

AFAD 2023 Accomplishments in the Context of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024: A Term Report

By Joey Faustino, Secretary General



Project Updates: Accomplishment Report 2023

AFAD works on 4 pillars as defined by the Strategic Plan of 2022-2024 (adopted by the 7th Congress in December 2021).

- I. Institutional Strengthening
- II. Research and Documentation
- III. Psychosocial Support and Accompaniment
- IV. Campaign and Lobby

Through various projects, the following had been achieved:



I. Institutional Strengthening focuses on significant changes delivered through strengthened local (member organization-level) and regional (federation-level) organizational capacity to sustain actions aimed at ending enforced disappearances and defending human rights. As of 2023 the following capacity building trainings / orientations have been conducted with 10 member organizations in 9 countries:

1. Social Research Training;
2. Finance Orientation;
3. Resource Mobilization;
4. Documentation & disappearED-Asia Database Training; and,
5. Grounding Outcome and Impact Orientation.

These trainings are sustained by continuing Communities of Practice (CoPs) discussions since 2022 for:

- Campaign
- Communication
- Documentation
- Finance
- Governance
- Resource Mobilization

II. Research and Documentation focuses on significant changes delivered through enabled accurate, relevant, and evidence-based campaigns, awareness-raising, and development of change packages (programs/projects) against enforced disappearance. As of 2023 the following have been achieved:

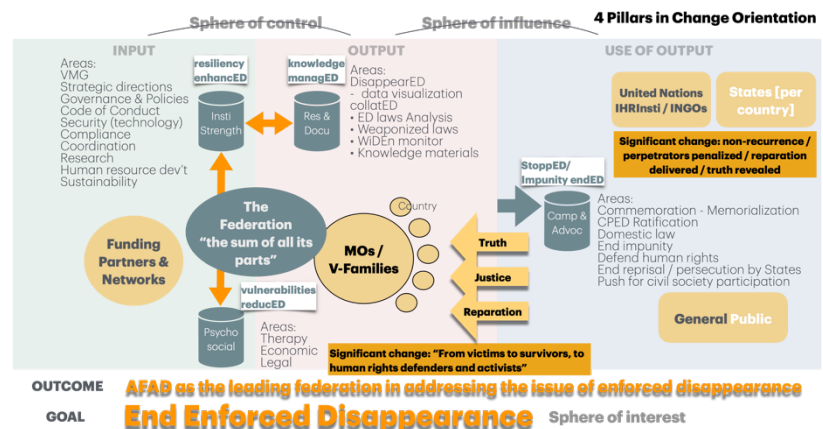
- 458 more (enforced disappearance) cases documented in 6 Asian countries;
- 5 additional cases forwarded to the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (UNWGEID);
- 111 more ante-mortem data of victims of enforced disappearance gathered in the Philippines;
- 3,185 cases migrated to *disappearED-Asia*, AFAD's database on cases of disappearances in 7 countries with 12 documentalists trained; and,
- 9 new victim-family individuals trained in documentation work in the Philippines.

Researches made:

1. *Shrinking Civic Spaces in Asia* (completed in cooperation of the Windesheim Honours College);
2. *Working in Difficult Environments* (a review on AFAD's current regional operations);
3. *Enforced Disappearances and Reporting Mechanisms: a Situationer for Selected Asian Countries* (for website publication);

- III. Psychosocial Support and Accompaniment focuses on significant changes delivered through reduced factors that limit or hinder victim-families' capacities to be human rights defenders and active agents of change. As of 2023 the following have been achieved:
- 216 victim-families provided with psychosocial support in 3 countries;
 - 110 victim-family members provided with economic, education and livelihood support in 6 countries; and,
 - 5 victim-family members accessed legal assistance in 2 countries.
- IV. Campaign and Lobby is focused on significant changes delivered through providing victim-families with locally-driven and regionally-led campaign platforms to support the achievement of positive advocacy outcomes. In 2023:
- More than 1,000 victim-families participated in commemorative activities in 8 countries;
 - Victim-family-led lobbying for the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and relevant domestic laws continued in 4 countries;
 - 23 regional, local and joint statements with the international human rights community released;
 - Initiated podcasting, reels, pubmats (*publication materials*), and multimedia forms for social media campaigns (International days/weeks¹, *Protection, not Persecution of HRDs* series);
 - Website rebranding @ *disappeared-asia.org*.

