## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ................................................................. 3  
2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND ........................................... 9  
3. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION PROCEDURE .......................... 16  
4. FINDINGS ............................................................................. 21  
5. RECOMMENDATIONS ................................................................. 47
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Fund for Global Human Rights (The Fund) and Purposeful partnered together to co-design and pilot ‘Tar Kura’, a participatory grant-making initiative in Sierra Leone. Tar Kura means ‘new fire’ in Koranko, Kono, and Madingo, three of the local languages. The fire that the initiative aims to ignite in children and young people by placing them at the centre of children’s rights grant-making, programme implementation, and learning. For the past two years, Purposeful and The Fund have worked together to analyse how to meaningfully include girls and youth in designing and running a participatory fund. The collaboration also involved better understanding the needs, realities, and challenges of youth-led activism in Sierra Leone.

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The objective of this participatory evaluation was to gather the main learnings from the Tar Kura initiative and contribute to the documentation of the process. Through interviews, a survey, and a reflection journal, the evaluation sought to reflect on the grant-making process and its immediate impact on youth engaged through it. It aimed to reflect on the successes and opportunities for improvement of the process and to make recommendations for future participatory grant-making processes with children and youth. Much like the Tar Kura initiative, the evaluation was committed to placing youth at the centre and, thus, included four young women from Sierra Leone as full members of the evaluation team.
**TAR KURA**

The Tar Kura initiative proposed a participatory grant-making process that placed children and youth at the centre. Guided by prior reflections and consultations with partners and youth in the country, The Fund and Purposeful jointly designed the initiative with the goal of increasing youth participation and leadership. Through an open call, a group of ten youth panellists from all around the country were selected and received capacity building and ongoing support. The panellists defined the eligibility criteria for the groups and organizations, led the selection process by visiting and interviewing shortlisted candidates, and made the final decisions on grant allocation. They also provided ongoing support to the grantee partners themselves, who also received capacity building and ongoing support from Purposeful.

The Tar Kura grant-making process sought to be responsive and accessible to young people and their realities. It was also inclusive, participatory, and empowering throughout, placing the decision-making power in the hands of young people and aiming to redistribute power in grant-making relationships.

**FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS**

Overall, the feedback from all stakeholders involved in this participatory grant-making initiative was extremely positive. Based on the findings of this evaluation, both Purposeful and the Fund made a conscientious and continuous effort to implement a fully participatory process that placed youth at the centre. The Tar Kura initiative was a true exercise in power sharing at all levels, and its reported impact is clear at the individual, collective, and community levels.

**A PARTNERSHIP BASED ON COMMON VALUES**

Despite never having formally collaborated before, Purposeful and The Fund came together and jointly developed and implemented this initiative. Both organizations expressed that they saw this as a partnership of equals, regardless of which one had the financial resources, and that both acted accordingly throughout the process. Both Purposeful and The Fund strategically chose to partner with one another. They believed that they had common values that would allow them to successfully work together. Within both institutions, there was collective buy-in of the initiative, of putting youth at the centre, and of rebalancing power. They each sought to prioritize young people, especially young women, on their own terms and they felt the other one ‘got it’. Their shared feminist approach made them ideal partners.

**REBALANCING POWER THROUGHOUT**

The participatory grant-making process also heavily questioned and rebalanced the power relationships between The Fund, Purposeful, and the young people who were selected as panellists. Both Purposeful and The Fund sought to place youth at the centre from the beginning and placed the decision-making in their hands. The initiative recognized the importance of providing them with capacity building to ensure that they were equipped and comfortable making decisions and leading the process; comprehensive support was also provided to allow young people to meaningfully participate and engage.

To find out more about the Tar Kura grantee partner organisations look for boxes such as this one labeled Grantee Spotlight throughout this report.
The rebalancing of power in this initiative was based on something crucial: trust. The Fund trusted Purposeful and their expertise both with the local context as well as in working with young people. Purposeful felt trusted and, thus, were able to participate as an equal partner, sharing concerns, challenges, and lessons learned. Both institutions trusted young people and their capacities and fostered an environment where they felt comfortable participating and making decisions on their own terms.

AN APPLICATION PROCESS RESPONSIVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE’S REALITIES

Efforts were made to create an initiative that was adapted and responsive to the realities of young people in Sierra Leone. For example, considering their time availabilities and planning around the school calendar; making phones available for panellists who needed them; using youth-responsive dissemination strategies such as radio jingles in English and Krio (the lingua franca), advertisements on social media, and flyers printed and shared through WhatsApp; allowing submission of applications through audios or videos; sharing a guide on how to complete the application and offering the possibility of receiving support from the Tar Kura team in preparing the application; and eliminating requirements that could create barriers to young people such as legal registration, demonstrated past success, impact, or track record.

SUPPORT THAT GOES BEYOND THE MONEY

Financial support is undoubtedly crucial for young people to realize their projects and initiatives. However, there are other types of support that are just as important for a comprehensive and sustainable impact in the lives of young people. These include leadership training and capacity building; ongoing support for panellists and grantees throughout the application and implementation process; and other opportunities that were shared with them for funding, collaboration, and networking, among others.

FISCAL SPONSORS, PATERNALISTIC INTERMEDIARIES OR SUPPORTIVE MENTORS?

Grantee partners who were not registered were able to work with fiscal sponsors. Fiscal sponsors received capacity building along with grantees to understand their role and were asked to sign agreements as per the conditions of their involvement. There is no doubt that fiscal sponsors valued their role and wanted what was best for the organizations they were sponsoring. However, some of their comments show that they still hold many preconceptions about young people and a highly paternalistic attitude towards them. Thus, further sensitization is recommended for fiscal sponsors of youth groups; this will ensure positive partnerships and that fiscal sponsors, in addition to acting as intermediaries and assuming financial responsibility, also believe in young people and their capacity to make decisions, including financial ones.

COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROCESS

Like elsewhere in the world, COVID-19 had a profound impact in Sierra Leone, and consequently on the Tar Kura initiative and the projects funded through it. Most of the groups had to suspend their activities due to the restrictions on mobility and many of their communities faced extreme hardships with the situation. Young people proactively reached out to discuss the impact of the pandemic on their work and to request permission to make changes to the work they had planned. Both institutions were flexible not only in understanding that implementation times had to be adjusted and deadlines could of course no longer be met, but also in recognizing that the work needed to adapt to the emerging situation. Thus, groups were authorized to redirect their funds as they saw fit.

BUILDING THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth found that the capacity building was extremely valuable and helpful for their organizations and themselves. They appreciated

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1 Although Tar Kura grants were awarded in December of 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, subsequent aspects of the initiative—such as face to face training—were impacted by it.
the practical skills they were able to develop, which were vital in the management and successful implementation of their work such as how to develop a project, monitoring, reporting, and financial management skills. Young people also appreciated the opportunity to build their leadership and teamwork skills. Panellists reported that this was crucial in the success of the panellists and their work in the grant-making process. Grantees also reported that the training had an impact in their work within their organization and that they took the knowledge acquired back to their organizations. For example, in implementing safeguarding policies and participatory processes. The certificates provided for the training were also appreciated by the participants.

DIVERSITY AND SOLIDARITY

The panellists and the grantee partners selected represented all regions of the country. This not only guaranteed a diversity of representation for the initiative, but it also gave young people the opportunity to interact with youth beyond their immediate circles. It led to the creation of a youth panel that was diverse and representative of the youth of Sierra Leone. It allowed panellists to travel all around the country, visiting projects from different regions and learning more about the realities of other youth. It also offered grantee partners the possibility to get to know projects and groups from all regions and to network and exchange lessons learned with them.

