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*Critical Voices on the World Bank and the
International Monetary Fund*

ANNUAL REPORT

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Established in 1995, the Bretton Woods Project (BWP) is a civil society watchdog of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. By monitoring the work of these institutions, supporting and connecting critical civil society communities, and advocating for transformational change, the Project challenges their power and fights for the development of policies that are gender transformative, equitable, environmentally sustainable and consistent with international human rights norms. It advocates for a multilateral system that is democratic, inclusive, transparent, accountable, and responsive to people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Based in London, the Bretton Woods Project is the hub of the UK network of civil society organisations engaged with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and works to amplify critical civil society voices from around the world that are aligned with the Project's vision.

In 2021, BWP maintained its strategic work, confronting IMF and World Bank narratives and the negative impacts of their policies and programmes, especially in response to the interlinked Covid-19, debt, climate and inequality crises. The Project continued its focus on climate change, gender and human rights, coordinating civil society engagement, and advocating for a people-centred recovery.



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Covid-19: The World Bank, the IMF and the path towards an unequal recovery

As was the case in 2020, 2021 was shaped by the catastrophic health, social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which by the end of the year had claimed more than [5.3 million](#) lives globally. It also [resulted](#) in an additional 97 million people living on less than \$1.90 per day and 163 million more people living on less than \$5.50 a day. Tragically, 2021 was also categorised by a depressingly familiar chasm between the hopeful discourse of international solidarity and multilateral cooperation and the perpetuation of unjust and inequitable international governance structures and policies. While the Bank stressed the need for a recovery based on [Green, Resilient and Inclusive Development](#) and the IMF highlighted its concerns about the divergent paths of the global recovery in 2021, both continued to support largely unreformed [policies](#) anchored on familiar calls for private sector-friendly reforms intended to ‘crowd-in’ private capital. The geopolitical context of the Covid-19 recovery became increasingly complicated, as the potential positive impact of a new US administration more committed to multilateralism, if not a radical reform of it, was diminished by increasing tensions between the US, China, and other G20 powers.

The year also witnessed the continued exacerbation of pre-existing inequalities, with the World Inequality Lab’s 2022 [Global Inequality Report](#) stressing that “contemporary global inequalities are close to early 20th century levels, at the peak of Western imperialism.” Refuting the private sector-led recovery policies strongly promulgated by the IMF and World Bank and many high-income countries, the report underscored that, “Income and wealth inequalities have been on the rise...since the 1980s, following...deregulation and liberalization programs...[confirming] that inequality is...a political choice.”

While the UN Conference on Trade and Development’s (UNCTAD) [2021 Trade and Development Report](#) highlighted that the scale of government support in high-income countries in response to the pandemic “broke new ground”, it stressed that urgent reforms remain hostage to a lack of political will in these countries. This is exemplified by the World Bank, IMF and G20’s continued refusal to support the necessary structural and policy changes to enable most middle- and low-income countries to achieve a just recovery from the pandemic. This has worsened a context of increased [debt crises](#), constrained fiscal space, tightening monetary [policies](#) in high-income countries and continued [inequitable](#) access to vaccines. Drawing disturbing parallels with the international response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, UNCTAD noted that promises of necessary reforms “were quickly abandoned in the face of resistance from the winners of hyperglobalization.”

Instead of re-evaluating the consequences of their orthodox policy prescriptions of austerity, privatisation and market-led reforms in the light of the overwhelming evidence that they contributed to worsening the health and social consequences of the pandemic, the Bank and Fund did little to change course.

A historic [\\$650 billion allocation](#) of the IMF's [Special Drawing Rights](#) and discussions of rechannelling of much-needed resources to middle- and low-income countries struggling to respond to the pandemic and debt burdens also took place last year. That said, the allocation fell well short of the \$3 trillion called for by [civil society](#) and also failed to meet other [demands](#), such as conditionality- and debt-free arrangements.

One of the year's few bright spots was the World Bank's announcement that it would [discontinue](#) its much-criticised *Doing Business Report*, although the Bank announced it would relaunch a revised version of the report in about two years. This was unsurprising, as World Bank President David Malpass made clear the Bank's intention to continue its push for [market-friendly reforms](#) in line with its [Maximizing Finance for Development](#) approach despite the pandemic.