The four (4) pillars of the Federation, clearly defined as they are from a general point of view, would benefit from a closer look. It is important to establish interrelation between the four and how each contribute to the truth and justice framework so they may be used accurately and efficiently within spheres of control and influence.



AFAD works on several major projects largely on a two to three-year cycle. It also implements short-term projects that usually complement the major ones. All such projects address the four pillars and contributes to the larger

¹ The International days are occasions to educate the general public on issues of concern, to mobilize political will and resources to address global problems, and to celebrate and reinforce achievements of humanity.

picture of the Strategic Plan 2022-2024 on different levels in nine countries (excluding Thailand at present) via implementation of project activities by its Member Organizations and the Secretariat:

- ***Project Title: Enhancing victim's collective and sustained response to enforced disappearances in Asia, phase 2 (8 countries) / N-ASK-2021-0393 - BfdW***

Objective 1

An increase in the number of victim-families actively engaged in defending and promoting human rights at the local and international levels;

Objective 2

Quality and progress of cases submitted to UN Mechanisms from six countries has increased; and,

Objective 3

Member organizations in eight countries have strengthened operational capacity to sustain their operation.

This project, with Bread for the World as funding partner, registered an implementation rate of over 56% of its 2nd year targets and a financial burn rate of more than 50/66%. Its implementation registered high on activities contributing to the Campaign and Lobby pillar (i.e., commemorative activities, lobby for ratification). Activity (every 6 months) and Annual reports have been completed for the year 2023. Audited financial statements for the 1st semester had been complied with while the 2nd semestral audit is in progress.

A catch-up plan by the member-organizations is in order to combine with the 2024 activities in the pipeline and added to the annual budget for the year.

- ***Project Title: Building capacities and platforms for victim-families and women of enforced disappearance in the Philippines (1 country) / No. 410-900-1493 ZG - Misereor***

Objective 1

The number of women and youth, particularly from the families of victims of ED, who are actively engaged in promoting human rights and allied social issues has increased.

Objective 2

Cases of ED are well and systematically documented by families of victims of ED and form the basis for lobbying and advocacy work vis-à-vis political decision makers and the public with the aim to receive support for the fight against ED and the promotion of human rights in the Philippines.

Objective 3

The capacities of the Legal Holder and of FIND to effectively perform and sustain operations have been strengthened.

This project, with Misereor as funding partner, registered an implementation rate of over 68% of its 1.5 year targets and a financial burn rate of more than 40/50%. Its implementation registered high on activities contributing to the Institutional Strengthening pillar (Objective 3). The assessment with FIND leadership and staff concluded that Objective 3 is highly essential in fulfilling Objectives 1

and 2, thus, very much on track. Activity and Annual reports for the 1st year implementation have been completed. The 1st semestral audit had been completed and waiting for the release of the audited financial statements for the 2nd semester.

Minor adjustments have been made in the scheduling of activities for 2024 to catch up with the targets. The presence of a *PMERLA Advisory Group allows consistent monitoring of the entire effects chain of the project.

**planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, learning and accountability*

- ***Project Title: Increasing capacities and reducing vulnerabilities of victim families and human rights defenders against enforced disappearances in Asia. (10 countries) – NHRF 2022-8370***

Objective 1

Promote and forge international solidarity among organizations of the families of the disappeared in Asia and with similar formations in other continents;

Objective 2

Provide assistance to member-organizations in ensuring a stronger response to the phenomena of enforced disappearances;

Objective 3

Conduct campaign and lobby work in addressing the issue of enforced disappearances in Asia, thus ensuring the attainment of truth, justice, redress, and the reconstruction of the collective memory of the disappeared; and,

Objective 4

Strengthen the capacity of the federation and its member-organizations through various forms of empowerment and capacity building activities.

