

# WEDU ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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THANK YOU

# VISION



A world where 50% of all  
leaders are women.

# LETTER FROM CEO



For many around the world 2020 was a very hard year; so it was for us too. Many of our funding sources dried up abruptly and we had to make significant organizational and programmatic sacrifices to ensure continuity. The pandemic and its ensuing economic crisis highlighted some of Wedu's structural weaknesses and violently asked us what we want to do: give up and let go, or stand up and keep going?

In those moments of deep reflection, Rising Stars and Mentors proactively reached out with words of support and all those conversations helped me and Wedu's team to find the resolve to keep going.

We have been inspired by the examples of leadership and resilience from our Rising Stars who stepped up in their communities to help in any way they could to contain the pandemic, from spreading information over the radio to organizing fundraisers and working overtime in the healthcare sector.

Women globally have been particularly hit by the pandemic, with the double burden of extra childcare and a difficult economic environment. At the same time women have been the leaders the world needed most - playing a key role in all healthcare systems and leading best in class response to the pandemic in places like New Zealand, Iceland and Taiwan.

In 2020 Wedu rediscovered our two core strengths: 1) a global community of inspiring leaders and 2) a track record of managing programmes and teams remotely. On those two pillars, we started building a new Wedu.

I am grateful for all the partners and funders who believed in us in the hardest moments. I am grateful to the team who worked around the clock to make the turnaround possible and to our boards in the UK, Thailand and Cambodia who helped us navigate uncharted territory. I am particularly grateful to the Rising Stars who inspired us by showing us what leading in a moment of crisis looks like.

We ended 2020 with new partnerships, confidence in our strengths, a sense of possibility for the future and a reinforced belief that the world needs more women in leadership now.

One of the many supporting messages I received contained a poem that I want to share with you.

## **In the darkest of nights**

It was late  
it was dark  
I was tired  
on the ground

then I looked around  
and all I could see  
were Stars,  
Rising all around me.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Keep Rising,  
Mario

# WHAT WE DO



Wedu nurtures the leadership development of women changemakers around the world by supporting their unique, lifelong journeys with leadership development training, opportunities and funding for education.



Leadership Development  
(online and in-person)



Mentorship  
(online and in-person)



Financing for higher and  
professional education via Income  
Sharing Agreements

# IMPACT NUMBERS



**1,544**

leadership actions taken by our Rising Stars



**1,926**

women leaders in our leadership community

**900** Rising Stars

**1,026** Programme Participants in other leadership programmes



**1,054**

mentors from **85** countries  
Over **55,219** mentorship hours



**355**

participants in our Leadership Training and Orientation Programme (LTOP)



**1,500+**

attendees in our webinars

# 7 MOMENTS OUR COMMUNITY SHONE

As people craved connection during lockdowns across the world, Wedu fostered solidarity and sparked new connections from mentoring conversations to community-wide events.



Mentors joined Rising Stars to lead the first **100%** community-led interview cycle for Rising Stars.

We reached the milestone of **1,000** mentors worldwide! Mentors come from **85** nationalities and diverse sectors.



Over **1,500** people attended our webinar series, where 56 speakers led 41 webinars, creating over 70 hours of shared learning and connection.

# 7 MOMENTS OUR COMMUNITY SHONE



Lin, a Rising Star in Myanmar, initiated a Burmese-language mentorship programme for **20** young women leaders.

Rising Stars united to run a fundraising campaign to raise funds for Wedu's flagship programme, the Global Mentorship Programme.



