management. The process served as an additional capacity building exercise and included on-the-job training and a range of innovative strategies to reach marginalized WROs (e.g. a helpdesk, 24-hour helpline and road shows). The online grants management system is another strength of the WVL-SA project.

The major disadvantage of this approach was the level of effort for Gender Links staff in providing this kind of support. The hotline in particular attracted many calls, and staff were called upon to provide support in multiple local languages. For a local organization like Gender Links, with comparatively fewer staff than larger INGOs, this was taxing.

The rapid response funds have also been distributed through three time-bound open calls. An initial open call was issued prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the two subsequent calls had prescribed themes, namely COVID-19 relief and vaccine justice. Moving forward, Gender Links has decided to accept applications for rapid response funding through a rolling call, a decision informed by exchanges with other WVL implementing partners in Africa. Gender Links has also chosen to double the size of the rapid response grants from R50K to R100K.

The movement building pillar of WVL South Africa consists of a specific multi-year granting category, as well as activities led by Gender Links. Activities have included regular symposiums for grantees (virtual and in-person) to share experiences and learn from one another, as well as efforts to build linkages between grantees. For example, there is a WhatsApp group for all grantees to share news





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and information, and Gender Links have been proactive in facilitating conversations between grantees working in the same region and even across regions during recent advocacy campaigns.

In addition to the specific project team within Gender Links, the WVL South Africa project is overseen by two specific committees, namely:

- **Project Steering Committee (PSC):** Includes representatives from GAC, GL, UN Women, the Commission on Gender Equality, and the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, and works to provide strategic political guidance for the project. The PSC was set up to ensure project goals are met, leverage resources from external donors and stakeholders, facilitate cooperation between key project stakeholders, approve operation of the grants selection committee, and respond to public queries on the project.
- **Grants Selection Committee (GSC):** Includes five South African gender experts from academia, the private sector, and grant making organizations, and works to support transparent grant making and beneficiary selection. The GSC evaluates concept notes, select grantees for each grant cycle and advises the PSC on the final selection, and reviews bi-annual and annual reports submitted by the grantees.

Given this structure, there is no direct involvement of grantee WROs in the governance of the project, though of course Gender Links are themselves a WRO. This is intended to ensure the independence of the committees and to avoid conflicts of interest during the selection of partners.

How Does the Project Interact with Other Initiatives in the Country?

There are no examples of WVL interacting with other GAC-funded projects in South Africa, with more attention dedicated to fostering collaboration among WVL-supported WROs. However, WVL South Africa is notable for how the project has been able to leverage support from other donors to support its activities.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gender Links was able to secure £50,000 from the UK FCDO (former DFID). This funding was channeled through the WVL rapid response granting mechanism, and was used to support an additional 20 WROs to deliver COVID-19 relief activities. The fact that FCDO was willing to channel its support through WVL is a testament to the value of the rapid response modality, and is also a good example of aid effectiveness principles in action.

Gender Links itself, as a WRO and a newer GAC partner, has also leveraged their experience with WVL to seek out additional sources of funding from other donors. Gender Links successfully applied to be a grant manager for Amplify Change, a fund for SRHR activities in Southern Africa. This speaks to the value of GAC's support to local organizations like Gender Links, which can position them to expand their programming with other funders.





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How Does this Project Integrate Feminist Principles and Intersectionality?

The WVL South Africa project benefits from the strong feminist credentials of the implementing partner, Gender Links, who are themselves a WRO with a long track record working within the country's feminist movement. Gender Links are embedded in the feminist movement, and are willing to take a strong stance on controversial issues, such as the inclusion of sex workers' organizations in WVL.

WVL South Africa draws from a clear feminist approach, rather than a more traditional gender equality approach. This is evident in the project's position that gender equality does not mean men and women are treated equally, but rather should be treated according to differing needs and diverse experiences of marginalization. The project implementation plan includes references to the historical/colonial roots of patriarchy, and the need to dismantle these oppressive institutions for the benefit of men as well. In this way the project conceptualizes gender inequality and gender-based oppression through a more holistic perspective – it is something that impacts both men and women. These references to transformative change attests to the feminist credentials of WVL South Africa.

This feminist approach also aligns well with the principles of intersectionality. The project documents note that when identity characteristics such as class, the rural/urban divide, age, disability, occupation (especially sex work), sexual orientation and gender identity form multiple burdens of exclusion, this can lead to higher levels of violence for certain categories of women. The project acknowledges that this results in diverse needs and situations for the women participating in the project.

Project documents also note that men share with women experiences of disenfranchisement, indignity and subordination as a result of diverse and persistent political, social and economic oppression, and that men are needed as allies in the gender equality movement. This is an attitude shared by many of the grantee partners, particularly those working on SGBV who make concerted efforts to engage men and boys as allies.

In practice, these commitments to feminism and intersectionality are evident in the diverse range of grantees, which was made possible by an inclusive and far-reaching application process. The road show approach of socializing the call for proposals ensured that rural organizations and others that are typically excluded from such programs were aware that WVL was indeed meant for them. Various capacity building mechanisms, from public computers at municipal offices to a telephone hotline, helped to ensure that diverse groups could apply.