The lack of progress on two of the central pillars required for an equitable, just, and green recovery were telling and devastating. On debt, the [much-criticised](#) G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative and Common Framework failed to address the problems faced by middle- and low-income countries, while continuing to privilege private sector creditors, who extracted urgently needed pandemic response resources from dwindling state budgets. The international community and private sector creditors continued to steadfastly refuse to consider long-standing civil society [demands](#) for a human rights-based reform to the international debt architecture inclusive of an independent debt workout mechanism.

On vaccination, alarmingly, the Bank and Fund continued to ignore calls from civil society and many of their shareholders to support the [intellectual property waiver](#) for the production of Covid-19 vaccines. As the [People's Vaccine alliance](#) stressed, the waiver is essential to address what African leaders call '[vaccine apartheid](#)' where high- and upper-middle-income countries continue to absorb the vast majority of vaccines produced globally, as low-income country populations remain largely unprotected.



While the IMF highlighted the equitable nature of its Covid-19 [response](#), it nonetheless continued to profit from [surcharges](#), which UN human rights experts warned violate international human rights laws, and are projected to cost countries most in need of IMF support up to \$4 billion by the end of 2022.

The year also witnessed the early [replenishment](#) of the International Development Association's (IDA), the World Bank's concessional lending arm, 20th round of funding, totalling \$93 billion. While additional concessional resources for low-income countries were welcome, civil society remained [critical](#) of the process and significant portions of IDA's programme, including the [Private Sector Window](#), and doubts about whether it is structured to support equitable development.

Raising civil society voices to confront BWIs' narratives in response to the pandemic

As the Covid-19 crisis and related travel restrictions continued to challenge BWP's advocacy and interactions with partners in 2021, the Project redoubled its efforts to open spaces to elevate the voices of those affected by World Bank and IMF policies and programmes.

The Project capitalised on its electronic platforms and outputs, such as the widely read quarterly *Observer* (which is also published in Spanish), its social media channels and website to confront IMF and World Bank narratives. **The Project provided strong, evidence-based critiques that illustrated the negative impact these institutions have, particularly within the context of the pandemic, with a focus on human rights, democratic governance and the environment.**

- In 2021 BWP published **four *Observers***, all in electronic format, highlighting key developments at the World Bank and IMF, with a focus on the **gap between their rhetoric and policies, and their reliance on flawed policy frameworks.**
- As in 2020, the Spring and Annual Meetings of the World Bank and IMF took place virtually in 2021, once more diminishing opportunities for civil society to interact with policy makers. The Project published **two editions of its *Dispatch*** coverage of the Spring and Annual Meetings, highlighting the longstanding **need for governance reform at the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), the lack of debt cancellation mechanisms to stem the impending debt crisis and the BWIs' inadequate climate-related proposals.**



“In the light of the multiple crises faced by Pakistan, the severity of conditionalities imposed on it is highly inappropriate, and it is high time the IMF rethink its neoliberal approach to prevent its policies from further hurting the most vulnerable.”

Bilquis Tahira, Shirakat Partnership for Development, Pakistan

- To raise the voices of those most affected by the BWIs, the Project published **eleven external articles in the Observer**, of which eight were from contributors from the Global South, four of whom were women. These included a piece by Bilquis Tahira, from Shirakat Partnership for Development, on the negative impacts of the new IMF-Pakistan agreement on women.

- Other external pieces included:

- World Bank's plans for Indonesia: Delayed action on climate and continued coal and gas support, by Fran Witt of Recourse and Andri Prasetyo of Trend Asia.
- The IMF's Comprehensive Surveillance Review: A bungled attempt at meeting the moment, by Sargon Nissan of Recourse and Roos Saalbrink of ActionAid International.
- Tip of the iceberg: How the call for SDRs reveals the urgency for deeper reforms of the global reserve system to address systemic inequalities, by Bhumika Muchhala of Third World Network.
- Debt crisis prevention: We need to talk about capital controls, by Daniela Prates of UNCTAD



“Due to the negative social and cultural impacts caused by extractive and infrastructure projects financed by the World Bank, greater measures are now required to reverse rights violations.”

