



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

# Deepening Roots:

Laying the groundwork for women's leadership to bloom





## Behind the Report



For Wedu, 2021 has been a year of deepening our roots, with the goal of sustaining abundance towards our mission of achieving a world where half of all leaders are women. And we've already seen things come to fruition as we've built on the groundwork that has been laid since we first opened our doors in 2012.

This report shares our highlights from scaling in areas that anchor our work: our signature leadership programmes and global community. As well as how this bears fruits through leadership in action, engaged partnerships, and strengthened core for sustainable impact.

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# Table of Contents

- 04 Letter from the Executive Director
- 05 About Wedu
- 06 Impact by the Numbers
- 08 Deepening Roots
- 15 Bearing Fruits
- 20 Financials



# Letter from the Executive Director

It's a joy to see all that became possible through Wedu this year when thousands of women leaders, hundreds of gender equity allies, dozens of catalytic partners, and our growing team and boards united around Wedu's vision of a world where half of all leaders are women.

As I picked up the torch of leadership from Wedu's co-founders at the start of this year, I was alive to how special Wedu is. Long before joining the team, I'd witnessed our transformative impact on the leadership trajectories of women as a mentor.

Stepping into this role against the backdrop of a global pandemic and ensuing economic crisis, I knew we needed to redouble our efforts to strengthen and sustain the leadership journeys of women across Asia. History has shown us that the people most proximate to challenges are uniquely positioned to create effective solutions and lead enduring progress. So while women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its cascading setbacks, we knew they also held the answers to carving out a path to a different future.

In 2021, as we collectively reoriented ourselves after a disorienting 2020, an insight from H. Nouwen gave language to the essence of what this year has come to mean for Wedu:

*The further the outward journey takes you, the deeper the inward journey must be. Only when your roots are deep can your fruits be abundant.*

In this report, you will read about the women leaders we serve whose clarion dreams of justice and care and flourishing will reshape our shared future; you will glimpse the roots we're deepening that will anchor Wedu for years to come; and you'll see the buds of abundance as collective power blooms.

In solidarity,

**Claire Naylor-Trein**

*Executive Director, Wedu*



# What We Do

At Wedu, we envision a world where half of all leaders are women.



Since 2012, Wedu has engaged a vibrant global community of gender equity allies to collectively nurture the unique, lifelong leadership journeys of **3,000 women changemakers from 28 countries across Asia**. We do this through mentorship, leadership development training, access to opportunities, and funding for education.

Our regional focus, deep experience with nurturing women’s leadership and diverse community enable us to catalyse the social assets women require to reach their full potential and achieve their ambitions.



## Mentorship

We have facilitated over 75,000 hours of customized one-to-one mentoring in extendable eight-month cycles, anchored on Wedu’s bespoke leadership curriculum.



## Global Community

We cultivated an extensive regional network of 90 local partners (including I/NGOs, universities, companies, and government ministries).



## Leadership Trainings

We offer women leadership academies and online courses based on a robust leadership curriculum centered around seven leadership dimensions and 35 traits.



## Education Funding

Our income-sharing agreements provide affordable and accessible financing to women leaders, enabling them to achieve their educational goals on their own terms.