Feminist principles have also informed the capacity building approach, which is grounded in notions of accompaniment and tailoring support to the unique needs of the organization. Gender Links also credits the importance of safe space in creating an inclusive project for diverse groups. Safe space includes the process of facilitating discussions, but in this case also references a physical space: Gender





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Link's own meeting facilities outside Johannesburg. According to Gender Links staff *"it provides a safe space for discussion... We have come to realize the value of a space like this – it has made a contribution on fostering dialogue. We have not had complaints from marginalized groups on feeling excluded."*

This perspective is supported by one of the participants in the WRO focus groups, who stated that *"Meeting other organizations have given us an opportunity to meet and exchange with other constituencies. The space is very accommodating. Sometimes when we go to do presentations as sex workers, we face hostility. I didn't feel like that. I felt like I knew everyone."*

While feminism is a strongly held belief for Gender Links, it has not been without its challenges. Like in many countries, feminism is a contentious term in South Africa that can often be construed as being "anti-men." Feminism is also something that can be understood or interpreted very differently. One Gender Links staff member was quoted in the project monitor's report as saying that

I struggle with the insistence on using the term feminist. It means something else to everyone. The word means nothing to my mother, grandmother, or aunt. It means nothing to most of the women we are supporting and sometimes it is an alienating word. It would be better to use words that people understand.

Furthermore, while grantees have developed a greater appreciation for feminism through the project, there are still notable gaps, especially among smaller rural grantees and particularly for the beneficiaries in these communities. During project monitoring visits, many were either unfamiliar with feminism, misconstrued it as being about punishing men, or in the case of beneficiaries expressed overt hostility towards the term feminism.

The project monitor has suggested less overt references to feminism, in favour of the term "women's rights" to avoid this backlash. Gender Links has also invested in peer learning during their learning sessions with grantees to try and build a shared appreciation for feminism. According to a Gender Links staff member, *"I think that one also has to accept that there are different ideological strands (radical, less radical, etc.) and I think this is okay. Different groups will have different points of reference. What is important is to be respectful. If you say you are feminist, you are not saying you are anti-men."*

Speaking with WROs in the focus groups also raised some interesting, and perhaps more encouraging, perspectives on the value of feminism for grantees. For example, one grantee spoke of how *"The feminist approach does empower individuals. I didn't know I was a feminist before, but when they explained what it really was, I identified with it. Being a feminist for me, boosts me to stand up for myself and be a leader."* Another male focus group participant, who was part of a smaller rural organization, stated that

This gender inequality problem is not a problem for women, it is a problem for society. We need men's involvement to say why gender equity is important. As a country and society, we





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have focused on women trying to solve gender inequality. It is not fair; the victim shouldn't have to solve the problems on their own. Men are the perpetrators and must be involved in the solution.

This quote speaks to the challenges as well as the possibilities of feminist programming in South Africa.

Alignment to Feminist Principles

As part of the WVL Formative Evaluation, the evaluation team developed a list of key principles for effective feminist programming. These principles were drawn from a literature review of best practices and guidance for feminist programming from leading thinkers and feminist organizations. The following table summarizes how effectively WVL South Africa has managed to integrate these principles at a project level, based on the findings of the desk dive. In the table below, green means a “good” level of alignment to the principle, yellow means a “fair” level of alignment, and red means a “poor” alignment. These ratings are based on a detailed rubric that was developed by the evaluation team and applied to all desk dive projects.

Feminist programming principles	Degree of alignment	Comments
1. Transform unequal power relations embedded in funding practices by ensuring feminist leadership and grassroots involvement in project design and implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- As a function of their partnership model, whereby multi-year grantees were selected after the project was designed, there were no opportunities for grassroots WROs to shape the overall design of the project. That said, Gender Links are, themselves, an Africa WRO that has taken on the role of implementing partner. This in itself is a positive step by GAC to address unequal power relations. Within the project, Gender Links maintains collaborative, peer to peer relationships with its grantees that go beyond traditional funder-grantee relations.
2. Consider risk management and crisis response strategies to protect feminist activists in contexts of violence and insecurity		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The project has supported WROs through challenging circumstances, including localized conflict and politicization. There are explicit strategies and policies for health and safety, sexual violence, M&E, financial management, and Gender Links







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		provides ongoing support to grantees to navigate challenging circumstances.
3. Adapt funding priorities and practices to the needs of WRO's and feminist activists		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WVL South Africa has been highly responsive to the needs and priorities of a diverse range of WROs. WROs have significant flexibility to define their priorities and focus programming on important issues for their constituencies.
4. IP's commitment to feminist processes and practices, context-knowledge, and ability to represent the diversity of feminist movements.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Links is a proudly feminist organization with a strong commitment to feminist advocacy and programming. They have sought to foster an inclusive women's movement representative of the diversity of women's identities.
5. Provide core, long term funding as well as capacity building support to WRO's and feminist movements, including grassroots and nascent organizations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WVL South Africa provides multi-year grants to a diversity of different WROs, including smaller nascent organizations with limited capacity. Grants can be used to fund programming and core expenses.
6. Provide medium to long-term support to WRO's and feminist movements, and focus on strategic-level outcomes that aim at larger societal change		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WVL South Africa is actively engaged in movement building and collective action towards social change. The project provides support to individual WROs and to networks.
7. Adapt processes to reach small/grassroots organizations (reporting, accountability, MEL).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Links built their granting system from the ground up in order to implement the WVL project. The grant application process was designed to ensure reach a diverse and representative cadre of WRO grantees.
8. Promote engagement from other donors, particularly through multi-stakeholder initiatives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Links was able to leverage funding from UK-FCDO to support their COVID-19 relief activities. These funds were channeled through the WVL rapid response granting mechanism.





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9. Build on the expertise of activists and CS actors involved in the feminist funding ecosystem		- Gender Links is a feminist organization with a footprint throughout Southern Africa. They have also been active in the Anglophone Africa learning cluster for WVL.
10. Promote movement building and dialogue across regions and issues.		- WVL South Africa has invested significant energy in building connections among its grantees. Gender Links also has a presence in other Southern Africa countries and has expanded its networking activities throughout the region.

How Has the Project Responded to COVID-19?