Denisse Linares, Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Peru



- The Project also **wrote a chapter for Redea, Revista de Derechos en Acción** (in Spanish), titled El FMI y la pandemia: Una historia de fortalecimiento de la financiarización y la complicidad con las violaciones de derechos humanos (The IMF and the pandemic: A history of strengthening financialisation and complicity with human rights violations).
- In 2021, the Project continued its work as a key watchdog of the BWIs. As part of this function, BWP shared a total of **238 critical news articles through its News Lens email alert**, covering publications from the media, civil society and academia on the latest developments at the World Bank and the IMF.

Supporting and connecting critical civil society communities

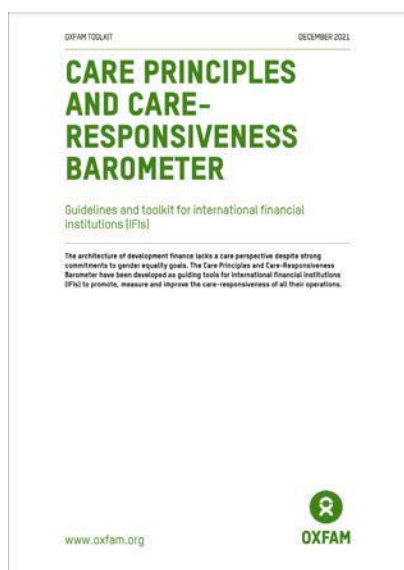
In 2021, the Project continued its vital coordination role of meetings between civil society, including Global South partners, and officials from the IMF, World Bank, UK and European governments, and served as an important hub for civil society advocacy in the UK, European and global contexts.

- BWP supported Mexico-based women's rights organisation Equidad in their economic justice work at the **Women's Working Group on Financing for Development and the Generation Equality Forum**, including a Campaign of Campaigns that called for a human rights-based and democratic global economic system.



- As the elected European civil society representative to the World Bank and IMF's Civil Society Policy Forum (CSPF) Working Group, **BWP worked to maximise the number of civil society panels available**, ensured that selected panels included critical analysis of Bank and Fund policies, and **successfully advocated for civil society meetings with regional executive directors**.

- Other highlights included: supporting Oxfam Asia in developing its Care Principles and Care-Responsiveness Barometer; supporting the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in targeting their **#feministbailout** campaign at the IMF and World Bank; facilitating a public webinar on the relation between debt, climate and gender justice by the debt justice community; and contributing to a discussion at the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) annual conference on bridging the gap between academia, activism and policymaking.



Supporting network-based advocacy

- In September, after the IMF issued a historic allocation of \$650 billion-worth of SDRs, BWP along with other partners submitted a letter calling for the rechanneling of these resources from high to middle- and low-income countries, where they could make a difference in the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis by providing debt- and conditionality-free financing.

“We strongly believe that successful and equitable recovery is contingent on transparency and a participatory process inclusive of civil society in all countries. This also applies to international spaces making decisions on SDR channeling mechanisms, including the G20 and the IMF, where civil society has not had, so far, sufficient opportunities to engage on this matter.”

Civil society letter on the rechanneling of SDRs

- For the 20th replenishment of the International Development Association (IDA20), the donor pledging process for the Bank’s low-income country arm, BWP worked with partners at Eurodad to coordinate a statement, calling for IDA20, “to strengthen public goods, the provision of public services and promote equitable, ecologically sustainable and inclusive domestic businesses.”
- The Project also contributed to a joint submission on the World Bank’s Development Policy Finance retrospective in December, highlighting the need for fundamental reforms to this instrument.



Protesters outside headquarters during the 2021 Spring Meetings at the International Monetary Fund.
Credit: IMF Photo/Joshua Roberts

Fighting to make the economy and Covid-19 recovery work for women

The Project continued to advocate for a more gender-just recovery by opposing the austerity and privatisation efforts promoted by the World Bank and IMF. BWP led advocacy coalitions, developed novel policy frameworks, published on-the-ground research, and supported women's rights organisations in countries impacted by IMF and World Bank programmes.