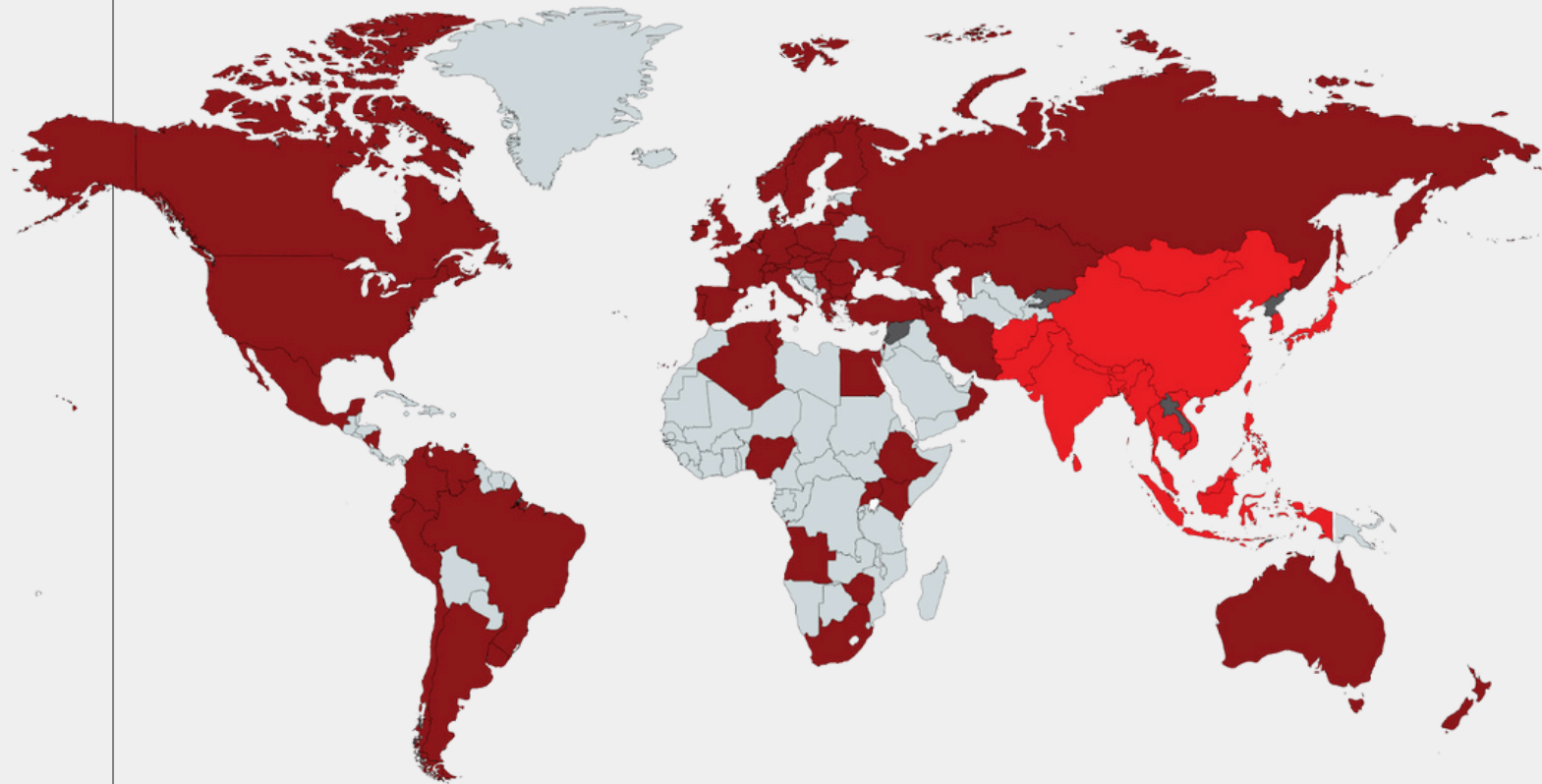
# Our Impact by the Numbers

3,744

members in our  
leadership community

Wedu's Leadership Community

- Only Mentors
- Mentors, Rising Stars and Programme Participants
- Only Rising Stars and Programme Participants



28

countries represented  
by Rising Stars

92

countries represented  
by Mentors

# Our Impact by the Numbers

## RISING STARS

556

leadership actions  
taken by Rising Stars

1,000+

Reached milestone of 1,000  
Rising Stars in February 2021

## MENTORSHIP

23,748

mentorship hours  
facilitated

204

mentor-mentee  
pairs matched

## LEADERSHIP COURSE

1,052

participants in our Introduction to Leadership  
(ITL) online course)

## EDUCATION FUNDING

9

new students funded by our Future  
Income-Sharing Agreement (FISA)

# DEEPENING ROOTS



In 2021, we focused on the root systems of our work at Wedu: our signature leadership programmes and global community of women leaders and gender equity allies.



# Deepening Roots

## Evolving our signature programmes

New global socioeconomic challenges have reshaped the needs of the women leaders we serve and their communities. To weave through these changes and continue supporting their unique, ever-evolving journeys, we've piloted new mentorship models, expanded access to our education funding, and centred our leadership academies on urgent regional issues.