Like many African countries, South Africa adopted a very strict lockdown at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The beta variant and more recently the omicron variant of the novel coronavirus were first identified in South Africa, and the impact of COVID-19 on the South African economy has been severe.

In response to the pandemic, Gender Links shifted many of its operations online, with capacity building and networking activities being delivered remotely. With conditions improving, there has been a gradual shift towards more in-person and hybrid activities, leveraging the increased familiarity with technology that has been developed among grantees.

WVL South Africa did not receive a COVID-19 top-up from GAC, though as previously mentioned the project did secure additional funding from UK-FCDO to expand its rapid response grants. 8 rapid response grants were issued during the first general round of funding in 2020, followed by 9 grants during the COVID-19 response campaign. A further 17 grants were issued in 2021 to work on vaccine justice. An additional 20 rapid response grants were provided using the UK-FCDO funding. Activities funded through the rapid response fund varied from distributing food parcels and personal protective equipment to health awareness campaigns, mental health counselling and supporting victims of gender based violence. Among these grants were a number specifically focused on the LGBTQI+ communities in South Africa.

WVL South Africa's response to COVID-19 has been admirable and a clear demonstration of the value of the rapid response modality. The fact that another international donor was willing to channel funding through this platform further underlines the importance of rapid, flexible funding to respond to emergencies. WVL South Africa also shows that WROs can support relief efforts, especially in rural or marginalized communities.





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The response has not been without its challenges. First, the rapid response window has attracted a great deal of interest, and Gender Links had to review (and reject) many applications. This created some frustration within the feminist and gender equality programming community, which was challenging for Gender Links to navigate as they are themselves part of this movement.

The COVID-19 vaccination campaign also faced some criticism from GAC, in contrast to the initial relief efforts. Points of contention were that i) prescribing a focus on vaccination was too directive and contrary to the spirit of WV; ii) vaccine equity was not a significant gender issue in the country, and iii) WROs were not well-positioned to be active in health promotion. Gender Links has disagreed with this assessment, arguing that vaccine equity was indeed a systemic gender issue in South Africa, and that is was a natural extension of the immediate relief efforts. It should also be noted that focusing on vaccine equity was encouraged, but not required.

A more fundamental challenge, and perhaps more of an existential question for WV, is the inherent lack of sustainability when rapid response grants are used for COVID-19 relief. These funds were initially envisioned as small, time-bound grants towards initiatives that catalyze gender equality. The pandemic has required a shift towards using the grants to meet communities' basic needs, an important piece of work but one that does not advance gender equality per se.

Indeed, the project monitor also noted that there may be risks associated with these grants, since *"the rapid response grants are small. In contexts of severe deprivation and fierce competition for scarce resources, this has the potential to cause inter-community conflict or conflict between the grantee organisation and the community they seek to serve."*

The example of the Siyakhula Community Project, cited in the most recent project monitoring report, is emblematic of these challenges, but also the unexpected capacity building dividends for rapid response grantees. Their rapid response grant of just over \$3000 is the first funding that Siyakhula has ever received since its founding in 2018, and it was also the first time the community received social assistance.

While the grant was for rapid response, Siyakhula benefited from the support and patience of Gender Links in developing their proposal and navigating the due diligence process. Through their project, Siyakhula disbursed food parcels and personal protective equipment to the 30 most impoverished families in their area. As the project monitor noted, *"It is commendable that the entire grant allocated to this organisation was spent on food and PPEs. Not a cent was spent on anything else. To save on transport costs, the selected beneficiaries were told to come to Siyakhula with their wheelbarrows."*

Through receiving this grant, Siyakhula grew considerably as an organization. They registered with the government for the first time and received a certificate of good financial standing, they made their first forays into social media, and improved internal management processes. They also gained greater standing in the community to reach different marginalized groups.





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However, only 30 families were able to receive food packages, which created some animosity within the community. The situation was described as “tense.” The arrival of the project monitor for the data collection activity also created expectations among this impoverished community, who hoped to receive further support.³ And, fundamentally, the rapid response grant in this case met the immediate needs of the community but did not contribute to any sustainable change. This is reflected in quotes from beneficiaries who stated that:

“...we had absolutely nothing, the funding changed our situation and we had something to cook. We managed to live and survive because of it . . . but the situation has not changed, it is still as it was . . . there is nothing, nothing, and nothing”.

“Afterwards, we felt pain because our situation was reversed back to where our lives were before. But there was nothing we could do. Whenever I am hungry, I always cherish that we had our opportunity of getting food parcels and that makes me feel good”.

This example underscores the fact that rapid response grants do serve an important purpose, but their ultimate impact is inherently limited. Gender Links has been cognisant of these issues, and in response to findings from the project monitoring report have sought to refine the rapid response granting approach. Most notably, the value of the grants will be doubled, with the hopes of improving their impact.

How has the Project Approached Innovation?

Stakeholders saw the WVL South Africa model itself as being innovative. Working with a local organization as an implementing partner, and combining grants with ongoing capacity building, was seen as a unique approach within the context of South Africa. The approach to accompaniment and capacity building that Gender Links has taken is also innovative and reflects good practices in feminist programming.

In contrast to other WVL projects, WVL South Africa has not taken a deliberate approach to incubating innovation among its grantees. WVL South Africa is not part of GAC's West and Central Africa Innovation Pilot. In its ongoing efforts to refine and improve the rapid response granting mechanism, Gender Links has proposed adding “innovation” as a selection criterion, drawing from the example set by WVL Nigeria.

That said, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the project to make use of different virtual collaboration technologies. For example, the project's annual summits have been hosted virtually, and the project has also offered an online help platform. WVL grantees were also invited to compete in

³ The monitor eventually was able to find a way to support this community.