- In March, BWP coordinated a **joint civil society submission to the IMF's Comprehensive Surveillance Review** with 11 partners proposing a framework for consistent engagement on inequality, gender and climate issues in IMF surveillance. Summarising longstanding civil society concerns, the paper conceptualised a more robust surveillance framework and led to dedicated bilateral meetings with numerous board members and senior members of several IMF departments.

“The IMF continues to largely fail to recognise and address the ways in which its own conventional policy advice can exacerbate gender and economic inequalities, as well as further aggravate the climate crisis and build future climate risks into economies.”

Joint civil society submission to the IMF's Comprehensive Surveillance Review

- With an international group of partners, the Project continued to lead advocacy against IMF austerity prescriptions during the pandemic recovery. Efforts from 2020 were galvanised into an **#EndAusterity campaign coalition** with nearly 40 CSOs and academics in May. The campaign seeks to create higher media visibility of the consequences of austerity, raise the profile of viable alternative policies, and build stronger connections between civil society communities.
- As a result of persistent advocacy together with the Global Alliance for Tax Justice's gender working group, the **IMF finally added gender analysis to its Value Added Tax chapter of the Tax Policy Assessment Framework** in the Summer of 2021.
- In September, BWP highlighted the experiences of five countries in a briefing titled **Learning lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic: The World Bank's macroeconomic policies and women's rights**, demonstrating that the Bank's development policy financing instrument has exacerbated gender inequality by promoting macroeconomic reforms that are likely to negatively impact women and girls, in particular.
- The Project continued to **facilitate women's rights organisations' engagement with the Bank and Fund**, including establishing a working group to collaborate on joint advocacy at the Bank and organising meetings with the new gender directors at the IMF and World Bank, Ratna Sahay and Hana Brix, respectively.



Pushing the Bretton Woods Institutions to support a just energy transition

As the World Bank and IMF stepped up their rhetoric on climate action in 2021 amid worsening the impacts of the climate crisis globally, the Bretton Woods Project worked in close coordination with civil society partners to push the BWIs to undertake institutional reforms necessary to support a just transition to a zero-carbon future.

- In March 2021, as the World Bank finalised its Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) for 2021-25, the Project coordinated an [open letter](#) to World Bank leadership, signed by over 150 organisations and individuals, **calling on the Bank to adopt a whole-of-institution commitment to end its support for fossil fuels and promote a just energy transition.** Following sustained civil society advocacy, the CCAP pledged the Bank's future investments in gas projects would be consistent with countries' climate plans, although [concerns](#) remain about the Bank's indirect support for fossil fuels – as well as its overreliance on crowding in private finance to support climate action.



- BWP also engaged with the IMF as it took steps to mainstream climate change across its mandate in 2021. In collaboration with ActionAid USA, the Project co-published a [report](#) in August demonstrating that the IMF Article IV reports (annual economic ‘health checks’ of individual states) are potentially undermining countries’ efforts to shift to low-carbon economies,

including through support for the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure. This followed the publication of a new IMF climate strategy in July, which noted that the macroeconomic challenges linked to the low-carbon transition would be a focus on IMF surveillance going forward. BWP and ActionAid USA published a follow-up [briefing](#) in October for civil society ahead of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) in Glasgow.

- Finally, the Project was active in **advocacy** on an official statement on International Support for the Clean Energy Transition at COP26 in November. The statement’s signatories committed to, **“end new direct public support for the international unabated fossil fuel energy sector by the end of 2022, except in limited and clearly defined circumstances that are consistent with a 1.5°C warming limit and the goals of the Paris Agreement.”** The [commitment](#) applies to bilateral finance provided by signatory governments and “will also guide [their] approach on the boards of multilateral development banks.” Although the World Bank failed to sign on, a number of its large shareholders, including the US, Germany, France, the UK, Canada, Spain and Italy, did – as well as a range of borrower countries including Sri Lanka, Zambia, and Mali – with civil society calling on the Bank to sign on before COP27 in Egypt this year.

