

## WFWPI's Journey from Face to Face Events to Virtual Networking

Mako Mori  
July 30, 2020



When the globe was hit with the pandemic lockdown in March, it shook WFWP's normal flow of activities. Since 2019, WFWP was deeply invested in the planning of the 64th annual UN Commission on the Status of Women -- a 2-week long conference filled with discussions, education, and new commitments towards gender equality. The UN conference was planning on hosting high-level officials from over 200 countries. WFWPI also had several events that were to take place in parallel to the official meetings. But due to the wake of the pandemic, the UN had postponed the conference, with the high possibility of cancelling.

WFWPI is an organization that is heavily reliant on in-person meetings, interactions, and networking in order to develop and sustain relationships. Once CO-VID hit, we had to quickly shift gears to continue carrying out our plans for the year. The team did this through moving in-person meetings to virtual Zoom calls. Grace Kellet, the Administrator for WFWP, took on the tedious task of learning the technicalities of how webinars worked. With this new skill, in-person events that WFWP planned to host did not have to be cancelled, but could be moved to a virtual platform. What we thought was going to be only a temporary change, actually set the bar for the new norm.

Now meetings could be held virtually, without the trouble of having to have everyone physically present in the same room. Virtual platforms also had the capacity to host a greater number of audiences, both at home and abroad. What we thought would be a limitation to our capacities actually expanded our capacities to dream bigger.

A limitation often posed by official intergovernmental organizations (such as the UN) was its rigidity and rather traditional approaches to make information more readily available to the public. In order for awareness to spread, social media platforms must be actively engaging the people. Similarly, this pandemic was WFWP's opportunity to learn how to be tech-savvy and utilize digital tools to connect and engage a broader audience.

With this new knowledge of running a virtual platform under our belt, we hosted our first webinar with Dr. Denny Taylor, on the topic of "Family Literacy" in June. After countless hours invested into the logistics of the presentation and outreach to our global organizations, we were successfully able to engage an international audience of nearly 300 people. Then, on July 30th, we hosted our CSW 64 webinar: "Gender Equality: A hopeful, forward-looking perspective" with Ambassador Chabala, a former Permanent Representative of Zambia to the UN and the EU as our keynote speaker. Although virtual calls and events certainly cannot make up for the human connection we feel when we are together, times are changing and we have learned to adapt. Even when the pandemic dies out and the UN opens its doors once again, this skill of adapting to digital platforms will certainly continue playing a pivotal role in serving WFWP's mission.