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the regional SADC Protocol@Work summit, where innovation was a major theme. Two WVL grantees won awards at this summit, one of which was for an innovative approach to working with men.

What Have been the Most Notable Achievements?

WVL South Africa has made good progress towards its intermediate outcomes, and according to the most recent monitoring report the project has achieved all of its immediate outcomes.

Pillar 1: Organizational Strengthening

Gender Links has provided extensive capacity building support, primarily through formal training, mentorship and active accompaniment of its multi-year grantees. Capacity has also been built to a lesser extent through interactions with rapid response grantees (eg. helping to meet due diligence requirements) and for unsuccessful applicants who were able to learn from the application process.

In particular, the project has helped to build WROs' capacity for financial management, internal governance, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. This was noted by WROs who participated in focus groups, who appreciated the support they received to improve the managerial side of their work. According to the project monitor,

Organisations reported a significant improvement in organisational management and capacity as a direct result of the support provided through the WLV-SA project. In this regard 77% reported that their administrative systems had improved, 74% that their record keeping systems improved; 74% that their financial management improved; and 72% that their monitoring and evaluation processes improved.

For example, the “Bellona Female Network developed several organisational policies and set up a Cloud based filing system. They are now confident with the use of Sage Pastel Evolution finance management system, and were able to demonstrate effective use of information technology for document and project management.” Other organizations also cited having grown more familiar with the use of Sage Pastel for financial accounting.





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Figure 2: Gender Links staff member Bessie Malatji assisting Mary Dobbie, a social worker at New Castle Child Welfare to upload an application for a grant

One other notable success of the project has been helping WROs to identify and secure additional funding from other sources, such as local government institutions. The year two project report indicates that

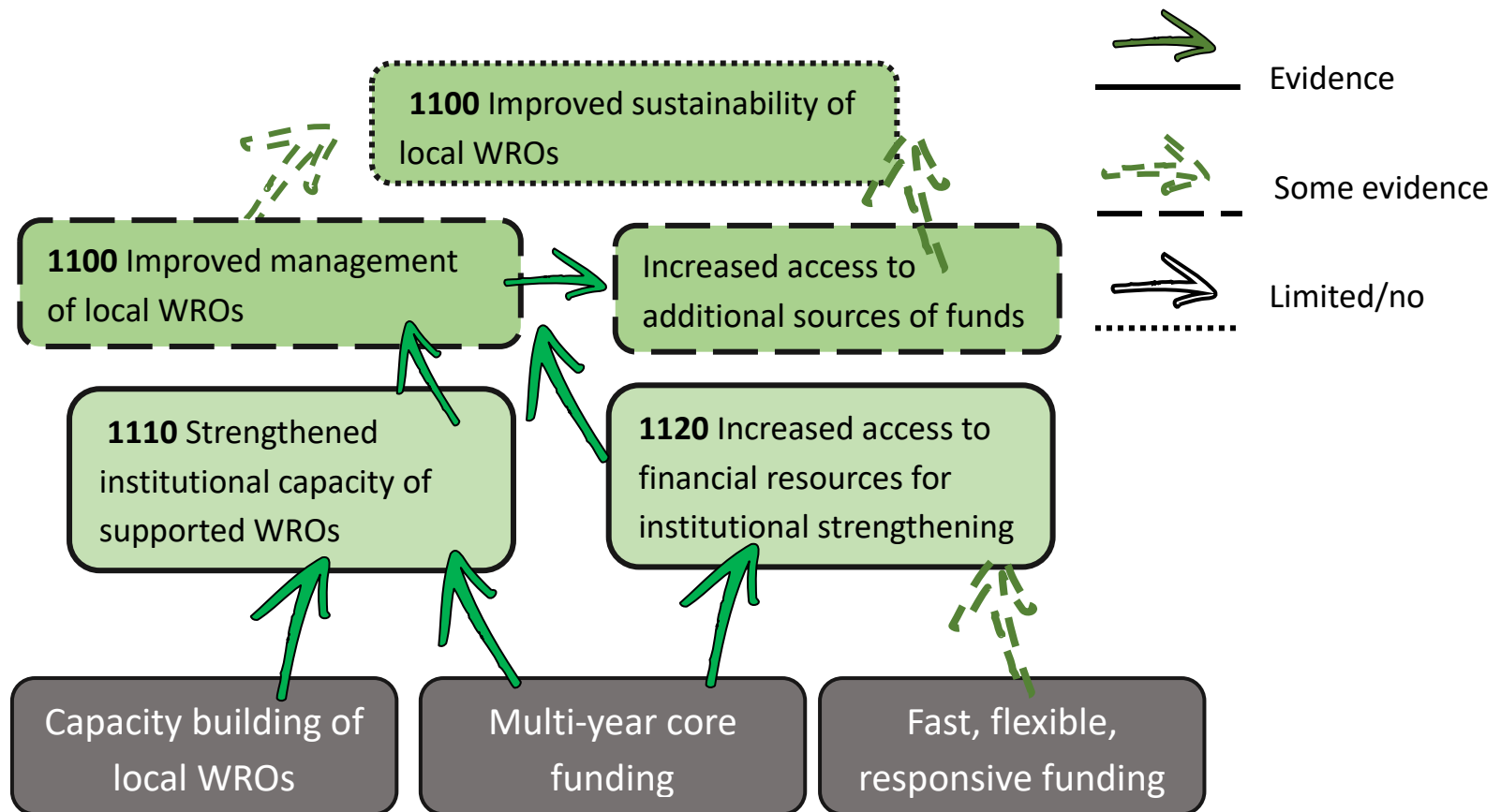
WROs are forming strategic partnerships within their localities and receiving in-kind support, and 15 WROS reported raising additional funding amounting to ZAR 4,626,529 [approx. \$383K CAD]. Grantees report that they raised an additional ZAR 4 806 349,00 (CAD 410 799) during Year Two; and received in-kind support valued at ZAR 1,544,900.00 (CAD 132,043.00). They attribute this, at least in part, to the capacity building, institutional strengthening and confidence-enhancing activities of the WVL Fund.

