Conference Summary Report

Cancún, Mexico
19-23 September 2022

#SVRIForum #ThePowerOfWE #WEact #WEMakeChange #VAW #VAC
#GenderViolence #ViolencePrevention #ViolenceResponse
Evidence builders from around the world coalesced in Cancún...

In September 2022, over 1,020 researchers, practitioners, funders, policymakers, activists, and survivors journeyed from all parts of the globe to Cancún, Mexico for SVRI’s Forum 2022. This, our 7th conference, proved to be the largest and most diverse Forum since our first in 2009. A total of 99 countries were represented, yet a common language connected us – the drive and determination to find ways to sustainably create a world free of violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC). Surrounded by like minds at Forum 2022, our world had become contained yet at the same time, more expansive.

The theme of the Forum – Connect. Share. Learn. – wasn’t just clever marketing speak. We believe passionately that our coming together facilitates a deeply reflective, constructively critical and soulfully joyous type of learning. Holding the Forum by the ocean with many activities and spaces for reflection, was a decision made with wellbeing in mind. It provided a tranquil setting with breath-taking views of the Caribbean Sea to balance the intensity of the conference topics.

After a heavy two-year diet of virtual connection, we binged on being able to actually connect in person, to share what we’ve learned and rethink what matters while sitting close to new and long-time friends. Such a collaborative space precipitated moments of discovery, of renewal, of reimagining. We didn’t entirely abandon technology while in Cancun though; in fact, the Whova App facilitated thousands of exchanges, allowed us to share photos and business cards, and was an all-round great networking tool for Forum delegates.

We’re deeply grateful to our sponsors and donors for providing a space to think about the intersectionality of violence and hold conversations about decolonising and the importance of localising knowledge production. It was through robust and honest discussions about improving prevention and response research practices that we reaffirmed our collective commitment that such practices must be participatory and driven by local / indigenous knowledge and realities.

We thank all the hands and minds that made this event possible. To those in the early Zoom meetings who helped move us from imagination to action, to the incredible team juggling logistics, to those whose creative touches ensured that during our time in Mexico we felt cared for and seen.

We left Cancún changed, buoyed by energetic and inspiring conversations, loads of friend requests, and challenged to close those stubborn gaps in prevention and response to VAW and VAC and other forms of violence driven by gender inequality once and for all.

Elizabeth Dartnall, SVRI Executive Director and Claudia Garcia-Moreno, SVRI Forum Scientific Chair
What made Forum 2022 so special

Focus on well-being and self-care

We know the emotional toll this type of work and life in general takes. Behind all the great initiatives presented, we know there are real human beings who shoulder uncountable invisible costs. It was essential for Forum 2022 to provide safe spaces such as trauma counselling, the SVRI Forum’s Brave Room and yoga and meditation, among others.

“I thought the whole event was so trauma informed and I think that is a huge strength. I really appreciated the support and focus on fun and joy as much as talking about difficult things.”

Diversity, inclusion, and language justice

Inclusivity needed to be a visible reality and ensuring the availability of quality services for participants with physical disabilities was important. We believe the localisation of knowledge and knowledge production and disruption of power is essential to the field. Therefore, ensuring that researchers and practitioners from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) could participate in the Forum was vital. Young and emerging researchers and practitioners were also a priority. 65 Sponsored bursaries made this happen.

“I received a full bursary to attend the SVRI Forum 2022 to present my PhD research; complemented with an additional bursary for someone to accompany me... SVRI 2019 was accessible, but the 2022 Forum takes the cake. Which conference provides a wheelchair service?! ...This enabled me to experience the full benefit of the conference. What an amazing act of inclusion!”

Many young researchers and practitioners have grown personally and professionally through the SVRI Young Professionals Programme. This is how the proverbial baton is passed. Support during Forum 2022 included being paired with a mentor for input on conference presentations. The Forum accepted nine young people into the Programme, two of whom received SVRI awards for their outstanding presentations.

“The growth from discussions with my mentor was immense. I really learnt a lot on how to present information in a comprehensible way.”

Our commitment to SVRI Forum being a multilingual space where all delegates can be heard is unwavering. It is essential for building partnerships and creating better programmes. Our commitment to language justice and language equity meant not only providing interpretation in English, Spanish, and French but also ensuring that interpretation and translation was intentionally feminist, antiracist, nonbinary and trauma-informed.
“A huge thank you to you and your whole SVRI team for convening such an inspiring SVRI Forum. It was a thrill to be together again in person after these three long years. The care, thought, and intention that you and your team put in to cultivating a warm, open, welcoming, and inclusive community made the experience ever richer and more memorable. Thank you so much for giving us all this opportunity to learn, share, and exchange in such a meaningful way.”

Forum 2022 Creators and Collaborators

Pulling off such a successful event is only possible when good friends, great minds and a world of committed researchers and activists come together. For a conference this size, designed to be inclusive, safe, facilitating robust analytical dialogue and including a healthy dose of fun, we called upon many people. This included our hosts in Mexico, our internal structures, and an array of local and indigenous experts. They include:

Co-host - INMUJERES, National Women’s Institute, Mexico.

Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INMUJERES; National Institute for Women) is an independent public institute established in 2001. It was formed in conjunction with the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CNDH; National Commission of Human Rights) to uphold and protect women’s human rights. From their perspective as a strategic organisation working on VAW in Mexico, INMUJERES was naturally instrumental in helping to shape the conceptual thrust of the conference and providing the necessary logistical insights on hosting such an event.

Regional Center for Multidisciplinary Research at the University National Autonomous University of Mexico (CRIM-UNAM)

CRIM-UNAM carries out multidisciplinary research in the fields of social sciences and humanities and other disciplines focused on local, regional, national and international challenges and their connection with globalization processes. As a premier research institution in Mexico committed to contribute to strengthening multidisciplinary work, including reframing thinking around VAW and its intersections, we are deeply grateful for this partnership.

“The SVRI Forum 2022 was a unique event that gave a very large group of activists, academics and officials the opportunity to meet for three days to reflect, listen to each other and share concerns, data, programs, actions and proposals on issues such as violence and gender inequality.

It was particularly significant that this conference took place in Cancun, Mexico, a country hard hit by violence against women. However, the presence of other Latin American and Caribbean countries at this conference was still very limited, which indicates that we still have a long way to go to achieve greater integration of the movements and networks working to eradicate gender-based violence in Latin America and the Caribe, and of this region with the rest of the world.” ~ CRIM-UNAM, SVRI Forum Co-Host.
SVRI Leadership Council

Our work in general is guided by a group of nine international experts who act as ambassadors for SVRI. Drawing on their range of expertise in research, academia, international development and global health relating to VAW and VAC, our Leadership Council keeps us strategically on course and were influential in refining Forum 2022’s thematic areas.

SVRI Board

The SVRI board plays a central role in managing our strategic direction, risk, and progress towards sustainability. The importance of these issues were heightened during the preparation of the conference and the sterling guidance of our five Board members helped us in identifying resource mobilisation opportunities, managing decisions related to efficiency and advising on the key strategic players that needed to be on board.

SVRI Team

Our internal team is quite accustomed to performing miracles when managing SVRI’s global biennial grants and staying responsive to our 8,300 members. For Forum 2022 however, they went above and beyond. From our technical area specialists to our incredible administrative support, the smooth running of our successful event was largely down to the coordination skills and hard work of our team members.

“..."I really want to celebrate and name the VERY massive task of organising the Forum in Mexico 2022. The challenges were many - from the venue to the visas, to COVID etc - you really made it happen, and it was such a vibrant and positive space. Huge congratulations and gratitude to all of you."

Abstract reviewers

In the run-up to Forum 2022, we received over 1,100 abstract from across the globe. We are indebted to 133 abstract reviewers for their time, keen reading and insightful inputs to the process. They are party the reason that our diverse and comprehensive programme looked at VAW and VAC from such a nuanced perspective and that the quality of the discussions was of such a high standard.

The numbers tell the reach and potentially...the story

While numbers can tell a story, we’re also interested in the story behind the numbers. We’re interested in touching as many lives as possible in ways that are meaningful, kind and ethical. For every attendee at Forum 2022 and every discussion held, we’re keenly aware that there is a ripple effect we are unlikely to see.

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<tr>
<th>Delegates</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Bursaries</th>
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<td>1021</td>
<td>99</td>
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1021 delegates (71% from low- and middle-income countries)

99 countries (16 Spanish-speaking countries)

65 bursaries (86% from low- and middle-income countries)
“I received a full bursary to attend the SVRI Forum 2022 to present my PhD research; complemented with an additional bursary for someone to accompany me... SVRI 2019 was accessible, but the 2022 Forum takes the cake. Which conference provides a wheelchair service?!...This enabled me to experience the full benefit of the conference. What an amazing act of inclusion!”

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<tr>
<th>Who helped us make it happen?</th>
<th>What was the structure of Forum 2022?</th>
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<tr>
<td>9 young researchers and practitioners in the Young Professionals Programme</td>
<td>116 five minute presentations</td>
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<td>12 donors</td>
<td>225 oral presentations</td>
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<td>21 partners</td>
<td>facilitated by SVRIs partners that served as building capacity sessions in the VAW and VAC field</td>
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- **five minute presentations**
  - where presenters were challenged to impart concise, high level and interesting aspects of their work

- **oral presentations**
  - that spanned the globe from reproductive coercion in Brazil, to IPV preventions in Afghanistan, to demand and supply barriers during Covid-19 in Albania

- **participant-driven events**
  - which presented opportunities for attendees to host strategy meetings, launch new products, celebrate achievements, and establish new initiatives and collaborations

- **exhibition stands**
  - which contributed to splashes of colour, an atmosphere of excitement, and most importantly spaces where organisations shared important information about their work
What we learned

Connection is everything

The Covid-19 pandemic and the isolation that followed was a rupture, one that invited us to rethink what matters. The importance of connecting, in person, with others was at the top of the list. We were filled with a renewed sense of appreciation for being in conversation in ways that maximise how we learn from each other about creating a more equitable world. It is in connection with others that we draw the energy needed to fuel our agency and our ability to advocate with tenacity.