This project, with the Norwegian Human Rights Fund as funding partner, registered an implementation rate and a financial burn rate of 100%. The 2-year project ended in 2023 with adjustments made for the second year (from research objective to documentation, with approval of NHRF). Its implementation focused on the establishment of “disappearED-Asia”, AFAD’s database (in UWAZI platform) of enforced disappearance cases in countries where member organizations operate. All reports and audit requirements have been completed for the project.

To date there are more than 3,000 cases from 7 countries that have been migrated to disappearED-Asia, with almost half coming from Sri Lanka care of the Families of Disappeared (FOD). Three countries (Thailand, Timor Leste and Kashmir, India) have yet to be assisted in varying forms to contribute to the database.

AFAD’s partnership with HURIDOCS on this project had traversed from the creation to population (Phases 1-4) of the database. The upcoming Data Visualization stage (Phase 5) shall be using all inputs for analyses and presentation of evidence-based information on enforced disappearances in the individual countries covered and the Federation. Data visualization shall support the Federation campaigns with solid data.

- **Project Title: Strengthening Regional Advocacies in Narrowing Democratic Spaces**

Objective 1

Strengthened capacity of AFAD MOs on resource mobilization, thus increasing their capacity to conduct coordinated regional advocacy; and

Objective 2

Strengthened institutional relationship between AFAD and a partner network.

The Taiwan Fund for Democracy (TFD) complemented the capacity-building activities for Resource Mobilization of Member Organizations. The Secretariat introduced MO participants to the framework of “4Cs”. The project also contributed to MO capacity building in documentation work for *disappearED-Asia*.

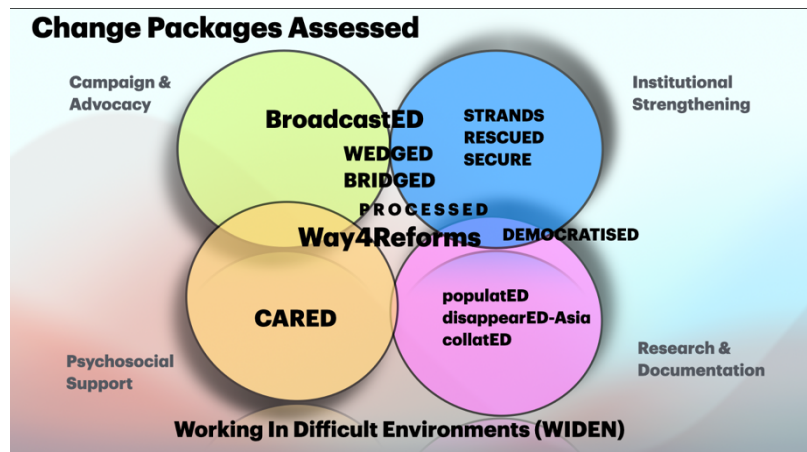


- **Project Title: Complementation to AFAD’s 2022-2024 Strategic Imperative to be the Nexus of Organizations Working on Enforced Disappearances in Asia (Federation Secretariat) – DKA Austria**

Objective

To complement AFAD’s major endeavors in terms of national, regional and international research and documentation and advocacy as well as direct assistance and empowerment of family members of the disappeared through an effective management, secretariat and administrative support.

Apart from the office administrative assistance, the DKA funding had greatly enhanced office-based operational support of the Secretariat. Managing AFAD’s rebranding efforts (change packages) and innovative group dynamics (Communities of Practice) are relevant contributions of the project.



Change packages are project concepts and details created to contribute to the four pillars of the Federation as it endeavors to strive and sustain itself while working in difficult environments in the countries covered by operations.