The ability of WROs to secure this additional funding represents promising early progress towards financial sustainability through the WVL project.



Pillar 1: Evidence to Support WVL's Theory of Change

The following diagram, and related diagrams on pages 19 and 22, depict the WVL program-level theory of change as interpreted by the evaluation team. This may differ from the exact logic model used in each project, and the logic model put forward in the program's formative stages. Based on the data gathered through this desk dive case study, the arrows depict how much evidence is available at this point to validate the theory of change. This may be influenced by how advanced the project is in implementing certain components.





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Pillar 2: Enhancing Programming Effectiveness

In addition to building WROs' managerial capacity, Gender Links has supported WROs to employ new and improved approaches to delivering their core programming. According to the project monitor, Gender Links

...was providing ongoing and effective technical assistance to WROs to (1) design and sustain policy, outreach, awareness, and advocacy campaigns to enable women and girls to access a range of gender-responsive services in four provinces, and (2) develop innovative programming and community mobilization towards the actualization of women's rights. Monitoring data demonstrates that the abilities of WROs to reach marginalized groups with high-quality services, and to undertake policy and advocacy activities has increased.

WVL's support has also enhanced the ability, through funding and improved capacity, to carry out advocacy and policy dialogue activities. This is supported by data from the project monitor, and by examples shared by grantees during focus groups. For example, the Great People of South Africa were able to build a partnership with a local government institution that included office space.

One area that was highlighted by many focus group participants is their increased use of the media to enhance the reach of their programming. This includes traditional media, like television and radio, which have been important platforms for advocacy. For example, the Great People of South Africa have been very active on local radio, helping to raise their profile as a service provider in the community. Another grantee, Rise Up Against Gender-Based Violence, described how

...we were featured in our local news, we were featured on International Women's Day. We have good relationships with media. We have been in this space for 3 years now. We have been able to establish a nice footprint. Funding from GL has elevated us. We have been contacted by news agencies in South Africa and internationally. We are grateful for GL and Canada in terms of being able to fund this. Because we have been able to elevate through media, we are getting a lot of requests...

The project has also had a strong push towards social media. Gender Links provides a model in this regard, having set up a website and a Twitter feed for the project which promotes project activities and amplifies posts from grantees. Many WROs have made their first forays into social media, setting up organizational profiles for the very first time. This has had a tangible impact; for example, one focus group participant described how *"most of our fundraising happens on social media. We are growing. Gender Links has helped us and has helped me – because we are a smaller org, at some stage in this work, I became the driver, organizer, everything. But now I am able to delegate more."*

More generally, many WROs in focus groups stated that WVL's multi year funding has been crucial for them in consolidating and expanding their work. For example, Queer Women in Business have been able to maintain and expand their business incubator program to reach more women-owned





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businesses. Sasobiz Foundation stated that WVL funding is supporting their ongoing transition from a small, charitable arm of a private company to a fully-fledged social enterprise.

Finally, it is worth noting that the response to COVID-19 through WVL South Africa has been a major success in terms of improving the effectiveness and visibility of WRO's programming. This was primarily achieved through rapid response grants to a variety of WROs in South Africa, a few of whom were also multi-year grantees. The availability of these funds allowed WROs to engage in relief activities which have been crucial in supporting vulnerable communities.



Figure 3: Zintle Khobeni speaks to media on behalf of the Great People of South Africa