“The side meetings/coffees were extra important this year after three years of not attending any meetings. This did mean that I attended formal sessions rarely, but it was well worth the trade off as the primary benefit this year was being in the same space as colleagues.”

The nuances of violence tell a bigger story

We learned about newer forms of violence such as reproductive coercion and those facilitated by technology, as well as newer perspectives on older forms such as contextually different definitions of femicide. We reflected how the intersections between violence with different identity markers paints a story, the bigger picture about the society and the world in which we live. Understanding this story is the foundation for how we co-create political systems and agendas. By having a deeper appreciation of the ways that for e.g. IPV is inextricably linked to VAC, how reproductive coercion is woven into the fabric of IPV, or the relationship between violence, disability and economic disempowerment, we can respond to VAW in nuanced and multi-faceted ways.

Decolonising Research

What we do is important. But it’s how we do it that has set SVRI apart. At Forum 2022, we faced tough conversations about power dynamics within which we operate and what decolonising knowledge production really entails. Releasing long-held beliefs about a western centrality on research and admitting that working on VAW often results in contestation and conflict that must be managed is key. A passion for ending VAW is no excuse for paternalistic gestures and Forum 22 affirmed our commitment to honour the thoughts, ideas and contributions of those whose lives we want to help change. This is the only way for knowledge generation to have value.

Ethical research practices

As part of the broad umbrella of decolonising research, we also realised just how much we have a responsibility to ensure that resource flows positively transform individuals and communities rather than perpetuate existing inequities. Ethically, we have to put increased effort into changing research practices so that they are participatory, driven by indigenous researchers, and conducted in ways that are culturally competent, respectful, and build trust with local communities.

Institutionalising practice-based knowledge

The role and importance of practice-based knowledge is increasingly being recognised as part of evidence-informed approaches. It has been proven to provide an additional layer of context, analysis, and intersectionality and useful as a key source in knowledge sharing. We learned that despite this, we need to do much more to capture, analyse, and share practice-based knowledge. Identifying and exploring its limitations and strengths, as well as appreciating how it can complement other sources of knowledge and research, are key to integrating this vast source of knowledge.
New ideas on prevention

Prevention efforts must consider the risk factors that underpin VAW and VAC such as inter-generational violence, social and community norms, economic stress, family dynamics, and substance abuse. We learned that the intricacies of prevention work in humanitarian and displacement settings include working with no or little infrastructure and in the presence of deep-seated trauma. Effective prevention must include accurate measurement of long-term social change. Prevention must also be programmed holistically, taking into account the role that economic empowerment initiatives, skills building, educational systems and parenting interventions play on preventing and reducing VAW and VAC.

Responses that don’t re-traumatise

Effective response services that centre on survivors must be properly planned and budgeted for and delivered in ways that are sensitive to avoiding secondary trauma. Response interventions must speak to the barriers that survivors encounter in accessing quality services. These include a fragmented and unfriendly referral system that reproduces inequities, the unavailability of services in rural areas, and limited financial resources to leave abusive situations. Local level coordination is important in ensuring a community-responsive action plan to strengthen violence prevention and response.

Working with stakeholders

Forum 2022 fired up our imaginations in how we crisscross our paths with others, in both the short and long term. We must consider how different role-players in the VAW and VAC landscape contribute towards social change. Once we do, we can be more strategic in our building alliances, whether it is with policy makers, feminist movements, with men or those working with men. We celebrate the perspective shared at the Forum that through the collective voice of civil society, we have a seldom-told, seldom-remembered history of victories and transformations. The conference reminded us that we are building a community through which we can build collective action for powerful change.

Looking ahead to Forum 2024

Feedback from participants proved very useful as we plan for Forum 2024. The conference evaluation results were largely positive with 86% of respondents agreeing that the conference gave them a comprehensive overview of key issues in the field, 84% believing that topics presented were relevant and useful to their work, and 91% indicating that the conference was well organised. We will certainly build on these successes. We also take heart the constructive feedback on how to improve the Forum including working harder to ensure themes fit together more coherently.

In relation to advancing knowledge, we are excited to explore the potential of including more dialogic panels, opening space for deeper learning and discussion of key debates in the field in Forum 2024.

We will continue to create more opportunities for networking and building partnerships through our Forum. These may include the possibility of co-hosting regional and global webinars and events based on Forum learnings and abstracts in non-Forum years as a way to link conversations between Forums.

Fostering diversity and equity is at the heart of the Forum and we will continue to fundraise for bursaries so that those who are underrepresented can attend the event. We are also actively raising funds for translation and interpretation services to help ensure all voices have equal opportunity to take part in the meaningful exchange of ideas which the Forum provides.

Integrating well-being and collective care in a coherent way was well-received at Forum 2022 and confirmed the need for it to continue. It acknowledged the emotional impact of the work and provided the space for attendees to truly be “seen”. It concretely offered services that hopefully assisted participants to focus on their wellbeing and allow them to be able to fully partake in all the Forum had to offer.
Thank you

To our funders, partners and in-kind contributors, including our workshop facilitators and abstract reviewers, for making Forum 2022 possible! We could have not done this without you.