SMALL GRANTS CAN MAKE BIG DREAMS COME TRUE

Grants received by the Tar Kura grantee partners are by any standard very small. However, for young people and their groups, these small grants were life changing because they made dreams come true. It is not because young people have small dreams; quite the contrary. It is because their dreams are about the impact that they can make in their own lives and in their communities. For young people, the value of this experience went far beyond the money they received to implement their work. The true value was in the trust that was placed on them, in having someone else believe that they were capable of making a difference in their communities, in being able to stand in their power and exercise their agency.

SUCCESS IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

A key component of participatory grant-making processes is letting go of adult centric views on success. It becomes crucial to consider what success means to young people and their communities. Both panellists and grantee partners were asked what their biggest success was in this process and their responses correlated with the positive personal and community impact of the process. Securing funding, being able to reach and support vulnerable community members, or supporting others in their empowerment process were some of their identified successes.
CHANGING COMMUNITY IDEAS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF

For young people, fiscal sponsors, and Purposeful staff, the participatory process and the implementation of the different initiatives has had a positive impact on the way that communities perceive young people. Several of their communities have expressed appreciation for their interventions and have valued the role that young people have played in them. Young people have also made significant efforts to engage community members within their work, which has also had a positive impact on their acceptance and recognition. Having young people in positions of leadership and implementing work that has a positive impact on the community, helps in changing the preconceived ideas and stereotypes that other community members have of young people. The fact that young people and their work are being recognized by external actors has made a big difference in changing community members’ perception of their work. Key in this external recognition was the visit that panelists made to the different organizations.

CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Several young people reported that although Purposeful covered their expenses to travel for interviews or trainings—as these expenses were reimbursed after being incurred for them—this posed a difficulty as they did not always have the funds available to cover these costs. In addition, although the process was made as accessible as possible for young people, some still faced challenges in applying. Once they were selected, the panelists who did not have a smartphone were given one; however, in the application process, this posed a barrier for a few of them. Time was also a significant barrier for young people. As mentioned above, young people have a lot going on in their lives, and it is often difficult for them to make time for such initiatives, regardless of how committed they may be to them.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE PROCESS

The Fund hopes that this participatory grant-making initiative is the first of many. With this pilot initiative in Sierra Leone, it hopes to be able to set the stage for future PGM initiatives in other contexts. As such, documenting this process, its challenges, successes, lessons learned, etc. was crucial. In this regard, both The Fund and Purposeful have been keeping detailed records of all internal processes that have taken place as part of this initiative. This report aims to be part of that documenting process.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Alliance of Concerned Sierra Leoneans

AC-SL was established as a Community Based Organisation (CBO) in 2017. It is a charitable, non-political and non-profit making organisation that is legally registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children’s Affairs. Project: To raise awareness on child protection issues, promote women’s empowerment, and to train street children and commercial sex workers entrepreneurship skills in an effort to reduce poverty and stigma in Koidu, Kono District.
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

• Keeping both panellists and grantee partners engaged beyond the initiative is crucial.

• Having open calls for applicants creates expectations for many young people that cannot be met for all. Creating a network of young people in the country and engaging all applicants in it could be a way to address this.

• Future initiatives should maintain capacity building and ongoing support as a vital component. Youth should be engaged in deciding the type of support and capacity building that would most benefit them.

• Capacity building and small seed funding could be provided to support young people who have great ideas but have not yet been able to begin implementing them in launching their projects.

• Provide feedback to those groups not selected for funding, and include the reasons that they were not chosen and recommendations on how to improve for future grant-making processes.

• Further efforts to disseminate the calls for applications should be balanced against the fact that there are limited resources and not wanting to create expectations that cannot be met.

• Consider including further gender sensitization training as part of the training and capacity building offered to youth panellists, grantee partners, and fiscal sponsors.

• Connect both grantee partners and applicants with other funders and support them in applying for other sources of funding.

• Make sure young people understand the importance of being reachable as much as possible so that they may remain further engaged in future opportunities.

• Encourage and support groups to have a social media presence if that is possible and safe for them. This will give visibility to their work and allow funders and partners to get in touch with them.

• Promote exchanges between youth-led groups beyond the life of the grant-making cycle to ensure ongoing learning and network building.

“Having young people in positions of leadership and implementing work that has a positive impact on the community, helps in changing the preconceived ideas and stereotypes that other community members have of young people.”
2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS (THE FUND)

The Fund for Global Human Rights (The Fund) is an international grant-making organization that supports frontline activists working to secure basic freedoms and challenge human rights abuses. The Fund focuses on advancing community-driven and grassroots initiatives through financial and strategic support, enabling the people most affected by human rights abuses to develop their own solutions. By offering skill-building resources, a strong network of allies, and long-term flexible funding, The Fund seeks to build stronger, more sustainable human rights movements around the world. In Sierra Leone, The Fund works with local organizations and communities to develop greater respect for the rights of children and youth, safeguard freedoms of association and assembly, and protect communities from environmental and human rights abuses caused by land grabbing and natural resource exploitation.

ABOUT PURPOSEFUL

Purposeful is an Africa-rooted global hub for girls’ activism. For millennia, girls have played a critical role in struggles for freedom and liberation. From Africa’s anti-colonial movements to the Arab Spring to climate justice organizing and everything in between, their resistance has always sparked and sustained transformational change. And yet, too often girls are separated and sidelined from resources and shut out from decision-making spaces; their power is deliberately obscured and hidden from view. Centring on the political power of girl activists, all of Purposeful’s work goes through a power-building lens: redistributing power assets, building collective power, organizing power holders, and transforming power structures. Through that approach, Purposeful ensures that girls and their allies have access to the resources,

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Poeman Investment

Founded in 2015 under the motto “Breaking the chain of poverty”. In 2017 it registered with the youth Council in Koinadugu and also the Ministry of Agriculture because they wanted to make agriculture their first venture. They realized how difficult it was for youths to have access to capital to finance brilliant start up ideas. They also realized some community problems can be solved through innovation and entrepreneurship. Project: To provide training to youth on converting community waste into briquette charcoal, helping to decrease the rate of deforestation in their communities whilst also creating employment opportunities.
networks, and platforms they need to power their activism and remake the world. The result is that girls live in safety, dignity and freedom, and the world is transformed.

ABOUT IWORDS GLOBAL

IWORDS Global is a social entrepreneurship with years of experience in human rights, development, and sustainability. The organisation seeks to strengthen civil society organisations, multilateral agencies, movements, networks, and social responsibility efforts, and support them in their work in reaching the most vulnerable populations.

Providing a range of services with strategic planning, specialized translations, fundraising, report and proposal writing, e-content development, and design creation, IWORDS Global has collaborated with many international, regional, and local organisations in over 120 countries across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East.

BACKGROUND OF THE INITIATIVE AND EVALUATION

The Fund has been on the ground in Sierra Leone since its inception in 2003, and currently partners with seventeen organisations there. The Fund’s Children and Youth Rights Program (CYP) provides grants to community-based and youth-led groups working to protect children from violence (including trafficking, serving as soldiers, and sexual abuse) and to ensure their access to quality healthcare and education. Through this programme, The Fund aims to foster new alliances within and beyond the children’s rights sector, support youth leadership, increase investment in girl-led organisations, provide technical assistance to grantee organisations to build second-line leadership, and support new ideas and innovation.