BWP IN NUMBERS

OUR OUTREACH

More than
4,000
subscriptions to
BWP's *Observer*,
Dispatch, *Alerts*
and *News Lens*
SUBSCRIBE

57
Observer articles
published in 2021

More than
300,000
visits to the
Bretton Woods
Project website
in 2021

238
articles shared
through
20
News Lens mailouts
in 2021

6,326
Twitter
followers

The most read

Observer article published
in 2021 was a guest piece by
Maju Varghese, of the India-
based Center for Finance
Accountability, with nearly
20,000 visits.

**India's new farm laws mirror
international financial
institutions' vision of
agriculture**

23 MARCH 2021 | GUEST COMMENT

Indian farmers protest new farm laws in Delhi. Photo credit: Joe Athalya

By Maju Varghese, Center for Financial Accountability

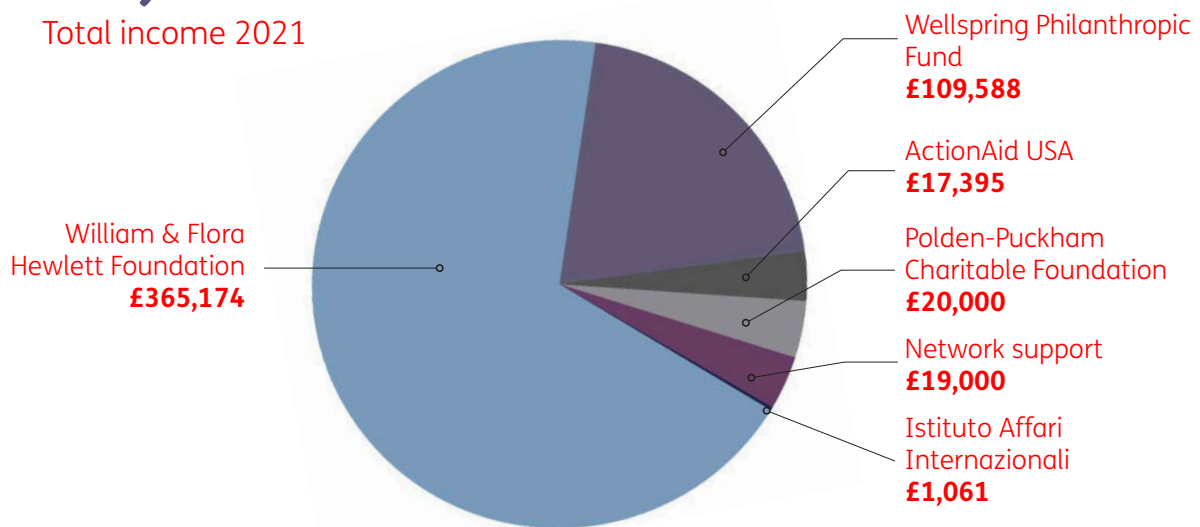
SUMMARY

- Thousands of farmers protest India's new agriculture laws
- Farmers fear new Bank and Fund supported reforms will disadvantage small producers
- Current reforms reflect continuation of long-standing Bank and Fund support for damaging deregulation