	Title of Change Package	Description
1	Seeking a Response to Working in Difficult Environments: A Conference of Human Rights Organizations in Asia	This two-day forum aims to strengthen human rights defenders' work – against enforced disappearances and other human rights violations – within continuing difficult environments. This Conference shall particularly tackle the context in the region of Asia and may serve as a starting point for global discussions on the work and protection of human rights defenders.
2	STRANDS: Strengthening Regional Advocacies in Narrowing Democratic Spaces	This project aims to secure positive regional and local advocacy outcomes on the work against enforced disappearances despite difficult environments. To do so, the project envisions the following key outcomes: 1. This project will strengthen the capacity of AFAD member organizations to conduct sustained and coordinated regional advocacy work; and 2. This project will strengthen institutional relationships between AFAD and its partners and networks.
3	#collatED: Compendium of Laws Weaponized to Stifle Dissent in Asia	This project aims to equip human rights defenders in understanding the various domestic laws and mechanisms affecting their activities - organizations and individuals - as a safeguard against abuse. It shall note the various laws that facilitate HR work and those weaponized in order to establish practical and legislative recommendations for their protection. The project, therefore, aims to empower AFAD Member Organizations to secure positive advocacy outcomes amid shrinking civic spaces.
4	Project DEMOCRATISED: Developing Member Organization Capacities under Current Tendencies and Inclination of States against Enforced Disappearances and other human rights violations	This project seeks to strengthen the capacity of human rights defenders (member organizations) to identify and respond to various threats to democratic spaces; to be a trustworthy source of documentation and information on the issue of enforced disappearances in Asia; to help create safer and alternative spaces for advocates of democracy to express dissent, criticism, beliefs and opinions; and to heighten public consciousness on enforced disappearances and other human rights violations in Asia.
5	Women and Youth for Socio-Political Reforms: Building Capacities and Platforms for Victim-Families of Enforced	The goal of the project is to capacitate families of victims of enforced disappearance in their

	Title of Change Package	Description
	Disappearance through training workshops and truth seeking sessions	transformation from victims to survivors, and eventually human rights defenders.
6	WEDGED: Women Elevating Discourse on Gender and Enforced Disappearances	This project aims to provide a platform for women to elevate the discourse on gender in the context of enforced disappearances. This will be done through Women's Congresses in four respective countries, and attempts to strengthen the solidarity of women advocates against enforced disappearances. It also seeks to increase experience, expertise, and exposure of women advocates in engaging with international human rights platforms. The outcomes of this project will also be beneficial for the planned 2024 World Congress on Enforced Disappearances. Ultimately, AFAD envisions this project to be a key stepping stone in mainstreaming gender in enforced disappearance discourse at the local and international levels.
7	BRIDGED: Building Relationships for In-Depth Discussions on Gender and Enforced Disappearances	This project seeks to empower women to lead the discussion in mainstreaming gender in enforced disappearance discourse at the local and international levels. Target outcomes are (1) to increase experience, expertise, and exposure of women advocates on gender and enforced disappearance as they engage with international human rights platforms; and (2) to strengthen the solidarity of women advocates in Asia against enforced disappearances. This was designed as a complementary project to WEDGED.
8	BroadCASTED: Broadening Discussion and Collaboration towards Significant Transformation in Ending Disappearances	BroadCASTED is AFAD and FIND's proposed response to counter disinformation on ED by engaging the country's policymakers, law implementers, and civil society. This project seeks to achieve the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concerned implementing agencies and the Office of the President commit to and lead in comprehensive implementation of RA 10353 and joint monitoring of CSOs; and, 2. The general public has meaningfully engaged in the discussions on ED as a heinous crime under Philippine laws.
9	Aligning Collective Consciousness Essential to Ending Disappearances (ACCeSsED)	The lack of a collective consciousness on human rights across Asia has led to the persecution and demonization of human rights defenders. In recent years, AFAD has monitored a trend across the region of reprisals, weaponization of laws, and shrinking