The Fund and Purposeful partnered together to co-design and pilot ‘Tar Kura’, a participatory grant-making initiative in Sierra Leone. Tar Kura means ‘new fire’ in Koranko, Kono, and Madingo.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Network for Advocacy and Youth Empowerment

The group was established in 2015. It is a youth and child focused group, supporting youth through farming for cash. Members of the group realized that youth, especially in rural areas lack entrepreneur skills. Therefore, it became key to help them become productive and self-reliant on a sustainable basis. Project: Train vulnerable youth in Kambia District to earn income by farming sorghum—a highly drought resistant and nutrient dense crop—in an effort to combat the high rate of youth unemployment in the district.
three of the local languages of Sierra Leone. This is the fire that the initiative aims to ignite in children and young people by placing them at the centre of children's rights grant-making, programme implementation, and learning. In the past two years, Purposeful and The Fund have worked closely together to analyse how to meaningfully include girls and youth in designing and running a participatory fund. The collaboration also involved better understanding the needs, realities, and challenges of youth-led activism in Sierra Leone.

To strengthen the learning from ‘Tar Kura’, The Fund for Global Human Rights commissioned IWORDS Global to carry out a participatory evaluation of the initiative in Sierra Leone. This report captures the results from said evaluation and aims to shed light on the process; it also documents its achievements and lessons learned.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION**

The objective of the evaluation process was to assess and learn from both the process of participatory grant-making as well as its impact at the individual, organisational, and community level focusing on the following outcomes:

- Increased youth participation, agency, and leadership.
- Improved effectiveness of grant-making strategies and approach, which leads to better outcomes for children and young people.
- Reinvigorated children and youth rights movement through youth engagement.

**EVALUATION MATRIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>MAIN QUESTIONS²</th>
<th>TYPE OF ANALYSIS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>To what extent do the members of the youth panel represent the diversity of geographies, interests, and child/youth experiences that we want to reach through this grant strategy?</td>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative</td>
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<td>How did the experience of serving on this panel change the panelists in terms of a) their confidence and leadership abilities; b) their relationships as a panel; c) their perspectives on issues facing youth (i.e. Does it broaden their appreciation of the range of issues and strategies?); and d) fostering solidarity among children and youth across the participating communities/provinces?</td>
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<td>Did the members of the panel feel that they had the authority to make the funding decisions? Did they feel they were prepared to make the decision and properly compensated/recognized for their time and expertise? Did having the responsibility to make these decisions place an undue burden on young people?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>Does the participatory grant-making process fit within the environment in which it is implemented and within the organisation(s)? Does it support the grantees’ mission and vision?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²Evaluation questions, not data collection questions.
## Evaluation of Youth Participatory Grant-Making Pilot Initiative in Sierra Leone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Do the groups selected to receive funding represent the diverse geographies, interests, and issues that are impacting children and youth in Sierra Leone?</td>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative</td>
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<td>Did the structure and process open funding opportunities to groups that would normally be left out of funding streams? If so, how? Did it, intentionally or unintentionally, leave out any group or create any barriers for participation in the process?</td>
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<td>To what extent did the process democratize grant-making by incorporating diverse feedback? Did that feedback influence selection and/or project design?</td>
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<td>What benefits did the groups that received funding accrue beyond financial support? What benefit did the panellists receive? How do both expect that these benefits will impact them beyond the grant-making process?</td>
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<td>What kinds of actions and what change did the grants catalyse? Did it contribute to building solidarity among the young people who participated in the initiative?</td>
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<td>Did fiscal sponsors play the intended role in aiding unregistered groups to have access to financial resources? Was there any undue intervention?</td>
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<td>What was the impact of the participatory process on how the youth see themselves and how others see them? How did it shape how young people see themselves and their work? How did it impact how others in their communities see young people? How did it impact how other youth view them? How did it impact how the community perceives their role and what they are trying to do? Was this positive or negative?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency (including programme design and management)</strong></td>
<td>What did The Fund and Purposeful learn from their collaboration on this initiative? What were some challenges and how were they overcome? Were they properly documented?</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
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<td>What were some gains (shift in power dynamics, level and type of engagement with children and youth, development of youth groups’ competencies in grant-making)? Were they properly documented for future processes? Etc.</td>
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<td>What insights did the two partners gain on managing participatory grant-making with youth?</td>
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<td>What insights did the young people gain on participatory processes and their potential involvement in them?</td>
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<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>How has sustainability been integrated into the design of the grant-making process?</td>
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<td>How has the process been built on successes/lessons learned from previous grant-making initiatives? How is the initiative contributing to sustaining achievements from previous initiatives?</td>
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<td>What elements could be part of a successful exit strategy for the project?</td>
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<td>Does ownership of the process exist among the young people who participated?</td>
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<td>Transferability</td>
<td>How can elements of the participatory grant-making process be transferred to other geographical regions?</td>
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<td>What good practices have been identified? What lessons learned?</td>
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<td>Has the process been appropriately documented to aid in potential replication and transferability?</td>
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<td>What were the challenges faced? How were they addressed? How can they potentially be avoided for replication of the process in the same context or elsewhere?</td>
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<td>Qualitative</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Qualitative and quantitative (analysis of data linked to the specific practice, to assess its potential to become a ‘good practice’)</td>
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SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

Due to the pandemic, the evaluation was adapted into two phases, with this initial phase focusing on evaluating the grant-making process and the first objective of “Increased youth agency, leadership, and participation.” The focus of the evaluation was to identify the appropriate tools and methodology necessary to address the objective and generate evidence around increased youth participation, agency, leadership, improved effectiveness of grant-making strategies and approach leading to better outcomes for children and young people, learning, and insights for The Fund and Purposeful.

The evaluation, much like the grant-making process, aimed to place young people in Sierra Leone at the centre, recognizing the importance of their full engagement and participation in this process. As such, the consultancy team proposed a participatory process through which they incorporated youth as full members of the evaluation team. The original intention was for the external evaluation team to travel to Sierra Leone and work together face to face with the co-evaluators in data collection and analysis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was not possible. Thus, the entire process was conducted remotely, which made the collaboration with the Purposeful team—located in the country—even more important. Without their continued support, this evaluation would not have been possible.

THE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

**Inception**
- Meeting with The Fund and Purposeful
- Review of documentation/desk review
- Refine methodology
- Inception Report

**Recruitment of co-evaluators**
- Selection of co-evaluators with support from the Purposeful team
- Capacity-building

**Data collection**
- Review and finalize methodology
- Implement methodologies
- Finalize desk review

**Data analysis**
- Data triangulation
- Data validation

**Final report**
- Draft final report
- Review of report by The Fund and Purposeful
- Address comments
- Draft summary
- Draft youth-friendly dissemination material
ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPATORY GRANT-MAKING PROCESS

Participatory grant-making can be defined as one way to address power imbalances that often arise in conventional funding practices. Instead of external donors or expert panels making decisions about who gets funded, the power and responsibility are shifted to members of the target constituency itself who are experts in their own communities, bringing in-depth knowledge, personal experience, and valuable insights to the process. Not only does participatory grant-making disrupt the notion of the ‘passive beneficiary,’ but it encourages a culture of peer-to-peer accountability for funding decisions made. Therefore, genuine participation moves beyond community consultation to full ownership. This evaluation included youth co-evaluators who received training and orientation and participated as full members of the evaluation team. This aims to provide a true reflection of the inclusive process taken to allocate the grants.