### PILOTING PEER MENTORSHIP MODELS



## IRC Mentorship Programme for Resilience and Self-Reliance in Refugees along the Thai-Myanmar Border

Wedu continues to partner with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide refugees from Myanmar with a structured Mentorship Programme. Since 2017, we have supported over 100 girls and women from the Maela, Nupo, Umpiem, Ban Don Yang, and Mae Hong Son.

The Mentorship Programme aims to build their leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities, support them set and achieve their goals and foster independence inside or outside the camp.

In 2021 we further developed this programme by introducing Peer Mentorship Circles. In this format, refugees meet with their peers in the camp once a month to foster a supportive community and strengthen their peer relationships. These circles also allow participants to demonstrate their confidence in leading in small group settings.

In total, **seven peer mentoring circles** were conducted:

**97%**

of participants found the peer mentoring sessions helpful in getting the support they need in their mentorship journey.

**97%**

of participants agreed that the peer mentoring sessions helped them reflect and understand other perspectives better.



**Naw Say Ler Paw**  
Mentee, IRC Mentorship Programme

## From Dreaming to Leading: A Journey to Self-Leadership

Before joining Wedu’s IRC mentorship programme, Say Ler felt overwhelmed by the many dreams she wanted to pursue but didn’t know where to begin. Being matched with a mentor was a turning point—she learned to set SMART goals and outline clear steps to achieve them.

Through the programme, Say Ler’s understanding of leadership transformed. She realised that leadership begins with self-awareness and self-discipline: “I used to think leadership was about leading others, but now I know I need to lead myself first.”

Over eight months, Say Ler has also seen personal growth in building relationships and improving her confidence. With her sights set on becoming an educator in remote areas, she dreams of expanding access to education and paying it forward by mentoring others in her community.

Today, Say Ler is continuing her leadership journey as a Rising Star at Wedu, ready to inspire others as she grows.

**“ I used to think leadership was about leading others, but now I know I need to lead myself first. ”**

## EXPANDING EDUCATION FUNDING THROUGH FISA



Sambridhi, Nepal



Mehwish, Pakistan



Ajmina, Bangladesh



Priya, India



Aqila, Afghanistan

### 2021 FISA Members



Anuja, Nepal



Yofara, Indonesia



Summ, Cambodia



Soe, Myanmar

## Future Income-Sharing Agreement (FISA)

Our future income-sharing agreements (FISA) provide affordable and accessible financing to women leaders, enabling them to achieve their educational goals on their own terms. With FISAs, repayments also help fund future generations of Rising Stars who also seek the same financial support, making their education even more impactful than it already is.

In 2021, we issued **\$18,875 worth of FISAs to 9 diverse women leaders across Asia**, representing different cultural backgrounds and pursuing different fields of studies. Two of them come from new FISA member countries: Afghanistan and Indonesia.



**Summ Phann**  
FISA Member

### Sowing Seeds for Food-Secure Futures



Summ Phann, a third-year Food Science and Technology student at Thammasat University in Bangkok, joined Wedu's FISA programme to cover living expenses not included in her academic scholarship. Originally from Cambodia, she is one of the first in her farming village to pursue a Bachelor's degree.

After graduation, Summ hopes to become a food chemist, start an agricultural business, and create sustainable livelihoods for her community.

“  
*I’m happy that whatever I contribute to Wedu in the future will fund other Rising Stars because I can help other students like me too.*

— Summ Phann, FISA Member

## ADVANCING LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC HEALTH

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed the critical role women leaders play in responding and preparing for a more equitable recovery—from the highest levels of decision-making to frontline service delivery.

To ensure our trainings remain relevant and demand-driven, we centred the theme of two of our leadership training programmes on Public Health and engaged with women healthcare leaders in Southeast Asia.



### 2021 YSEALI Women’s Leadership Academy

Wedu is honoured to have continued our seven-year partnership with the U.S. Mission to ASEAN to implement the YSEALI Women’s Leadership Academy. In 2021, we brought **54 emerging women leaders across 11 countries in Southeast Asia** for four months of virtual activities.

With the theme of Public Health, this year’s YSEALI WLA supported the next generation of

female healthcare leaders by contributing to their awareness of gender differences in the health sector, providing leadership skills needed to thrive, and building a strong network for cross-collaboration and peer mentorship.