	Title of Change Package	Description
		<p>space for civil society organizations. There has also been increasing phenomena of trolling on social media and the spread of mis- dis- and malinformation on enforced disappearance (ED) and other human rights issues. Together with this is a lack of public information on cases of enforced disappearances. Despite the continuing number of cases, there is strong denial of states of the occurrences. States also vilify families of the disappeared, downplaying their efforts to search for their loved ones.</p> <p>The ACCEssED Project (Aligning Collective Consciousness Essential to Ending Disappearances) thus aims to address the above mentioned issues by delivering truth to the public on enforced disappearances in Asia. The target group – the five “publics” – have been selected through internal review and alignment with AFAD’s strategic plan.</p>
OTHER DEVELOPED PROGRAMME PACKAGES		
	Title of Package	Description
1	WIDEN: Working in Difficult Environments	This program package seeks to address how CSOs and HRDs can work in difficult environments. In response to the challenges both existing and emerging, AFAD continually engages partners in the work against enforced disappearances and human rights violations. Through its engagements, AFAD seeks to better adapt and respond to the situations at hand, no longer merely relying on traditional practices but exploring innovative solutions as well.
2	disappearED-Asia	Refers to the UWAZI database for documentation of disappeared cases
3	SECURE: Safeguarding Engagements of CSOs Under Risky Environments	Package on strengthening internal systems to protect CSOs in Risky Environments
4	populatED: Populating Database on Enforced Disappearances	Package on funding encoders and their equipment for populating the UWAZI database
5	RESCUED: Reserved Crisis, Urgent, or Emergency Distress Fund	<p>Creation of quick response fund for human rights defenders under threat and for new cases of disappearances.</p> <p>Line item in budget should function as semi-restricted funding for the purpose of assisting human rights defenders and families responding to emergency</p>

	Title of Change Package	Description
		situations brought about by HRVs. RESCUED will fund the legal, logistical, and overhead costs involved in the legal response or emergency search for a disappeared.
6	CARED: Claims and Access for Reparations on Enforced Disappearances	AFAD and FIND propose a project that aims to empower victim-families to have meaningful involvement in claiming what is lawfully provided by RA 10353. Specifically, this project aims the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build the leadership and advocacy capacity of victim-families on rights-claiming • To partner and collaborate with legal groups for the capacitation of the rights-claiming • To engage with government systems for rights-claiming.

Among the project packages, the following were approved for grant in 2023 (excluding 2-3 year cycle projects):