PARTICIPATORY MODEL

In consultation with The Fund and Purposeful, the IWORDS Global team adopted a Participatory Evaluation Model. In this case, a group of four young women joined the IWORDS Global evaluation team as co-evaluators and full members.

The pre-selection of the young women was done by Purposeful from the pool of young people who had applied for the role of panellists for the Tar Kura initiative. Although holding an open call for applications for the roles of co-evaluator was originally discussed, the collective finally decided against this approach to avoid generating expectations for a large number of young people when only a few could be selected to participate. For that reason, Purposeful pre-selected a few of the applicants who had not been chosen as panellists and reached out to them directly to assess their interest and availability. Attempts were made to ensure maximum representation from the different regions in Sierra Leone to ensure diversity; however, there were challenges in reaching some of the young people, and some of them did not have the availability to participate in the process. As a result, all co-evaluators selected were based in Freetown.

To avoid adding barriers to the participation of young people in the evaluation process, previous experience in research or evaluation was not required of co-evaluators. IWORDS provided extensive training and support to the young women selected so that they could meaningfully participate in the evaluation team and in the implementation of the process. In addition, and to ensure a lack of accessibility did not further prevent any of them from participating, co-evaluators that needed them were provided with phones with internet access. Also, they all received recording devices, and they were provided with data and airtime credit for effective participation in the data collection process with support and co-ordination from Purposeful. In recognition of their work, the co-evaluators were paid a stipend of US$150 at the end of the evaluation.

As part of their engagement, co-evaluators did the following:

- Participated in the revision and adaptation of the evaluation methodology.
- Co-designed the data collection tools.
- Supported the implementation of all data collection methods.
- Assisted in the coordination of stakeholders.
- Acted as a key resource to support the external evaluation team with fact and context checking.
- Took part in briefing and debriefing sessions with the consultants.
3. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION PROCEDURE

The IWORDS Global approach to evaluations is learning-oriented, adapted to the local circumstances, target population-led/guided, and focused on outcomes from a comprehensive perspective. Our participatory methods are employed with the focus of obtaining information that varies depending on several factors, including evaluation criteria and questions; time availability; context and cultural characteristics of the communities; age; sex/gender; and literacy level of informants, among others.

This evaluation sought to assess the process of participatory grant-making, and its influence at the individual, organisational, and community level and by identifying, evaluating, and reporting on the short-term outcomes acknowledged in the working learning and assessment plan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, some of the funded projects were rearticulated or extended with additional funding provided to grantees; this evaluation does not include the final results and impact of said projects on the individual and communities. The evaluation centred on the participatory grant-making process up to its current stage, and also aimed to assess the documentation and systematization processes in place. The evaluation team also took the opportunity to reflect on the capacity of the model to react to emerging situations such as the ongoing pandemic. We hope that this evaluation report will enable The Fund and Purposeful to identify and understand the changes observed and the main impact thus far on the youth selected to receive the grant and those involved in the process.

MAXIMIZING RIGOUR, WITHOUT COMPROMISING RELEVANCE/EXECUTING WITH PURPOSE

This principle was adopted through:

Data collection and management
To maximize rigour, all interactions for key interviews and survey responses were recorded with prior consent from informants. Data collected was transcribed and stored securely. The transcriptions involved narrow conversational transcription which captured the details of conversational interaction, including which particular words are stressed, which words were spoken with increased loudness, and how specific words were articulated.

Data triangulation
During the data analysis process for the drafting of the report, the evaluation team analysed the consistency of the data generated by different data collection methods. When data was not consistent, or there is contradictory information, the evaluation team tried to clarify via email/phone with those involved in the coordination of the initiative. If, after the consultation process, there was still inconsistent/contradictory information, it was highlighted in this report. Likewise, the evaluation team determined the consistency of the data from the same data collection method (for example, comparing the findings of the semi-structured interviews).
Team preparation/debriefings
Members of the IWORDS Global evaluation team participated in an online preparatory meeting to share the methodology and implementation of data collection tools, as well as potential challenges that could affect the quality of the data. Likewise, a closing meeting was held after the data collection was completed.

PROTECTION OF ALL PARTIES INVOLVED
This principle was put into practice through:

Consent
Verbal consent was secured for participation in all data collection methods, and co-evaluators were trained on child protection and safeguarding policies in case of interviewing minors.

Recordings/data collected
The evaluation team used the IWORDS Global institutional folder to collect all the information concerning the evaluation. Only authorized personnel from IWORDS Global have access to this Drive, to guarantee confidentiality. Three months after the final materials from the evaluation are submitted, all information will be destroyed/eliminated.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Desk review
Identification and review of relevant documentation from the initiative, including activity reports, MEL tools, technical documentation reports, and donor reports, among other documentation available. See Annex 2 for the documents that were gathered and analysed.

Experience diary
This utilized art and creative methods such as images, art, or writing that motivated the youth panellists to express their views and experience. They expressed they felt more comfortable with a less formal methodology. Guiding questions were provided and panellists were encouraged to use them as points of reflection and to react to them freely in thinking about their engagement with the panel and the process overall. A total of six youth panellists were able to participate and complete the journal.

In-depth interviews of key informants
This involved collecting relevant information from implementing partners, relevant local stakeholders, representatives of related institutions, and young people. Data was collected from ten granteepartner organisations, nine youth panellists, three Purposeful staff, three staff from The Fund, and two fiscal sponsors. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp, or other online platforms.

Survey
The survey aimed to reach a larger number of young people and their organisations than would be possible through other methodologies. The goal was to obtain information on the experiences of young people with the grant-making process. Given the limitations regarding internet access within the local context, the surveys were conducted by the co-evaluators on the phone.
Two surveys were held; one for youth who had applied to be panellists but were not selected and another one for organisations that applied for funding but were not awarded the grant. Twenty-six youth and four organisations were reached through these telephone surveys.
Creative Focus Group Discussions
Focus groups were originally planned with youth from grantee partner organisations. However, the evaluation team decided not to conduct them so as not to overburden the organisations. They were also cancelled due to the logistical difficulties of holding them online—since the COVID-19 pandemic and the rainy season in Sierra Leone made travel impossible—. Therefore, the team focused on the other methodologies to gather the information.

LINKAGES BETWEEN THIS EXTERNAL PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION AND OTHER MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL) PROCESSES

The external evaluation team was aware that the evaluation was not the only MEL process that would happen within the framework of the grant-making process; namely, the internal MEL framework and an evaluation of the children’s and youth initiatives funded through the participatory grant-making process. One of the main principles that was agreed upon for the aforementioned processes is the imperative to coordinate efforts whenever possible to ensure there was no unnecessary burdening of youth and their groups and organisations nor duplication of efforts. Based on conversations held, the external evaluation raised the following points, which were further discussed and considered jointly with the The Fund and Purposeful teams and the Learning and Evaluation Consultant at Purposeful:

- Capacity building was provided to panellists and co-evaluators, including materials developed, the training manual, information pack, and COVID-19 safety tips document.

- Data collection avoided duplicating efforts and overburdening youth and their organisations.

- Aspects to be covered by each evaluation (recognizing that this external evaluation could not assess the full grant-making process as it had not yet ended).

- Potential compensation for co-evaluators.

- Challenges which arose from the inability to travel at that moment, especially in the data collection process.