Our participants come from diverse professions, including health workers (i.e., doctors, nurses, and midwives), public health practitioners, and NGO workers focusing on health. By the end of the Academy, they shared commitments on the Impact they want to create in the health sector.

Watch the Academy’s highlights [here](#).



“

*One of my learnings from the Academy is to overcome self-doubt and the fear of being judged for your every action—especially as a woman working in the public health sector.*

*With all the encouragement, support, and friendship I made, I learned a lot and feel empowered to become a better person and a more competent leader for myself and my country.*

— Wong Yen Jun,  
Pharmacist, Malaysia

## Advancing Women’s Leadership in WASH Cambodia

Access to clean and safe potable water is essential in COVID recovery, especially among women disproportionately affected by the crisis. This puts women leaders in the best position to lead decision-making in WASH Response.

In 2021, we launched the Advancing Women’s Leadership in WASH project in partnership with WaterAid Cambodia and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. We facilitated virtual mentoring and networking sessions to support capacity-building among **58 women WASH leaders** in Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kandal, and Phnom Penh.

Ngam Veasna, Chief Administrative Officer of the Krach Kandal District, Kandal Province, shares her experience leading a capstone project that helped local authorities and household heads implement new ideas for kindergarten school latrines. The project’s ultimate goal is to end open defecation among young rural children. She also shared that the programme allowed her to connect with other women working in the sector and learn from their experiences.

“ *It’s a small project that we never thought is possible. But once we started doing resource mobilisation that we learned from the program, we felt everything is possible as long as we commit to it.*

— Ngam Veasna, Participant

# Deepening Roots

## Centering our community

At the heart of our work at Wedu is our global community of women leaders and their allies. We deepened our roots in community-building by expanding representation in our leadership community and engaging with our wider community to show up for women in different ways.



### Piloting a tri-lingual mentorship programme

Continuing the spirit of piloting new models, our Mentorship Programme with the IRC becomes our first tri-lingual programme. In 2021, we held bilingual orientations and SMART goals workshops to cater to all participants and mentors.



### Community-Led Rising Star Recruitment

90% of our Rising Star recruitment cycles were led by the community. Our September interview cycle saw almost as many community interview leaders as participants, with a ratio of 97:106.



### Community-Led Webinars

From January to April 2021, mentors and Rising Stars hosted 11 webinars ranging from fireside chats with women leaders to professional and personal development classes and networking sessions. Over 300 members of the community participated in this webinar series.

# BEARING FRUITS



As we build on the groundwork laid since Wedu first opened its doors in 2012, we have already seen things come to fruition.

OUTCOME 1:

# Leadership through action

**THROUGH RISING STARS** — Within ten years, the expansion of our Rising Stars in number and geographic diversity has been truly extraordinary. And along with that, the leadership actions they are taking to create change in their communities.

Collectively, our Rising Stars reported taking over **550 leadership actions in 2021**. Here are some of these stories, anchored in Wedu’s seven leadership dimensions.



## CHANGE-SEEKING

Nanako Tojo — Japan

Nanako voluntarily organises leadership workshops for high school students to realise their unconscious biases and practice self-expression. Through these workshops, she hopes young women gain the courage to amplify international dialogue about gender issues faced in Japan.

## PRINCIPLED

Kumudini Perera — Sri Lanka

Kumudini started her voice coaching academy called “Voice in Kumu”. As a professional singer and public speaker, her mission is to strengthen people’s capacity to represent themselves and amplify their own underserved narratives.



## ENTERPRISING

Laitheam Eang — Cambodia

Inspired by her mentorship at Wedu, Laitheam co-founded “Dare and Dream”, a social enterprise that has provided mentorship support to 250 women students from rural, low-income families in its first year alone.







## ACTION-ORIENTED

Davrin Rianda — Indonesia

Together with five other alumni from the YSEALI Women's Leadership Academy, Davrin founded Jaga Mama: Aregional maternal health learning network which has reached over 240 members to come alongside mothers amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## COMMUNITY-FOCUSED

Afruza Tanzi — Bangladesh

Afruza received the 2021 Diana Award for her work at Protibha under Its Humanity Foundation (IHF), providing financial literacy in rural communities. Through Protbiha, over 100 housewives-turned-artisans found employment and financial independence.