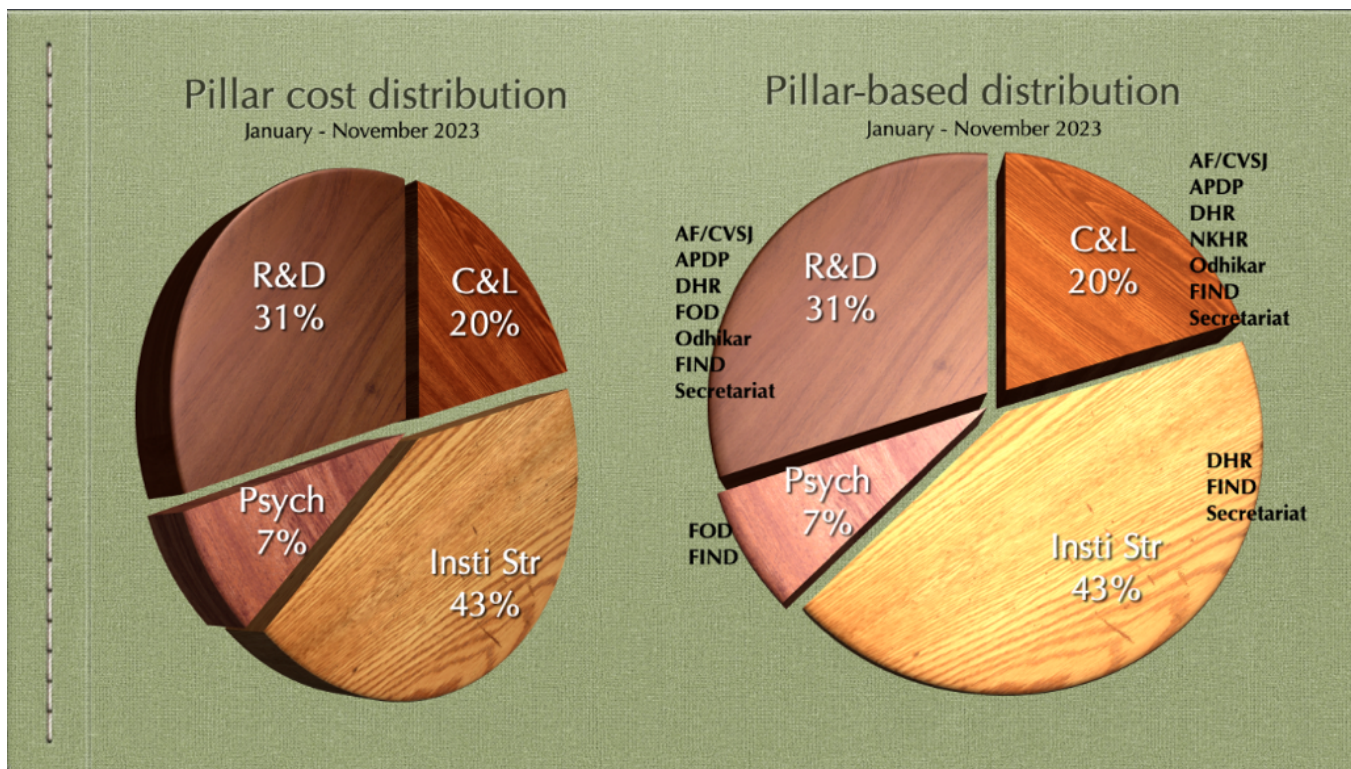
1. STRANDS (Strengthening Regional Advocacies in Narrowing Democratic Spaces) @ USD6,000 - April 2023
2. WEDGED (Women Elevating Discourse on Gender and Enforced Disappearances) @ USD27,000 - November 2023
3. Other: May 18 Foundation @ USD20,000 – October 2023
4. Other: Cultures of Resistance via Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice @ USD3,000 – May 2023

Promising Project Results

The current data (populating still ongoing) of *disappearED-Asia* reveals that 96% of victims of enforced disappearance are males, a big number of which are adults. On the assumption that the men are mostly breadwinners, it obviously leaves the women to cope with the aftermath of their disappearance in terms of social, economic, and psychosocial dislocation/disturbance. Under the circumstances AFAD Programs had identified “Gender” to be an inherent consideration in addressing the needs of the victim-families. Ergo, project WEDGED. AFAD’s database will not only contribute immensely to the Federation’s credibility and visibility, it will also provide evidence-based direction to become a lead in addressing the issue of enforced disappearances in Asia.

Pillar-based Analysis

Financial records for year 2023 (until November) yielded the following analyses:



The biggest chunk from overall funds was spent on Institutional Strengthening (43%). This is a trend developing in line with the Working in Difficult Environments (WiDEn) concept. Looking into developing resiliency capacity of its member organizations, institutional strengthening becomes key to survive the wave of reprisals and harassment by the respective States under current trends (see WiDEn).

Research & Documentation (31%) takes second spot with the direction of enhancing evidenced-based campaigns through continuing documentation work and population of *disappearED-Asia*. The creation of AFAD's database (*disappearED-Asia*), with continuing population by seven (7) member organizations at present, is soon to move next into data visualization phase. The database is expected to produce significant statistics and trends per country to guide program outputs.

Campaign & Lobby (20%) takes next spot with the commemorative activities across various countries and the ongoing lobby for the ratification / accession of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Campaigns likewise took a turn during recent years as *PROTECTION, not Persecution, OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS* developed into a necessary call for action to continue the work addressing enforced disappearance. State harassment and reprisal of member organizations became evident across countries of operation.