COVID-19 AND COLLECTIVE CARE ACTION

The team was mindful of the emotional, psychological, and physical strain that the COVID-19 pandemic could have on young people in Sierra Leone, in particular given the recent experience of the country with the Ebola outbreak. Thus, the team promoted a

"... the team promoted a collective care approach throughout the entire evaluation, while also prioritizing the holistic/overall well-being of the youth co-evaluators and everyone else engaged through the data collection methodologies."
collective care approach throughout the entire evaluation, while also prioritizing the holistic/overall well-being of the youth co-evaluators and everyone else engaged through the data collection methodologies.

As part of the capacity building provided to co-evaluators, a collective care component was included to familiarize them with the concept and to ensure that it remained an integral part of the interaction. All interactions promoted opportunities for them to express and communicate concerns and be able to seek support from the group. Purposeful was also consulted and the evaluation team checked in with them regularly to remain up to date on the evolution of the pandemic and consider how it could affect the co-evaluators.

**LIMITATIONS**

**Irregularities in Internet connectivity:** with the data collection process being entirely virtual, the research team experienced serious difficulties with internet connectivity considering that it can be very unreliable, especially during the rainy season. Consequently, many meetings and interviews had to be rescheduled several times. These difficulties also affected co-evaluators and the training calls the evaluation team had with them. In this case, calls were also rescheduled as needed.

**Academic Exams:** the youth panellists and the co-evaluators had academic exams at different intervals, which limited their availability to participate in the data collection process. Some, for example, were unable to fill out the creative experience diary due to exams and school projects. Co-evaluators also struggled to conduct surveys and interviews on time. The external evaluation team did its best to exercise flexibility and offer support as needed.

**Weather:** the heavy rains also affected the evaluation plans of holding face to face focus group discussions with youth panellists; these were to be conducted by the co-evaluators who had already received adequate training. However, as safe travel conditions could not be guaranteed—and following the recommendations of the Purposeful team—co-evaluators or youth panellists were not asked to travel. All data collection was conducted online.

**Criteria for the recruitment of co-evaluators:** as previously explained, no open call was conducted to recruit co-evaluators for this process. They were selected from the pool of applicants for the role of panellists. Though Purposeful reached out to potential co-evaluators to assess their interest and availability for this process, it is possible that some of them might have felt somewhat pressured to say yes despite not being totally motivated. Throughout the implementation of the evaluation, not all of the co-evaluators were equally motivated and, as deadlines had to be pushed back given their limited availability and connection difficulties, it became hard for them to remain fully engaged. The evaluation team made extra efforts to remain available and flexible and provide extra support for the co-evaluators as needed. However, it was quite difficult to ensure that they were able to complete their assigned tasks. The team fears that the process might, at times, have become a burden for them rather than a learning experience.

For future initiatives, the team recommends conducting a recruitment process, even if a limited one without an open call; it should at least involve asking young people for a short motivation letter and conducting interviews. This would ensure that youth are really motivated with the process and that they fully understand what it requires of them so they can freely decide if they are interested and able to participate. Nonetheless, the co-evaluators did an amazing job, and their time and efforts are recognized and appreciated by the evaluation team.

**Technological difficulties:** many of the young people living in rural areas of Sierra Leone were not comfortable or familiar with virtual conference apps such as Zoom and Skype. As a result, co-evaluators were encouraged to use WhatsApp—a platform with which youth are much more familiar—and a telephone as needed. The consultancy team offered support and guidance to co-evaluators as needed throughout the process.
Changes in the evaluation timeline: the co-evaluators juggled unpaid care work, school, and community management roles together with data collection. This made it difficult for them to deliver on the agreed upon deadlines and some were partially unable to deliver or complete some of their work.

Unavailability of potential participants: potential participants, especially applicants who had not been selected as panellists and grantee partners, were extremely difficult to reach. Telephone numbers that Purposeful had on record were disconnected or never picked up. Some did not wish to participate in the process and others expressed initial interest in the process but then failed to make themselves available at the agreed upon time. The team made an extra effort to reach out to them by sending reminders and following up numerous times. Over six hundred young people applied to be panellists and ninety-one were shortlisted and reached out to for this evaluation. Of those ninety-one, twenty-six were reached through the telephone survey. More than one hundred and thirty organisations applied for grants and twenty-two of those were short listed and not selected. Of those, four were reached through the telephone survey. Meanwhile, of four fiscal sponsors engaged through the initiative, two were able to be reached and interviewed.

COVID-19 Pandemic: given that the evaluation team was not able to travel to Sierra Leone to conduct the data collection process and provide support to the co-evaluators as was originally planned, a new evaluation plan had to be drafted with adjustments based on the new restrictions.

Challenges with time difference: because several panellists and the co-evaluators had to attend classes during the day, in most cases, they were not available for calls until after their school hours late in the evening. Considering the time difference between Sierra Leone and the countries where the external team was based, this meant adjusting the working hours of the global evaluation team and offering extreme flexibility to be available very late into the night.

Community engagement: the evaluation process faced significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to travel of the evaluators to Sierra Leone, of the co-evaluators to the communities, and of community members to Freetown. With limited access to the internet and online tools such as Skype or Zoom, most of the process had to be conducted via WhatsApp and telephone. The evaluation was adapted to these challenges, but it unfortunately severely limited data collection among members of the communities where grantee partners are based. With the inability to travel to the communities, and the very limited internet access available in most communities, and the additional efforts required to collect data, the engagement of communities was not viable. Efforts were made by the team but unfortunately, it was not possible to further engage community members. Their perspectives are captured in this report through the reflections of others engaged, namely panellists, grantees, fiscal sponsors, and Purposeful staff. However, the evaluation team recommends making additional efforts during the second phase of this evaluation to engage community members and gain their perspectives directly.
4. FINDINGS

Overall, the feedback from all stakeholders involved in this participatory grant-making initiative was extremely positive. Based on the findings of this evaluation, both Purposeful and The Fund made a conscientious and continuous effort to implement a fully participatory process that placed youth at the centre. The Tar Kura initiative was a true exercise in power sharing at all levels, and its reported impact is clear at the individual, collective, and community levels. With this initiative, The Fund took a brave step forward in rethinking their grant-making practices to increase the engagement of those they aim to serve; it is our sincere hope that Tar Kura is one of many steps in that direction both for The Fund as well as for other actors within the philanthropic field that aim to support young people and their initiatives.

A PARTNERSHIP BASED ON COMMON VALUES

‘Leaving everything in [young people’s] hands and giving them the power to make decisions about change in their communities I believe is the best thing, and that is what Purposeful believes in and that is the reason why The Fund for Global Human Rights partnered with Purposeful to pilot this [initiative].’ – Purposeful staff

The Fund for Global Human Rights has always sought to practise participative philanthropy and engage communities they aim to serve in their decision-making. However, with this initiative they wanted to completely move decision-making to the local level. Informed by what young people told them, in late 2018 they started developing the concept of a fully participatory grant-making model centred on young people in Sierra Leone.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Girls Behind the Lens

In 2017, four young women joined an apprenticeship program at Envisage Concept to learn photography, graphic design and video production. They had no doubt that they were naturally talented and that they could thrive in this industry and make money, and so they enrolled into university. They engaged on a year-long practical training and mastered the art of photography and photo editing. Their idea is to start an all-girls photography company that could facilitate training of girls who are interested in learning photography, provide employment to female photographers, and help them make their own money. Project: Train girls and young women in photography and organize photo exhibitions at schools across Sierra Leone in an effort to inspire girls and young women to express themselves through art and promote greater gender equity in a male-dominated industry.
They quickly identified the need to have a local partner. On the one hand, because of aspects such as the logistics of coordinating with young people and being able to move the funds as efficiently to the ground as possible. On the other hand, because it was apparent that a key component in a process that aimed to redistribute power and place children and youth at the centre required a partner with the local credibility and knowledge to be able to reach young people and identify the specific challenges they could face in participating. The Fund wanted much more than a mere operating partner; they wanted true partnership based on common values.