## RISK-TAKING

Thanyathip Chatsawat (Yim) — Thailand

With her mentor's support, Thanyathip turned a YSEALI Fellowship rejection into success. She applied her World Relief experience in Washington to develop programmes advancing refugee and children's rights in Jordan.

## INSPIRATIONAL

Zai Majeed — Singapore

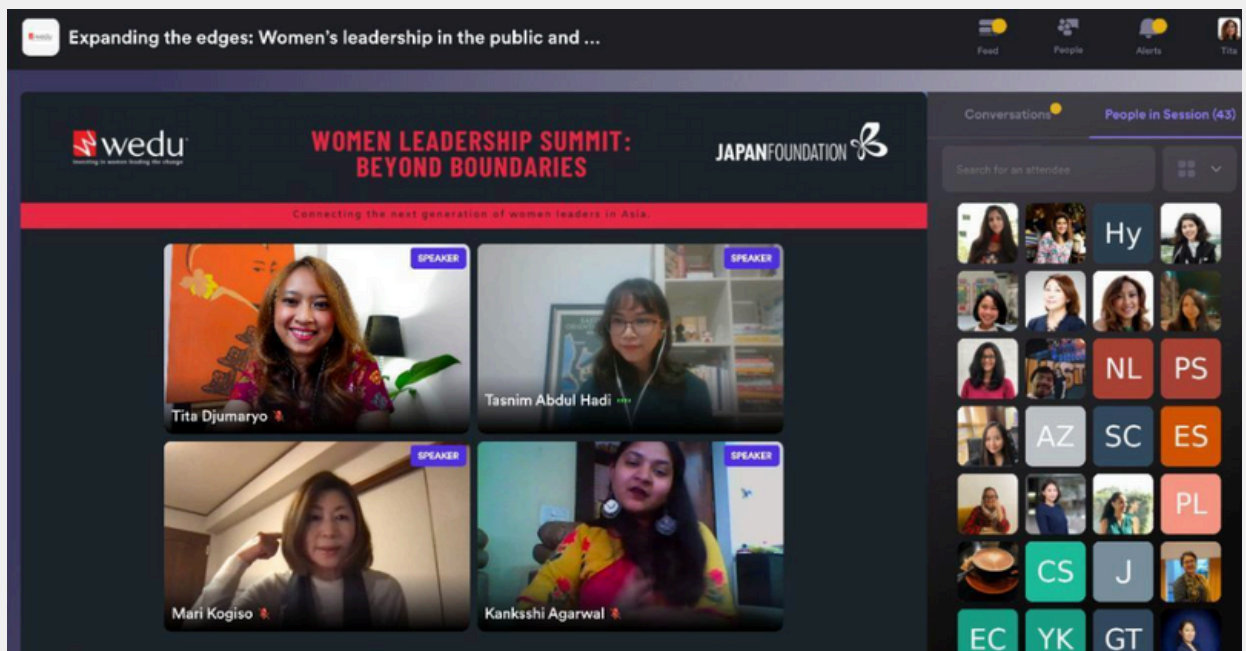
After a tragic accident that broke her spine and nearly left her paralysed, Zai chose to rise above it. Guided by her belief that "you may have a physical disability, but you are still gifted with a sound mind and a loving heart to take action," she rebuilt her life. Today, she is a hijab model, motivational speaker, and entrepreneur, sharing her inspiring journey of recovery worldwide.



OUTCOME 2:

# Partnerships for Impact

## Working with bi-laterals to advance regional goals



In March 2021, Wedu organised the Women’s Leadership Summit: Beyond Boundaries in partnership with the Japan Foundation. The Summit aimed to connect the next generation of women leaders in Asia.

The online event convened over 150 women from 20 countries across Asia, fostering new connections, inspiration, and actionable learnings through keynote speeches, panel discussions featuring Asian female leaders and change-makers as speakers, peer mentoring, and speed networking.

Watch the Summit’s highlights [here](#).