OUR FINANCES

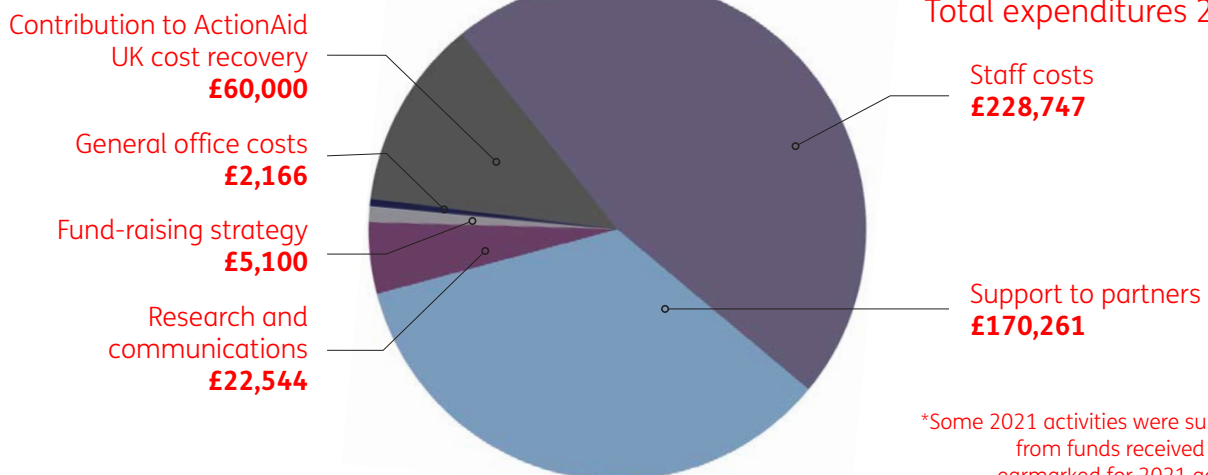
£532,434

Total income 2021



£488,820

Total expenditures 2021*



*Some 2021 activities were supported from funds received in 2020 earmarked for 2021 activities.

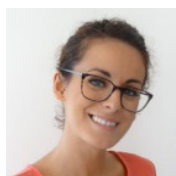
While the generous contributions of our funders and partners has ensured BWP's medium term stability, we look forward to continued support in 2022.

[DONATE TO BWP](#)

WHO WE ARE

OUR TEAM IN 2021

In 2021, the Bretton Woods Project experienced several staffing changes, mostly in the Gender Equality and Macroeconomics (GEM) Project's team.



Isabel Alvarez
Communications Manager



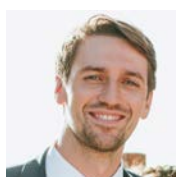
Friederike Strub
GEM Project Lead (from November)



Emma Burgisser
GEM Project Manager (until August)



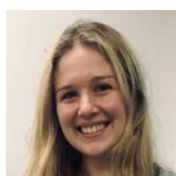
Jon Sward
Environment Project Manager



Chris Hope
Interim Financialisation & Human Rights Project Lead



Luiz Vieira
Coordinator



Ella Hopkins
Senior Gender Project Officer (until September)

The Bretton Woods Project Steering Group provides strategic advice on policy direction and key developments and trends that relate to the role of the World Bank and IMF in the wider international development landscape. In 2021, the Steering Group was comprised of seven members, who serve in their personal capacity.

Steering Group Member	Affiliation
Lee Webster (chair)	ActionAid UK
Helen Tugendhat (vice-chair)	Forest People's Programme
Raffaella Dattler	International Planned Parenthood Federation
Daniela Gabor	University of the West of England, Bristol
Jane Lethbridge	University of Greenwich
Alfredo Saad-Filho	King's College London
Sarah Wykes	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)

LOOKING FORWARD

Next year will be pivotal for global efforts to ensure that the divergent recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic does not become an entrenched reality, as high-income countries learn to ‘live with Covid’ and begin to tighten monetary policies in line with an anticipated return to growth, with potentially devastating consequences for citizens of low- and middle-income countries. There is a real danger that the structural reforms urgently required of the international financial architecture and global economy will fail to materialise, in particular regarding debt relief, as financialised market solutions with ‘green’ and ‘sustainable’ labels continue to gain prominence. Indeed, 2022 may well take us one step further along the path of the unfolding climate emergency. With predictions of increased fragility and social unrest amidst the worsening inequality crisis and continued vaccine inequity, strong and united civil society movements are advocating for real and bold solutions to these intersecting crises. Side by side with our partners, the Bretton Woods Project will continue to push the World Bank and IMF to respond to the concerns of marginalised countries and communities by developing policies that enable them to avail themselves of their human rights and to live with dignity in a truly sustainable environment.



Youth activists attend a climate protest ahead of COP26 in Milan, Italy on 1 October.
Credit: Mauro Ujetto/Shutterstock.

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