Despite never having formally collaborated before, Purposeful and The Fund came together and jointly developed and implemented this initiative. It is crucial to highlight that both expressed that they saw this as a partnership of equals, regardless of which one had the financial resources, and that both acted accordingly throughout the process. The initiative was crafted jointly and, although The Fund was the main source of funding for the grant-making, Purposeful also contributed their own resources, which demonstrated their commitment to the work. The Fund consciously wanted to step away from the traditional donor-grantee relationship and sought for Purposeful to be much more than just a logistics partner but a true co-creator and co-implementer of the initiative.

‘They [Purposeful] didn’t only come in as implementing partner, far from it. They really challenged a lot of the initial thinking. They developed a plan from scratch where they pushed us, challenged what we were thinking and transformed that thinking. They were not just logistics partners, they were really co-creators.’ – The Fund

Both Purposeful and The Fund strategically chose to partner with one another. They believed that they had common values that would allow them to successfully work together. Within both institutions, there was collective buy-in of the initiative, of putting youth at the centre, and rebalancing power. They each sought to prioritize young people, especially young women, on their own terms and they felt the other one ‘got it’. Their shared feminist approach made them ideal partners.

One of the key factors of success for this initiative was the credibility that Purposeful has within Sierra Leone and its relationships in the communities. Being an organisation that is rooted in the local realities was crucial in the recruitment of participants, as it allowed them to disseminate the open calls for applicants among its wide networks, and their reputation among youth generated a high level of interest. Several youth who participated in this evaluation stated that the fact that Purposeful was involved was one of the reasons they chose to apply for the opportunity.
GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Mirror Africa

Mirror Africa was founded in Sierra Leone in 2016 by a group of young Sierra Leonean women and adolescents to fight gender-based violence and promote economic empowerment of girls and young women. We young ladies took up the challenge because we have been victims/survivors of different forms of GBV and economic exclusion and have not been given a platform to raise our voice against these odds. Most survivors of GBV are often marginalized and blamed for their situation instead of helping them to access justice and be given psychological and socio-economic support to overcome their difficulties. Project: To reduce rates of sexual violence in primary schools by identifying and providing training and coaching to teachers to be sexual education facilitators, developing child friendly reading materials on sexual violence, and training girl students to work with sexual education facilitators raise awareness around sexual violence protection through theater.

REBALANCING POWER THROUGHOUT

‘Here with this [initiative] they don’t impose on us what to do because it’s like we first agree with them and then do something … we do what we agree upon not what they want us to do.’ – Purposeful Staff

Any form of participatory grant-making is a recognition of the unequal power relationships inherently present in philanthropy and a conscious effort to rebalance said power. The unequal relationships present in any form of philanthropy are numerous and extend far beyond The Funder-grantee relationship. They permeate the internal relationships within institutions, as well as relationships with partners and with the community. This participatory grant-making process was able to truly question said relationships and worked to rebalance them.

First, as previously mentioned, the relationship between The Fund and Purposeful is one that has been described by staff from both organisations as a partnership based on respect and mutual accountability. The initiative was co-created by both institutions with The Fund recognizing the expertise and immense value of Purposeful in their strong local presence. Decisions were made jointly and collaboratively without The Fund exercising undue power over Purposeful. In fact, Purposeful—in their role as the local expert—questioned a lot of the initial thinking of The Fund around this initiative and were crucial in its design and implementation.

The relationship, like any relationship, certainly faced some challenges. Purposeful is a new but quickly growing organisation that is involved in several initiatives, which puts pressure on their staff and sometimes stretches them thin. At times, this makes it hard for them to meet tight deadlines. It is the reality of growing
organisations. With a new process that was being defined and adapted as it progressed, both The Fund and Purposeful had to show a high degree of flexibility and adaptability.

Both institutions co-designed the initiative together. Although Purposeful was in charge of its coordination in Sierra Leone and it most directly supported the young people, The Fund was engaged throughout the process, providing support, sharing lessons learned, and working to address challenges together. A working group was established with Purposeful and Fund staff and met on a regular basis to coordinate and plan together. Members of the working group all had access to a shared folder where they could upload and access all documents pertaining to the initiative. This ongoing and open communication and interaction was key to their successful partnership.

The participatory grant-making process also heavily questioned and rebalanced the power relationships between The Fund, Purposeful, and the young people who were selected as panellists. First, it is worth noting that the selection process included representatives from other youth organisations in Sierra Leone. Thus, young people were included from the beginning to ensure their perspectives were guiding the process and its outcomes. Once the panellists were selected, they decided the selection criteria and other aspects of the grant-making process. Both Purposeful and The Fund sought to place youth at the centre from the beginning and placed the decision-making in their hands.

It is important to highlight that although the decisions were left to the panellists, this in no way means that they were doing so without support. Purposeful and The Fund recognized the importance of providing them with capacity building to ensure that they were equipped and comfortable making decisions and leading the process. Often, organisations make the mistake of assuming that because young people have the capacity to do something, it means that they do not need the support of adults. In many ways, this sets them up for failure. Capacity and practical knowledge or skills are two different things. Actors that aim to support young people and their initiatives must be prepared to provide full, comprehensive support that truly allows young people to meaningfully participate and engage. In this case, the support extended beyond the capacity building provided at the beginning of the process (more so than at later stages) and remained constant throughout the entire process.

In addition to deciding the selection criteria, panellists also made the final decisions on the organisations that would receive the funding, which further rebalanced power towards young people. Also, the confidence and self-worth that were instilled in the youth panellists led them to become aware of the importance of doing the same for others, especially young people. It allowed them to better recognize the potential that young people have and how much their positive impact in their communities increases if they are trusted and believed in.

‘One of the [ways] is that it draws us back to see that to decide is not a one-time thing. [It] requires [a] combination of ideas [and to] then take a particular decision... before we wrote the project, we were able to sit three of us [and] we decided on what to go ahead with, leaving the other [person out]; but when we received this Grant we were able to know that it’s wiser to be participatory, for all of us to bring ideas and we put [our ideas] together and we keep going together. So, this is one thing that we were able to learn.’ – Grantee partner
An important aspect worth highlighting is that most of the Tar Kura grantee partners expressed that they had conducted participatory processes when developing their application (to varying degrees). Evidence indicates that youth do not necessarily organize as adults do. They show less hierarchical and more participatory models of organizing than traditional adult models, especially in the early stages of organizing. For most of the grantee partners, this was the first time that they received external funding, many had not even applied for funding before. As such, many of them came together as a group to develop their proposals.

As a result of their experiences with the Tar Kura participatory grant-making initiative and the capacity building and networking opportunities that they were offered, the youth-led organisations gained a greater appreciation for the importance and value of rebalancing the power within their own organisations. This led to more inclusive and participatory processes within grantee partner organisations and around decisions concerning their work within the Tar Kura initiative. For the grantee partners, it was also very significant to see that other young people would be making decisions about who would receive the funding; it reassured them that other youth would better understand the challenges they faced and the importance of their work.