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*My biggest takeaway from this event is that there are many barriers and obstacles for women to succeed and become leaders. But one of the biggest barriers we face is self-imposed boundaries from internalised patriarchy and other cultural norms. **We need to create our mould in the space we are in.***

— Tashfeen Akram, Summit attendee from Pakistan

## Working with corporations to support women’s economic empowerment



There is growing interest among corporations and private organisations to expand their DEI work by supporting women leaders. As evidenced by our partnership with Visit.org, a SaaS that connects corporates with NGOs as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

In 2021, we hosted **10 Career Chats** with organisations like PayPal, Dolby, AllianceBernstein, and PIMCO. Wedu’s Career Chats are online events through which professionals interact with Rising Stars, acting the role of mentors and helping solve their presented career challenges.

For the professionals who join, Career Chats are a great way to impact the lives of young women in Asia by guiding and helping them to advance their career priorities. This is also an opportunity to experience mentoring and learn first-hand the value it can bring to someone’s leadership journey.

### A TRANSFORMATIVE PARTNERSHIP



We’re proud to partner with **Octava Foundation**, who shares our commitment to supporting education, enhancing employability, and increasing the social mobility of emerging women leaders in Asia.

Over the next three years, we will work together to engage and impact more young women to develop their leadership potential. We will do so by expanding the Rising Star programme from the current base of 1,000 and enable more women to complete further education through affordable access to financing.

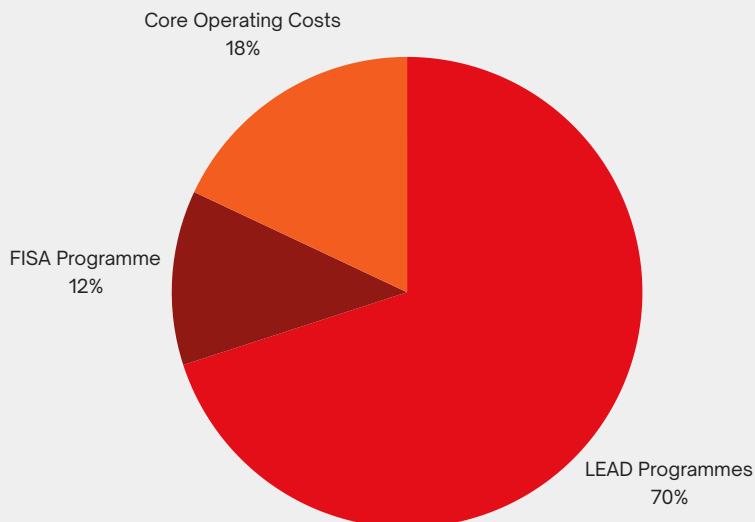
# FY'21 Financials

In 2021, we secured new mission-aligned funding partnerships that grew our impact and diversified our revenue streams to start rebuilding reserves.

Doubling our year-on-year growth of income has generated the runway and margins needed to dream bigger for 2022, and we're nearing a return to pre-pandemic levels of resourcing.

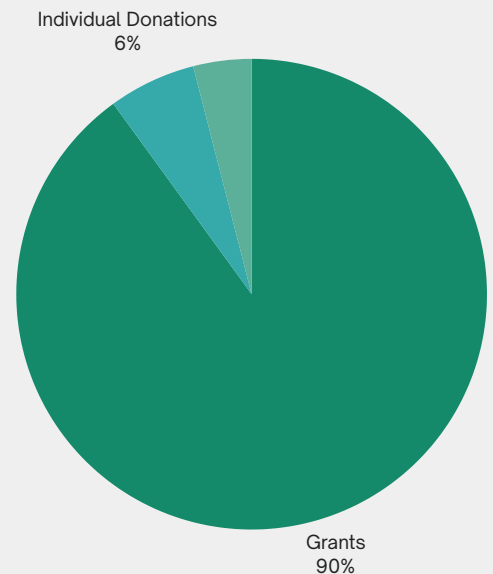
You can access our **audited consolidate financial statements** [here](#).

## EXPENSES



EXPENSES	
LEAD Programmes	\$235,667
FUND Programmes (FISA)	\$39,516
Core Operating Costs	\$59,888
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$335,071</b>

## INCOME



INCOME	
Grants	\$376,064
Individual Donations	\$25,926
Other Sources	\$14,968
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$416,958</b>

# Partners



# 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 at Wedu, we want to hear from you!

[www.weduglobal.org](http://www.weduglobal.org)



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