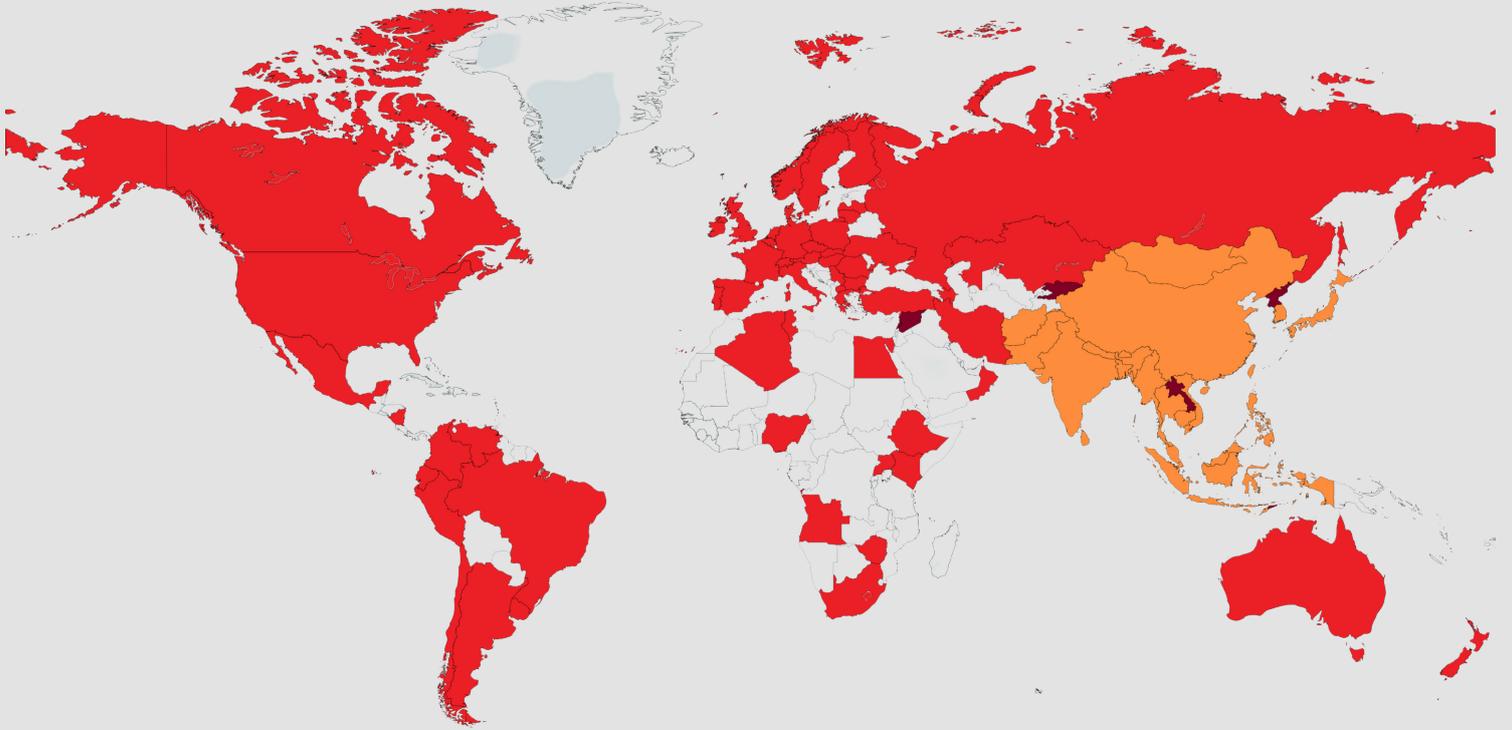
Our community spread the word about Wedu on social media, organically expanding our online community to over **21,000** members.



Mentors like Ana Sanchez Alfonso were inspired by their mentees to take action during the pandemic. Her initiative, Smiles Behind Masks, donated over **500** masks in total in South Africa.



# AROUND THE WORLD



## WEDU'S LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY



Only Mentors



Mentors, Rising Stars  
and Programme  
Participants



Only Rising Stars  
and Programme  
Participants

# LEADERSHIP STORIES

In 2020, Rising Stars across Asia stepped up in moments of crisis to lead in big and small ways. Collectively, they reported taking over 1,500 leadership actions. Below are some of their stories.



## CHANGE SEEKING

*Sreytouch, Cambodia*

Sreytouch continued to amplify women's and children's voices. She persisted in breaking patriarchal barriers: From confronting limiting beliefs in her family that don't allow women to share their opinions, to challenging unjust gender norms and harmful practices in her community, to leading activities that tackle the rising shadow pandemic of gender-based violence.

## ENTERPRISING

*Yoana, Indonesia*

Yoana organised the first Virtual Disability Culture Event in Indonesia for the Inclusive Dance Organisation after all in-person cultural activities were suspended. Determined to create a space to enable people with disabilities to express themselves through art and dance, she organised nine events, bringing over 500 participants together through online exhibitions, art workshops and dialogues with experts. Amidst the pressures of a national lockdown, the weeklong event uplifted the spirits of the participants and showcased their work worldwide.