‘We got training... [on] how to deal with people we call the beneficiaries. And I was so excited during the training when they said we shouldn’t be calling the people we support beneficiaries but rather participants then I say wow... then they said because these people also play a role in the development of whatever we are doing as an organisation so since then whenever am preparing documents for Purposeful or The Fund for Global Human Rights I use the word participants not beneficiaries.’ – Grantee partner

The rebalancing of power in this initiative was based on something crucial: trust. The Fund trusted Purposeful and their expertise both with the local context as well as in working with young people. Purposeful felt trusted and, thus, were able to participate as an equal partner, sharing concerns, challenges, and lessons learned. Both institutions trusted young people and their capacities and fostered an environment where they felt comfortable participating and making decisions while simultaneously supporting them on their own terms. A key manifestation of this trust was the fact that they chose to provide core, flexible funding. Providing unrestricted funding made it evident to young people that the institutions

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Pekin to Pekin

Pekin to Pekin talk for Human Rights and National Development is a children’s movement that aims at the protecting and promoting the rights of children; and, to make sure that children are included in the decision-making process, their views are respected and that there is a fair representation of children in the implementation process. Project: To conduct a district-wide school tour of Bombali to educate students on their rights and to train students to form school-based youth groups to promote children’s rights as well as to provide free summer school programs to youth in their community.
trusted their judgement and believed they were best equipped to make decisions about how best to spend the money granted.

The interviews and reflection diaries showed that young people who participated in the initiative felt trusted. They expressed that this increased their self-esteem, improved their perception of themselves and their work, and led them to also recognize the importance of trusting those they aimed to support. For panellists, it was an empowering experience to be selected by Purposeful and The Fund and to be trusted to make decisions on who would receive support. For grantee partners, being chosen by their peers gave validation and recognition to themselves and their work.

Youth and Purposeful staff interviewed also expressed that, in seeing trust placed on young people, they felt that communities shifted their perceptions of them, and were more willing to support their work and recognize their capacities and potential.

“Yes, because like when we have an activity that [involves] children below 18 I won’t [recommend] myself, I will give a chance to those who are below 18 years. Actually, I learnt that if you want to target youth you should use youth to target them and if you want to target children then you should use children to target them too.” — Grantee partner

But did this trust placed on young people translate into them feeling like they had the power to make decisions? Based on the testimonies of panellists interviewed, it did. Not only did they feel that they had the power to make decisions that impacted the process and the work of other young people, but they felt very comfortable making those decisions overall. The comprehensive approach of the process, which provided them with capacity building and ongoing support from Purposeful staff, made them feel equipped and capable to lead the process and make decisions. When asked specifically during the interviews how they felt about the decisions they were asked to make and probed on whether they felt pressured or overburdened, none of the panellists expressed having felt overburdened with the process. They were excited by the opportunity and felt empowered to lead the decision-making process.

“I really felt good because I was so happy getting to choose which organisation received funding, I was so happy because I had never done that before and [I am] proud of myself.” — Panellist

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Forum for Community Development

The formation of Forum for Community Development in 2016 was inspired by the need to make youth feel they have a place in society. It has helped offer several alternative means of livelihood by promoting technical and vocational disciplines through its own educational initiatives as well as by supporting formal education. Project: To establish a resource center and train 600 high school students---many of whom have never touched a computer---to use software like Word, Excel, and PowerPoint to increase computer literacy in Kono District.
‘Yeah! Imagine me [being] a young girl making decisions about my colleagues, youths who are even older than I [am], just to decide who should receive funds. So, I really felt very proud of myself.’ – Panellist

‘They gave us all the space to do the work. We did everything. They were only there to guide us but they were not overseeing the process and it was amazing. I’ve never gotten such opportunity.’ – Panellist

‘I feel so big of myself, I as a young girl choosing organisations that would receive funding. I feel proud of myself.’ – Panellist

‘It felt very empowering for the fact that you are in a position where you can make a change and of course we are making a change.’ – Panellist

AN APPLICATION PROCESS RESPONSIVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE’S REALITIES

Funders and actors that wish to truly support youth and their initiatives must first recognize the adult centrism that is inherent in our society and consequently in traditional philanthropy. The field has been developed from an adult centred perspective where, if youth want to participate, they need to adapt to fit in, to be respected, and to be taken seriously. The adult gaze is taken as the default, much like the male gaze is the default perspective in our society. Being able to reach and fully engage and support young people necessarily requires a conscious attempt at recognizing, and actively dismantling said adult centrism.

This initiative created a process that was responsive to young people and their realities. It recognized that it was unrealistic to expect to reach and support young people with the same strategies used to reach adults and other groups. Tar Kura was a fully responsive and adaptive initiative that aimed to reach, engage, and support young people on their own terms. From beginning to end, efforts were made to create an initiative that adapted and responded to the realities of young people in Sierra Leone instead of expecting young people to adapt to it. For example, the process took into consideration the time availability of most young people and aimed to plan around the school calendar. Likewise, recognizing that not all young people have regular and reliable access to a smartphone, phones were made available for the panellists that needed them.

When reaching out to youth with the open call for panellists and for proposals, the initiative used several strategies that responded to the realities of young people. Purposeful developed jingles in English and Krio (the lingua franca) that were aired on the radio. Advertisements on social media were also used, and Flyers were printed and widely distributed. Word of mouth also played a key role in disseminating the opportunities, which were widely shared through WhatsApp. Several young people heard about the opportunity from mentors and other organisations that they have collaborated with.
In addition to a link to the Purposeful website, soft copies of the applications were also shared through WhatsApp. Youth that were interested could submit the application online, hand-deliver it at the Purposeful office, or send it through WhatsApp, even using voice notes or videos if they preferred not to write. A guide on how to complete the application for those youth who had no prior experience was also shared. Applicants could also request support from the Tar Kura team in preparing their application.

Several of the young people interviewed as part of this evaluation – including panellists and grantee partners – reported that one, or the main reason they decided to apply for this opportunity was that someone had encouraged them to do it, especially adults. Mentors, family members, or former partners from other organisations shared the opportunity with them and encouraged them to apply because they believed in them; in some cases, they even provided practical support in the process.

Generally, youth are told by society, their communities, and their families that they do not have the skills or experience necessary to do what they want, to make their dreams come true. Sadly, but understandably, this regularly leads them to doubt themselves. Having that support and encouragement is crucial for young people, as it was in this process.

The requirements to apply for funding were also mindful of the realities of youth organizing. There was no requirement that the groups had to be legally registered, often a barrier for small youth-led community groups to access external funding. If they were not registered, they could work with a fiscal sponsor. They did not have to demonstrate past success, impact, or track record either; this is often another barrier for young people in accessing funding. They just had to be youth-led and show that they were working for change in their respective community.

‘But this [initiative] is different because they are sponsoring young people with no recommendation; in other words young people with no track records, that [is] the difference and also they give young people without track record an opportunity for them to improve themselves. So that [is] the difference because other [funders] look for people with track records but this is different from them.’ – Fiscal sponsor

Including youth at all stages made it easier and more accessible to other youth who wanted to participate. When asked about the process, they described it as friendly and stated that they felt comfortable throughout. The methodologies used during the capacity building sessions, as well as the topics included, were also responsive to the realities of young people and further made them feel welcomed and at ease.