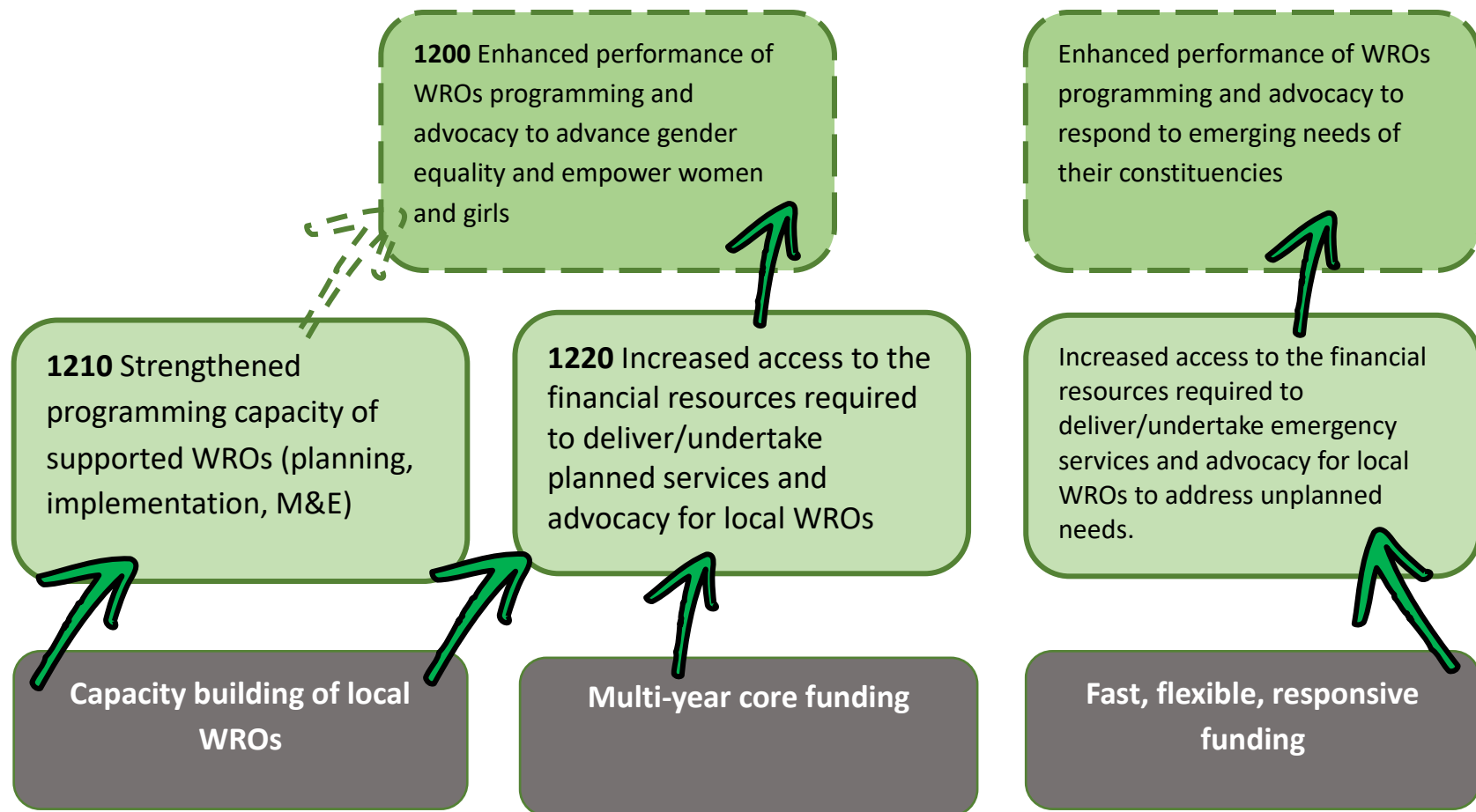
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Figure 4: A demonstration led by Amanzimtoti Trauma Unit



Pillar 2: Evidence to Support WVL's Theory of Change





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Pillar 3: Network Strengthening and Alliance Building

WVL South Africa has been extremely successful in building connections among grantees and strengthening the South African women's movement. Gender Links has been able to foster an inclusive and mutually encouraging community where grantees are able to share, learn and build on each other's work. Gender Links being embedded in the South African feminist movement has undoubtedly been a factor for success.

Gender Links has hosted regular learning and sharing summits where WROs are able to come together and present their work. These summits have also featured mini-awards shows, where standout WROs are recognized for their successes. These summits have helped to cultivate a learning community where grantees are excited to participate, and connected them to the broader Southern African women's movement. For example, one focus group participant described how

During the anniversary that we attended, I was touched by the history of how Gender Links was formed. I realized that somehow there are common experiences in forming movements like this... I was excited to see the opportunity given to grantees to share lived experience. How they have become leaders in their organizations. I hope to share my personal story in the next conference, to share how I became the founder and leader of this organization. It is rare to be given these type of platforms. It motivates, knowing that history of a person and an organization. We are a national organization now that covers the whole country in some way or another. When I started I didn't know that we would get here, sometimes I look back and smile.

In addition to these summits, the project has created a WhatsApp group with all grantees, so they can share information, news and events. Rapid response interventions by grantees also helped create partnerships between state and non-state actors. This has led to some concrete examples of various grantees connecting with each other on shared initiatives. One focus group participant working on economic empowerment described how "There is a sister organization here in Pietermaritzburg and we often exchange with them. They deal with the social side of things, so we often refer them if they need support. They refer back to us if they have people who want to get involved in business." Another focus group participated discussed how

When we joined Gender Links, then we got to know a whole lot more organizations. We are in Kwazulu-Natal and got to know more organizations the area. This facilitated our capacity building. COVID helped, as everyone was now banded together in an emergency situation. But we have more partnerships and networks now that we are with GL... We have partnered with an environmental project... With Waste Action, we are trying to help communities clean up the environment. Help with recycling, farming projects, provide seedlings to communities who are now growing their own gardens. It's a holistic project; we can't just tackle GBV, this is a multi-faceted problem. If we help communities to look after themselves, we can teach them.





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While still early in the project's implementation, the efforts made to build a movement among grantees is leading to some early successes, potentially laying the foundation for collective advocacy initiatives or other activities in the years to come.

Finally, WVL South Africa is also providing grants directly to networks. These largely function in the same way as other multi-year grants to WROs, but support organizations with a wider reach. WVL South Africa is supporting three networks:

- South African Women in Dialogue (SAWID)
- Sisonke National Sex Worker Movement
- We Will Speak Out South Africa