# LEADERSHIP STORIES



## COMMUNITY FOCUSED

*Kavita, Pakistan*

Kavita started funding the studies and basic needs of two children in a nearby orphanage and intends to build an educational institute for them someday. Thanks to her generosity, these children are receiving better nutrition and proper clothing, and are still enrolled in school. After seeing Kavita's example, others in her community stepped forward to support children's welfare.

## RISK-TAKING

*Sadikshya, Nepal*

When Sadikshya saw how government inaction was worsening the fragile healthcare system's inability to cope with the pandemic in Nepal, she organized a (socially-distanced) protest in her district. Sadikshya mobilized over 100 people to join her protest march and as a result, the local government authorised relief packages for daily wage workers and increased PCR testing.



# LEADERSHIP STORIES



## ACTION ORIENTED

*Marzia, Bangladesh*

Spurred on by the belief that actions speak louder than words, Marzia , (aged 21), founded the Treat and Care Foundation to feed daily wage workers and people disproportionately impacted by the pandemic in Dhaka. Beginning by providing nutritious meals to 25 people, Marzia's initiative quickly grew to serve over 700 people over the span of five months, with plans to scale up to 6,000 people over the next year through food drives.

## INSPIRATIONAL

*Lalenkawli, India*

To support local handicraft entrepreneurs and extend the reach of Mizoram's unique cultural heritage, Lalenkawli, who has a PhD in Commerce, provided digital marketing training, which resulted in an increase of sales and inspired community members to take action and share knowledge.



# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Rising Star Opportunity

We welcomed 164 additional Rising Stars — all emerging women leaders in Asia — to our flagship initiative this year, bringing our total up to 900. These leaders are diverse. They represent 18 nationalities and multiple generations, and are studying and working in a myriad of fields: from health and engineering to law and business, to the environment and technology. They are united by their leadership aspirations and commitment to their community. In 2020, the Rising Stars reported taking 1,544 leadership actions for their community and self-development.

Every year, we improve our flagship initiative and 2020 was no exception:

- 100% Community-led Interviews: 21 Mentors and 42 Rising Stars joined forces to lead the first 100% community-led intake of Rising Stars. Together, they conducted 154 interviews, connecting with future Rising Stars and learning from their inspiring stories in the process.
- Customised Opportunities: We piloted sending customised leadership development opportunities to Rising Stars each month based on their goals and the leadership traits.



“Being a Rising Star not only helps me in defining a clear vision of my long-term aspirations, but also the prospective pathways to achieve my goals.”

Nabila, Rising Star, Indonesia

“This journey of being a Rising Star has made me more self-sufficient, confident and empathetic towards my ambition. My goals are more aligned, and now I am ready to take on the world with the best intentions.”

Shumile, Rising Star, Pakistan



# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Global Mentorship Programme

To accompany Rising Stars in their unique leadership journeys and help them achieve their goals, Wedu matches them with mentors for extendable eight-month cycles on-demand. This year, we set up over 200 new matches and facilitated over 16,929 hours of mentoring.



“With my mentor, we talked about life, fears, goals, and the future, and she taught me how I should overcome my fears and challenges in life. Even though the mentorship was only one year long, my learnings were lifelong.”

Madhu, Rising Star, Sri Lanka

“Knowing the challenges and hurdles they have to come across in their journey, I always wanted to mentor and support young women with immense potential. It feels wonderful to be giving back to the Wedu community, which helped me stride towards my success as well.”

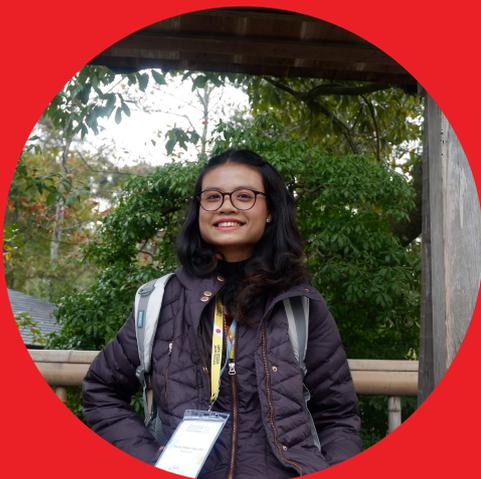
Farhana, Mentor & Rising Star, Bangladesh



# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Leadership Training and Orientation Programme

355 women from 24 countries developed clarity on their priorities, mapped out a vision for their lives, and set goals around their newly-articulated ambitions through our online Leadership Training and Orientation Programme (LTOP). The LTOP is a two-month self-paced course structured as a series of reflective exercises, which lays the foundation for becoming a Rising Star.