Psychosocial Support and Accompaniment (7%) is expected to be quite underrated as reports from other member organizations came in later. The figure is still it is logically proportionate to the approach of member organizations and the Federation – reducing vulnerabilities of the victim families to allow them to participate and contribute to the other three (3) pillars. A deeper analysis into reparation of the victim families is needed to set standards (lobby) and access from the respective states. The project WEDGED (*Women Elevating Discourse on Gender and Enforced Disappearance*) is a significant first step to this.

WiDEn (Working in Difficult Environments)

(Lifted from the WiDEn desktop research) AFAD is witness to a developing trend of States' reprisal to human rights defenders and civil society organizations in recent years. Asian countries have had a history of dictatorships and authoritarian regimes through decades past. Thereafter a more liberal set up came into fore. At present, however, a resurgence of authoritarianism in the region had contributed to more than shrinking the civic spaces for participation and movement of non-government organizations in several Asian countries. In recent years various government regulations and existing criminal laws had proven to be potent weapons for the States to curb dissent and criticism, and ultimately create a chilling effect for the rest of civil society to ponder upon. Negative labelling or red baiting by the governments often lead to arbitrary detention and arrest, and in many instances, extra judicial killing. Populist leaders had demonized the concept of human rights publicly and justified violations with lies and hate campaigns using the government propaganda machinery and institutionalizing the use of social media troll armies. Both the legislative branch and judiciary of the subject countries support this mode of governance.

The ominous situation had actually and forcefully affected operational details of the Federation and its member organizations in their respective countries. To continue the cause, certain adjustments to what was “common” practice in operations and procedures had to be made. Out-of-the-box innovations and alternative procedural systems had to be applied both for organizational and individual security and programs/projects continuity considerations.

These alternatives and innovations need to be approached with careful analyses to either comply or move around each respective legal standards and regulations within a given area of operations. It is also imperative for partner/donor agencies to note how civil society organizations “Work in Difficult Environments” as regards compliance procedures and responsibly documenting and recording accountabilities.

Change Orientation

The Change Orientation, along with the Pillar Framework, was initiated in 2022. It took a visioning exercise with the Secretariat where “publics” and the purposes for engaging them were defined. By the second half of 2022 the PMERLA (*planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, learning and accountability*) process was introduced in the Misereor project for the Philippines. Since then the orientation was operationalized in systems and procedures (activity designs to creation of change packages) of the Secretariat.

After the Resource Mobilization / Documentation Training of May 2023, the member organizations were necessarily introduced to the “change packages” contributing to the four (4) pillars, and the Strategic Plan of 2022-2024. This triggered a request by the participating member organizations for an Outcome and Impact Orientation (OIO). Grounding the orientation took the form of a two-part “OIO101” online. While more grounding efforts need to be made within the Federation’s governance structures, one-on-one tutorials for member organizations also need to be designed. The Change Orientation can highlight both logic and reason for being (*raison d’etre*) of the Federation in the long term.

Fortunately, the BfdW and the Facilitators of Learning for Change (FLC) had initiated a two-year training course for Facilitators / Coaches of OIO. The Federation’s Secretariat had been a lead participant and contributor to this process. In parallel, BfdW highly encourages that projects be designed and planned using the same orientation. While a project covers a three-year period, the outcomes and impacts foreseen can take a more strategic perspective of 10-12 years.

Learnings and the Next Cycle of Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan 2022-2024 is constantly revisited by the Secretariat in assessing its projects and programs. While parts of the said strategic plan had clarity in terms of targets and indicators, the purpose for some items did not necessarily relate directly with the desired outcome and goal. A case in point is the item on increased funding / revenue. While a given increase in revenue of MOs and the Federation generally reflected on sustainability, it may not be clearly related to the goal. Some of the MOs are multi-funded and operate on a plethora of issues apart from enforced disappearance.

In any case, 2024 is the third and last year in this strategic plan an assessment is in the offing for the AFAD Council. In the same manner, so is the project cycle with BfdW. A good number of consultations may be expected by the Council and the individual MOs for 2024 due to these concerns.