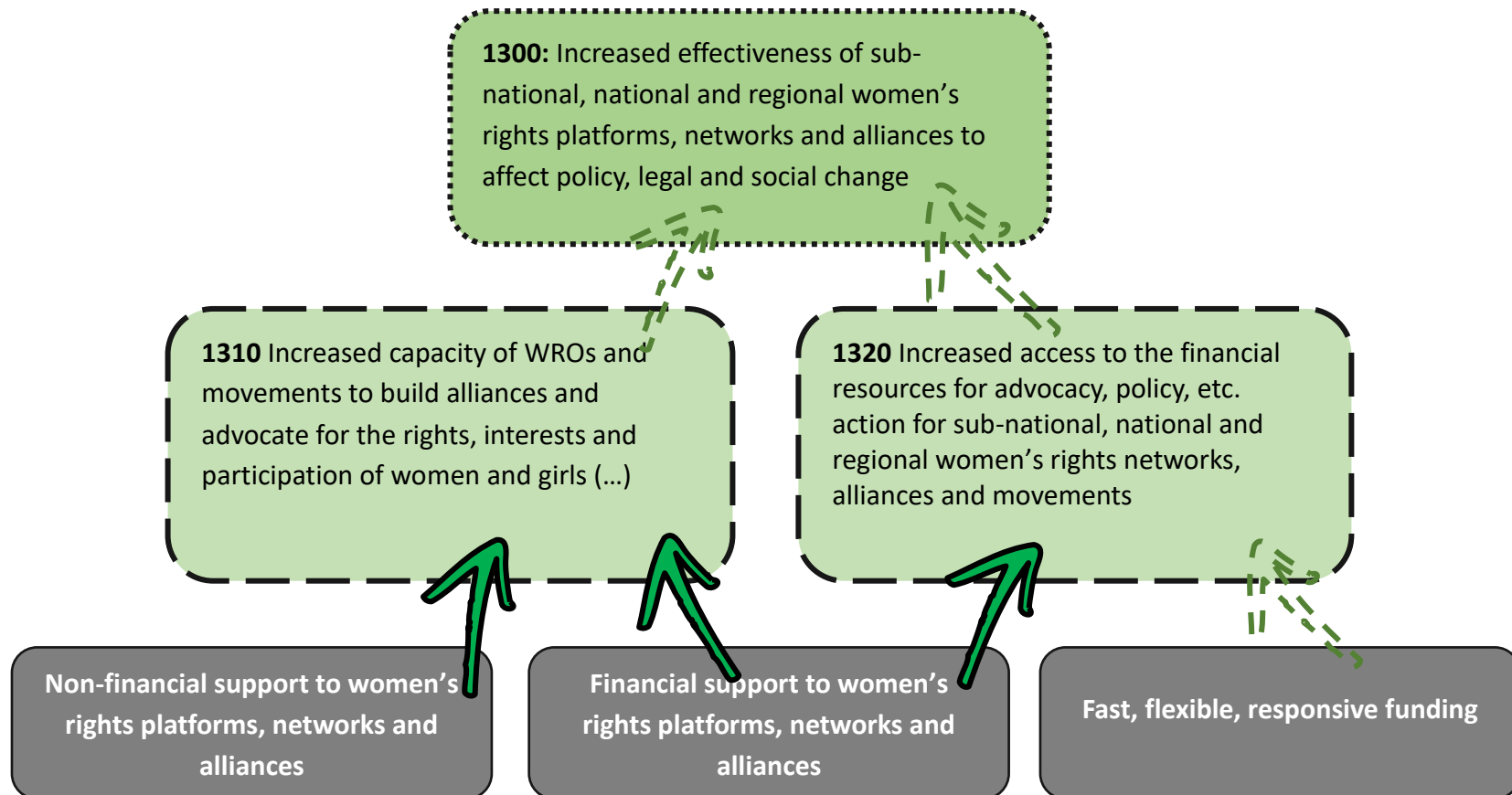
These grants have largely focused on strengthening the organizational capacity of the networks. For example, during a focus group discussion a representative from Sisonke discussed how they are in the process of setting up a new head office in Johannesburg and a new strategic plan. WVL training has also inspired them to take a different approach to internal capacity building, and they are working to ensure that learning opportunities are shared among all staff, and not just the leadership.



Figure 5: Rise Up Against SGBV is recognized for their work at the first awards ceremony for WVL grantees



Pillar 3: Evidence to Support WVL's Theory of Change





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What Factors Have Influenced the Implementation of the Project?

WVL South Africa has had to contend with a challenging context given the COVID-19 pandemic, but also local unrest in several parts of the country. Nonetheless, the project has responded admirably, and in a short space of time has achieved a great deal in terms of responding to immediate needs and building WROs' capacity.

Gender Links has faced challenges as a new GAC partner. The most challenging aspect of operationalizing the WVL design in South Africa was the fact that Gender Links did not have previous experience with sub-granting to WROs. As a result, there were no mechanisms in place for receiving applications or managing the WRO grants. Gender Links had expected greater support from GAC in setting up their granting system (and realistically a ready-made system) to manage a call for proposals. When this was not forthcoming, the partner had to build a system from the ground up; this required a notable investment of time and money. GAC's PTLs, both at HQ and in the field, have made significant efforts in their own capacity to support Gender Links and provide them with the tools they need. However, GAC was not well-positioned to support Gender Links as they embarked on building a granting system from scratch.

One notable feature of WVL South Africa is the very active engagement of the project's monitor. The terms of reference for the monitor are arguably more like an ongoing evaluation than simple monitoring. While this has meant additional effort for all the stakeholders in South Africa, the benefit has been a wealth of monitoring and evaluation data. As a result, the WVL South Africa project is well-positioned to identify lessons on what is working and what isn't, and making major contributions to answering WVL's overall learning questions.

Gender Links has faced a steep learning curve in adapting to GAC's reporting requirements, though again this challenge has been addressed, to the point that GAC's officers are very impressed with the reports from WVL South Africa. Gender Links had faced an issue with GAC financial requirements, specifically around using interest accrued from project funds to expand project activities. With encouragement from their GAC counterparts, Gender Links successfully requested that these funds be split between systems development for the organization and some additional grants. The resolution of this issue is a positive example of how feminist principles can be used to push back against bureaucracy, and how flexibility can be found within GAC systems if there is sufficient will to do so.