“The LTOP helped me reflect on my strengths and weaknesses and attain my fullest potential through the exercises. This has been an invaluable learning journey for me.”

Thunn, Rising Star, Myanmar

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS



US-ASEAN  
**WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**  
FOR YSEALI

## YSEALI Women's Leadership Academy

Wedu brought 38 young women leaders together from across Southeast Asia for a virtual 6th Annual Women's Leadership Academy as part of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) funded by the U.S. Mission to ASEAN. Over the course of two weeks, the Academy delivered workshops on leadership skills and capacity building with an emphasis on promoting economic development to emerging women leaders from civil society, government, and the private sector. We continued to nurture the ever-growing community of over 200 YSEALI WLA alumni, by hosting a strategic planning retreat for the board and awarding seed grants for community activities.



“The Women Leadership Academy (WLA) served as such a wonderful opportunity to recharge and remind myself of the bigger dream we all share: a kinder and more loving world. But to reach that goal, we truly need to work together and be rooted in the fact that we’re not alone in this meaningful fight. After the academy, it was just more natural for me to take meaningful risks because I’ve been inspired by my cohort that every meaningful effort from the heart truly counts.”

Raevne, YSEALI WLA 2020 Participant, Philippines

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS



## Refugee Mentorship Programme

Wedu continued supporting the leadership capabilities of Burmese refugees in three camps (Maela, Nupo, and Umpiem) along the Thai-Myanmar border in partnership with the International Rescue Committee. Since 2017, we have helped over 70 refugees set and achieve goals, fostered independence, and supported sustainable livelihoods through mentorship and goal setting.



“My mentor also taught me how not to give up when things get hard and to value myself. She will always be my mentor and I am glad to have her to guide me.”

Ra He Mar Be, IRC Programme Participant

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Women Rise Fellowship

Activity supported by the  
Canada Fund for Local Initiatives  
Activité réalisée avec l'appui du  
Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales



At the height of the pandemic, we launched a virtual Women Rise Fellowship programme in Cambodia to support 20 high-impact women leaders at the front lines of social change who were working in education, public health and social work. In partnership with the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, we equipped these women with the leadership capabilities and practical support needed to lead their organizations through uncertainty.