Looking ahead, the next cycle of strategic planning is proposed to cover a medium term of six years – another exercise where the change orientation may be adapted. The following items, as a start, may serve well to build on:

Institutional Strengthening

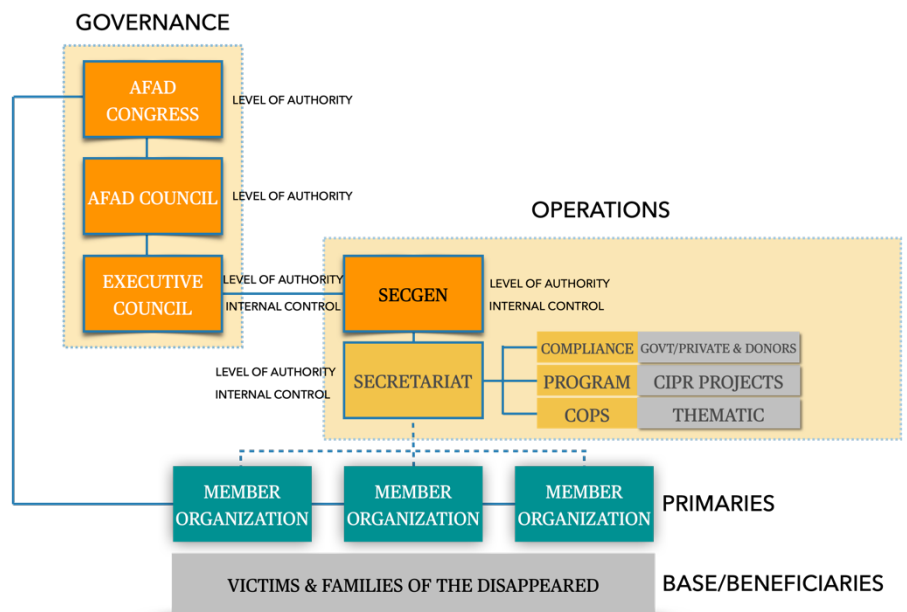
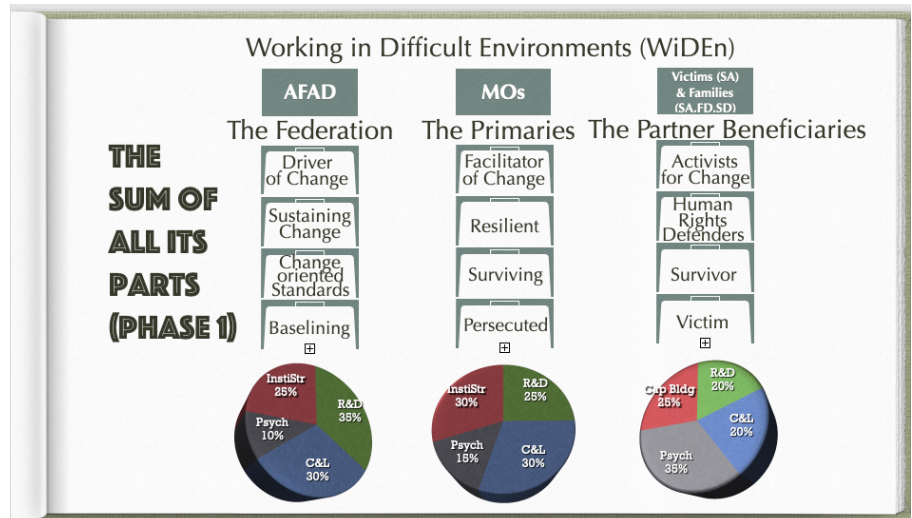
- Directional policies
- Governance & Code of Conduct
- Change Orientation
- Membership expansion

Research & Documentation

- disappearED-Asia and its ways forward (data visualization, virtual gallery)
- Gender and Enforced Disappearance
- Directed researches
- Knowledge management

Campaign & Lobby

- World Congress on Enforced Disappearance
- ICAED



END OF 2023 REPORT