



## Leadership, Organization, and Movement-Building

The collective organizing of women and girls has sparked far-reaching social, economic, and cultural changes in nearly every part of the world. The last century of the women’s movement marked profound shifts in women’s status and opportunities and laid the foundation for the recognition of women’s rights and the push for gender equality at the global level.<sup>1</sup> This incredible shift has taken place “not by accident but by design – through the conscious and determined struggles of courageous women and the movements they have built.”<sup>2</sup> Creating opportunities for individual women and girls to build leadership skills and movements for change has proven vital to advancing the status of women, boosting community development, and improving the accountability and equity of local power structures.<sup>3</sup>

*“Through [women’s] activism and advocacy, our very understanding of what constitutes social justice has been indelibly altered, and the once seemingly normal forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and exclusion are now at least recognized as problems, if not partially resolved.”<sup>2</sup>*

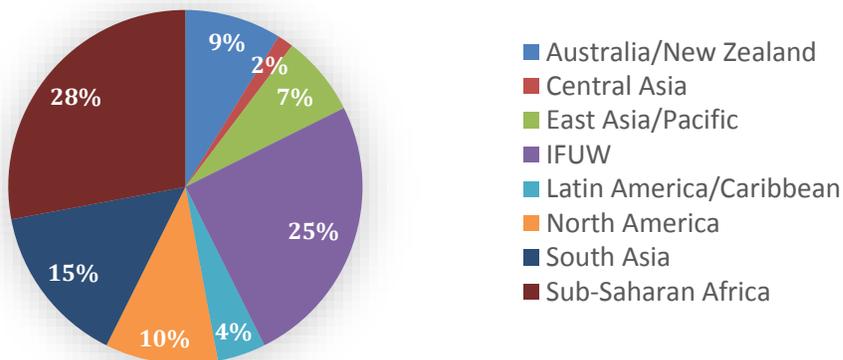
Despite the many gains, women’s leadership roles and participation in government and power structures remain restricted in many parts of the world. Women remain “underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.”<sup>4</sup>

From 1970-2013, VGIF invested more than 450,000 USD to support 75 projects with a focus on women’s leadership and movement-building in several regions, including projects with an international focus organized through a partnership with the International Federation of University Women. Leadership projects have served more than 6,300 participants.

### VGIF grantees used the following strategies to advance women’s and girls’ leadership including:

- Training women and girls in leadership skills and community engagement;
- Supporting participation in international conferences and network-building for individuals and organizations;
- Educating women about the political process and local policies.

### VGIF Leadership Projects by Region



## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Engaging Young Women in Community Development



The “Empowering Young Women in Practical Leadership Skills” Project by the Akilah Institute for Women was funded by VGIF in 2011-2012 to increase leadership and community engagement skills for young women in Rwanda. The project provided leadership training to young women and supported them in developing and carrying out community projects to address malnutrition, family planning, adolescent pregnancy prevention, youth and work attitudes, domestic violence, and human rights. Through the projects, the young women enhanced their individual leadership, speaking, and advocacy skills and learned strategies to plan and partner with local communities to promote development and social change.

The project served 42 young women and reached a total of 220 people through the community

development projects. The projects engaged young women as partners in identifying community needs and looking for local solutions. According to a spokesperson for the organization, the projects helped young women gain **“more confidence and become more assertive. They have gained power in knowing that they can speak and be heard.”**

## VGIF ACHIEVEMENTS: Leadership, Organization, and Movement-building

VGIF was founded in 1969 with a focus on promoting women’s leadership in community development and social change efforts. From 1970-2013, VGIF funded **75 projects** that included activities to foster women’s and girls’ leadership, organization, and movement-building. Approximately **6,300** people were reached through these projects.

The majority of projects focused on individuals and provided **network- building opportunities, leadership training, and support**. On average, **84 women and girls** were reached by each project.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing Declaration.” (United Nations, Beijing, 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Association for Women’s Rights in Development, *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: the Status of Financing for Women’s Rights Organizing and Gender Equality*. (AWID, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Huairou Commission, *Final Report: Global Summit on Grassroots Women’s Leadership and Governance*. (Huairou Commission, 2011), available at [http://huairou.org/sites/default/files/SUMMIT%20REPORT%20website.final\\_.pdf](http://huairou.org/sites/default/files/SUMMIT%20REPORT%20website.final_.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> UN Women, “Women’s Leadership and Political Participation.” Available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>.