A significant challenge has been the level of effort required in actively accompanying WROs through the capacity building process, especially given limited human resources within Gender Links. The partner has committed significant effort to accompaniment, from the application roadshow through the ongoing support to partners. As noted by the project monitor,

These methods, and the extent of the training provided, are strengths of the WVL-SA implementing partner, but also created challenges. These include the fact that the





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requirements of the approach exceeded the capacity of the WVL-SA team; not sufficiently recognizing that resource constraints have prohibitive effects on the ability of some WROs to comply; and a lack of flexibility to accommodate existing financial management systems, resulting in duplication of effort for some WROs.

While accompaniment has proven challenging, it has been a crucial ingredient in the success of capacity building efforts thus far. Focus group participants were quite appreciative of their relationship with Gender Links, which they saw as a form of peer support coming from a more senior organization with experience in the movement. According to the project monitor, “the selection of a local WRO as the implementing partner is a key factor in the success of the project to date.”

Indeed, despite the aforementioned challenges, Gender Links themselves have been a major beneficiary of the WVL South Africa project. Gender Links are embedded in local civil society as an avowedly feminist organization, and GAC's investment in Gender Links through WVL has helped to elevate their profile and position them as an attractive partner for other funders. This is exemplified by the UK's decision to channel their own COVID-19 relief funds through the WVL project. Having gained this first experience as a granting organization, Gender Links are exploring further opportunities to expand their programming in the region, building on lessons learned through WVL.

WVL South Africa has also benefited from the Anglophone Africa WVL learning community, having served as a facilitator for the region. Through participating in this group, Gender Links decided to reorient their rapid response window towards a rolling call for proposals with larger grants, drawing from the examples in Ghana and Kenya.

One notable challenge, and success, worth highlighting is the way in which the project responded to issues of due diligence and financial mismanagement. Gender Links noted that the due diligence requirements are the same for all grantees, both multi-year or rapid response, regardless of size. As a local NGO without sub-granting experience, this has proven to be more challenging than expected for Gender Links. However, the organization has done an admirable job of managing risk and responding to challenges when they arise.

This is exemplified by a case study in the most recent monitor's report about the Salt Lake Residents' Action Group. In short, questions were raised about whether a rapid response grant was used inappropriately, reflecting the grantee's poor financial management practices, possible misrepresentation of activities and using family members as service providers. The example speaks to insufficient due diligence work on the part of Gender Links, as more stringent screening up front would have revealed some concerns about the organization's financial practices. That said, the way Gender Links was able to respond to this case, especially considering they are new to being a granting organization, is laudable. Gender Links staff credit their effective whistleblowing system that allowed them to identify the issue in the first place, upon which they conducted a thorough investigation. As stated by the project monitor, this case study





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provides an example of what could go wrong and includes some recommendations to prevent similar events in future. Inversely, the case study also serves as a best-case example of Gender Link's dedication to the effective implementation of the WVL-SA Project, as well as, of their monitoring and project management capacity.

The project's ability to respond when things don't go according to plan is also evident in how Gender Links responded to performance issues with one of their grantees that supports women with disabilities. This organization was not meeting the conditions of the grant and not communicating well. Despite a concerted effort to find a solution, especially as they were the only disability-focused organization among the multi year grantees, Gender Links ultimately had to cancel the grant arrangement. However, in the interests of maintaining a diverse and inclusive cadre of grantees, Gender Links are re-advertised the multi-year granting opportunity with the specific intention of funding an organization of women with disabilities. This speaks to the commitment within the project to support a diverse, representative group of WROs to advance gender equality and women's rights in South Africa. This call was recently concluded, with two disability organizations being selected to receive support from WVL.

What Can We Learn from this Project?

WVL South Africa serves as an example of the value of working with local NGOs, and particularly those that identify as feminist organizations. Gender Links has adapted to GAC systems admirably as a new partner, and are actively accompanying WROs on a process of improving their managerial and programming capacity. WVL South Africa has also provided a space in which to build a more inclusive, supportive women's rights movement among WROs around the country.

At the same time, WVL South Africa demonstrates where GAC can do much better in supporting new partners. This is something to consider if programs like WVL continue to seek out new Southern partners. Nonetheless, Gender Link's participation in the WVL project has been a major boost to their profile and capacity, and has positioned them to take on similar programming in the future.

The WVL South Africa project also provides a useful example of remaining avowedly feminist, even in the face of resistance. In particular, WVL South Africa has been driven by a desire to see an inclusive feminist movement, and the proactive efforts made by Gender Links through the application phase and support to grantees has allowed them to reach organizations that have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream women's movement, like sex workers and gender diverse groups.

Finally, WVL South Africa provides an important proof of concept for the rapid response granting mechanism. Despite some concerns about targeting, the rapid response grants were deployed to great effect during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide critical relief to vulnerable communities throughout South Africa. The fact that another donor chose to channel funds through the WVL platform is a ringing endorsement of this model of leveraging WROs as conduits to supporting the





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most marginalized during crises. The ongoing refinement of the rapid response mechanism speaks to the potential for this type of funding.

All things considered, South Africa stands out as one of the strongest WVL projects, speaking to the value of locally-based, feminist organizations as partners in supporting women and their organizations in all their diversity.





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Annex 1: Documents Reviewed for the Case Study

The following documents were reviewed as part of the desk dive:

- Project implementation plan
- 2019-2020 annual report and 2020-2021 annual report
- Year 2 semi-annual operations report
- 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 management summary reports
- Year2 and 3 work plans
- Outputs and activities reporting worksheet template
- Project approval memorandum
- WVL South Africa Analysis
- Project monitor's baseline report
- Stories of change document
- Local Monitor Report on GL Support to Local WROs in Application and in Selection Process
- WVL granting manual
- Terms of Reference – Grants Selection Committee
- WVL Selected WROs – profile thematic and geographic
- Contribution Agreement
- Project Proposal