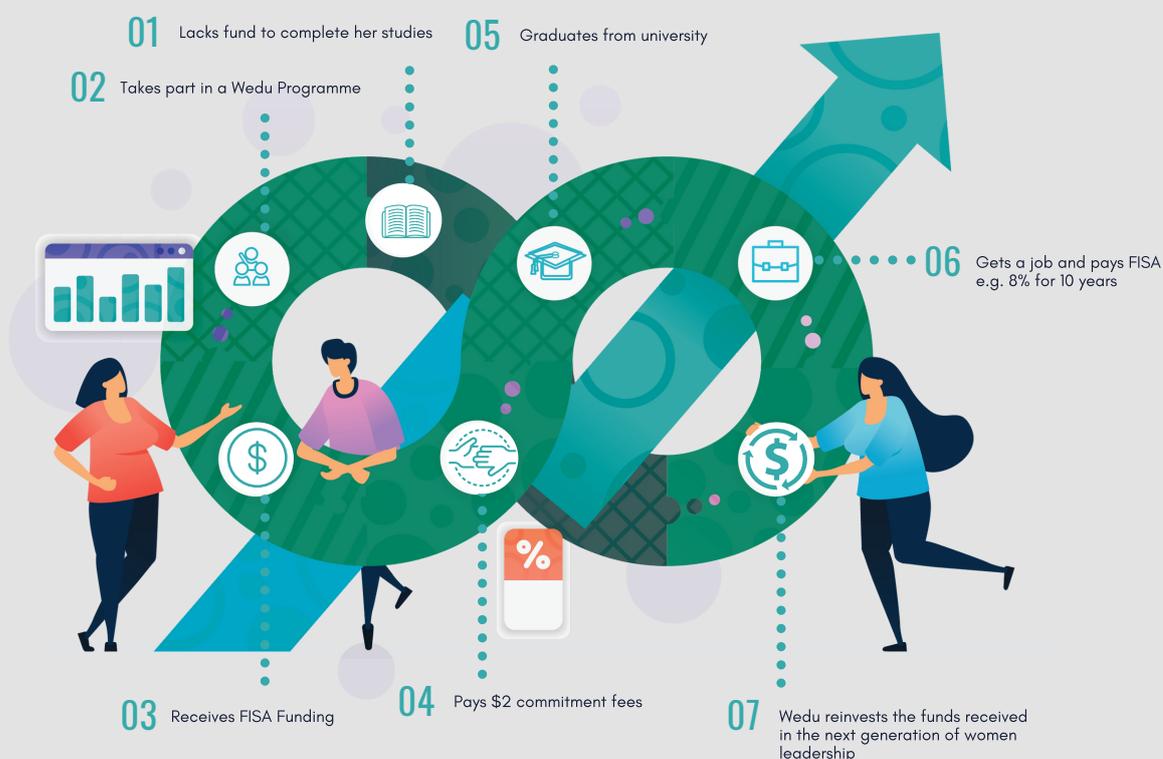


“This was very empowering, practical and life changing for me. Being part of this fellowship helped me to know myself better and I have started to embrace my imperfections and vulnerabilities while building on my strengths. I have learnt that only I can limit my growth, and that everything starts with me.”

Nita, Women Rise Fellow, Cambodia

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Investment In Education



To date, Wedu has provided 45 women with over US\$100,000 in affordable and flexible financing for education through Future Income Sharing Agreements (FISAs). FISAs of up to \$5,000 are disbursed to Rising Stars, with contributions calculated as a mutually-agreed percentage of earnings (e.g. 9% over 6 years). We have seen that financial support for education has a tremendous impact in a young woman's life when it is combined with effective leadership development support.

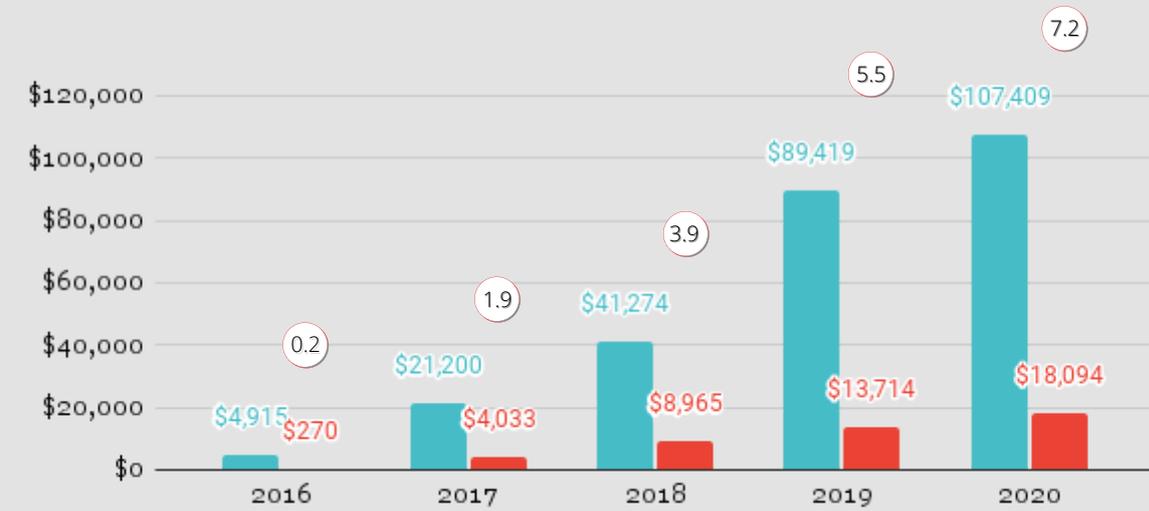
FISA's 'pay it forward' model multiplies impact as contributions are converted into new contracts. To date, we have issued funding to 7 additional women through these funds, enabling them to pursue their ambitions. That's an 18% (and growing!) extension of impact beyond what a traditional scholarship model could have achieved.

FISAs are uniquely able to accommodate the realities of women's unique leadership journeys, and the flexible contribution structure meant that in 2020 (as the pandemic's economic shocks led to unexpected income fluctuations), FISA contributions automatically adjusted proportionately.

\*Average contract size is \$2500, average percentage income is 9% and average duration is 6 years.

# PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

## Investment In Education



- Total amount disbursed in USD
- Total contributions received in USD
- No. of students funded with contributions



"FISA supported me financially during my Bachelors of Nursing program, and helped me focus on my study and career without worrying about the economic stress. Today, I have passed my licensing exam and am currently working on the Covid-19 frontline."

Sanju, Rising Star and FISA recipient, Nepal



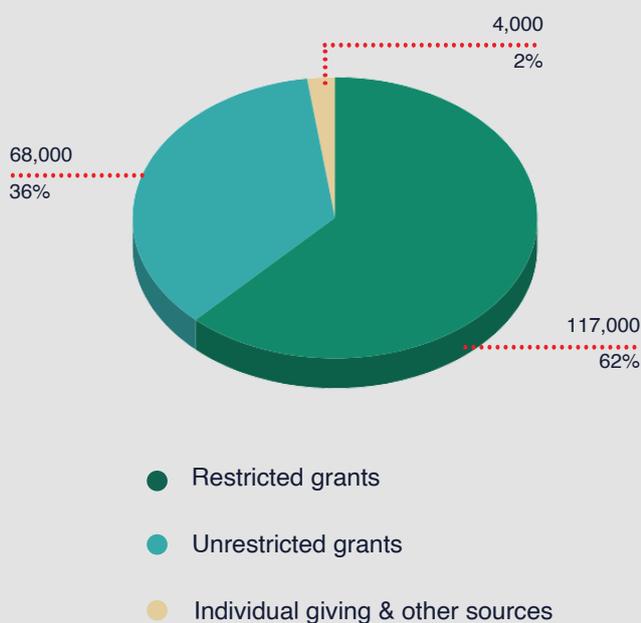
**CIRCLES OF ANGELS**

"Circle of Angels have seen how Wedu has consistently brought change and impact to the lives of many! Wedu's mission is a gift to the world and we have been so encouraged by the FISA work that Wedu has done in collaboration!"

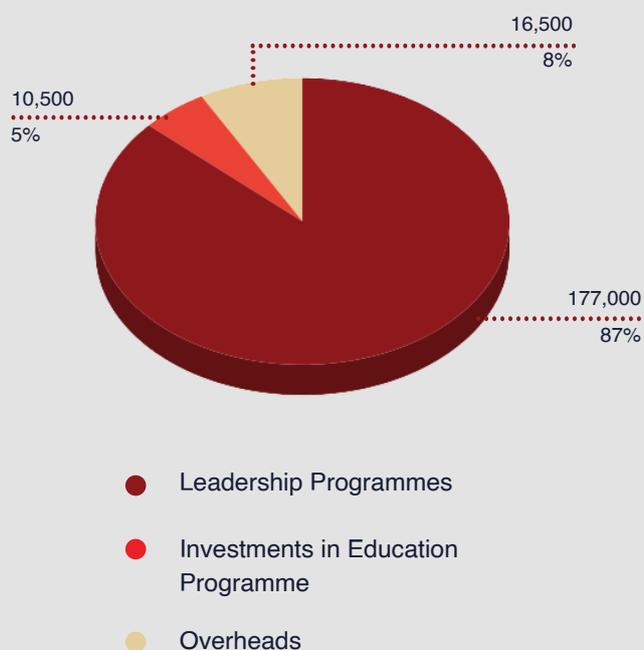
Audrey, Co-Founder, Circle Of Angels

# FINANCIALS

## Income (189,000 USD)



## Expenses (204,000 USD)



2020 was a difficult fundraising year. Several key funding sources dried up while others redirected their giving to the COVID pandemic and related economic crisis, resulting in some large bids being postponed or cancelled. In response, we drew on our reserves, received some emergency COVID relief funding, and reduced our fixed costs where we could (e.g. moving to a remote-first structure). These tactics, combined with some difficult decisions, helped us contain the deficit in 2020 and we ended the year with enough cash to ensure a solid start to 2021.

For more information, see our [Audited Financials](#).

# PARTNERS



Activity supported by the  
Canada Fund for Local Initiatives  
Activité réalisée avec l'appui du  
Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales



# THANK YOU

We are incredibly grateful to our global community and continue to draw inspiration from the people, partners and donors who support our vision of a world where half of all leaders are women. If you see an opportunity to collaborate or to get involved with us, we want to hear from you!



Visit our website  
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