‘Actually, we didn’t face any challenge, the process was so nice because it was youth…after the application they sent us a message that we have been short listed for the interview and the people who were going to interview us were all youth both girls and boys, so it was so friendly. Though we had a lot of expectations because [it was by Purposeful]. So I was well aware that the process wasn’t going to be all that easy since there was a lot of competition.’ – Panellist

For many young people, this was their first encounter with grant-making. As a result, most of them were not able to
comprehensively compare how this process measured up to traditional grant-making. What they do understand very clearly is that traditional grant-making excludes them not only from participating in decision-making but also in accessing funds. Several of them had applied in the past for funding but only one or two had ever received any kind of institutional support. Being able to apply without being registered, or without having a demonstrated track record, a physical office space, or hired staff, already broke down many of the barriers that young people regularly encounter in accessing funding.

“It was fun. The individual that was doing the interview was accommodative and I really felt loved.” – Panellist

The fact that young people were leading the process and in charge of decision-making certainly also made the process more accessible to youth organisations. It also reassured them that they could potentially receive funding.

“The traditional process is so archaic but this participatory [process] is just excellent because [as] young people, we know our problems, we know the challenges we face in our community. So they gave us [a] chance to decide and implement our ideas and also make decisions. Seriously, participatory grant-making process is the best and I think they should continue and involve all youth.” – Grantee partner

Finally, the flexibility and adaptability demonstrated by The Fund, Purposeful, and the initiative as a whole was crucial in ensuring that the process was responsive to young people and their needs. Throughout the process, Purposeful worked hand-in-hand with young people to adapt the processes and procedures as needed to ensure that they could meaningfully participate and that they felt comfortable and welcomed, while understanding that young people have competing responsibilities that may in fact prevent them from fully engaging at different moments.

Young people have responsibilities at home, in school, at work, in their communities, with their friends, their activism or social justice work, and their hobbies. They maintain active lives, and this sometimes prevents them from fully participating. In addition,

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**GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT**

**CraftyBee Fashion World**

CraftyBee Fashion World, previously known as JSK Designs, is a social enterprise involved in making various fashionable products with the use of African materials such as bags, hats, files, laptop covers and many more. We are also involved in activities like workshops and training programs to equip people, especially youth, in various communities to make these products as well and encourage people to be entrepreneurially minded as this helps improve the lives of people in poor communities. Project: Develop a fashion design school for vulnerable youth that uses African-made materials to make bags and accessories in an effort to create job opportunities and entrepreneurial training for vulnerable youth in Freetown.
they do not always have the freedom to participate in all processes, nor do they necessarily have the support from their families or communities to do so. All of this makes it crucial for interventions involving youth to recognize that flexibility in the work and in how, when, and where it is conducted is necessary to maintain the engagement of young people.

One of the most significant adaptations was regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on young people and their ability to continue with their work as originally planned. Both The Fund and Purposeful not only agreed that deadlines had to be adjusted but also recognized that, perhaps, the original work planned needed to change to respond to an evolving situation. Most importantly, they did so by trusting that young people knew and understood what the needs of their communities were and that they were best equipped to decide how to respond to them.

‘Really a lesson learned is that we can trust these young people and then we get good results.’ – Purposeful staff

**TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

‘Yes, I would say the process was transparent because the criteria that they followed was not difficult for a youth organisation and the template that was provided to write the proposal was so easy.’ – Grantee partner

Young people believed there was transparency and accountability throughout the process both in the selection of panellists as well as in the selection of grantee partners. They also expressed feeling heard and loved. Youth panellists expressed that they felt supported throughout their participation by staff members from The Fund and Purposeful (see Annex I for more information) and grantee partners felt supported by both Purposeful staff and panellists.

‘YES, YES, YES, because they have supported us. For Nyangah [Purposeful Programme Officer], whenever we have difficulties, we call her no matter the time she will be so supportive and also Mr John of The Fund he has also been supportive to us [with] guidance and direction.’ – Grantee partner

‘Purposeful has been there if there is any support [we] need or any kind of advice. From the start, we told them that we are new in this thing and we shall always need their support. Every time we ask them for help, they really help us and they are always ready to answer our questions.’ – Grantee partner

For most grantee partners, this was their first experience in receiving external funding, and very few of them had any experience even applying for funding. Nevertheless, they all agreed that this process was different than what they had experienced or what their ideas about grant-making were based on the experiences of others. One of the groups interviewed said that, in the beginning, they were scared they would not be selected for funding because they did not know any of the panellists or the
people at Purposeful. Additionally, the way traditional funding works in the country is that you can only gain access to it through contacts. A few also mentioned that they were surprised that they did not have to ‘pay’ anyone (i.e. the panellists) to be able to access the funds, as they believed this was a regular practice. In fact, they were taken aback during the visits to their project; the panellists would not accept anything from them (not even a glass of water) because they wanted to make it clear that they could not be bought in any way. Sadly, corruption and mismanagement in traditional grant-making processes by international agencies in Sierra Leone are common,4 and memories of the infamous scandal of sex for food by the UN peacekeepers in the country5 may still be fresh in the minds of young people; thus, this is what they expected from this process.

‘This is something which I am not so sure about, but I have been hearing like for some organisations when they fund you, they will ask for some percentage of money but for Tar Kura is not like that.’ – Grantee partner

‘And interestingly even when we offered them food and then some products, they said no, our work doesn’t allow us to receive anything from you. But I have seen Grant here where people even ask for compensation and even at the end of the day they say when they give you the Grant this is how much you will be offering to us but nothing like that came from the side of the panellists.’ – Grantee partner

SUPPORT THAT GOES BEYOND THE MONEY

Meaningfully reaching and supporting young people and their communities requires much more than making financial resources available to them. Financial support is undoubtedly crucial for young people to realize their projects and initiatives. However, there are other types of support that are just as important for a comprehensive and sustainable impact in the lives of young people.

As previously mentioned, the teams at The Fund and Purposeful provided ongoing support to panellists and grantee partners.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

The Transformational Center for Agricultural Development Organisation - Sierra Leone

The Transformational Center for Agricultural Development Organisation - Sierra Leone, formerly known as The Tural Clan Agricultural Development Organisation - Sierra Leone (TCADO-SL), is a youth-led new top tier community-based organisation located in Kambia District, Northern Province, Sierra Leone. TCADO-SL was established in 2015 by few youths of the Turay Clan (A Royal Empire in Kambia District) to help address the poor standard of youth farmers, poor small scale Farmers, rural communities to tackle the limited involvement of youth in the farming sector and sustain rural small scales farmers. Project: Provide agricultural training to youth farmers, widows, and orphans to increase food security and access to economic opportunities.

4That is the reason that Purposeful has a very strict policy with regards to not accepting any type of gift, no matter how small.
5https://worldpress.org/Africa/509.cfm
throughout the process. This support, of course, included the official institutional financial support for both in the form of stipends (including travel costs for youth panellists) as well as grants for grantee partners, but it also went beyond the money.

Purposeful and The Fund provided them with leadership training and capacity building, and guided them in standing in their power and realizing their full potential. They made themselves available to support young people throughout the application and implementation process. Youth panellists and grantee partners reported that they felt supported at all times by Purposeful. They felt heard, respected, and valued.

It is important to note that after they had gone through their own empowerment processes, panellists also provided support to grantee partners. This was of particular importance to several grantee partners because they felt very comfortable having someone their age—who understood the challenges they faced within their organisations—who was able and willing to support them.

‘We got some help from the youth panellist . . . after the very first meeting that we had most of them became my friends and so whenever I would have some challenges I would just call them and they really help me out . . . It creates room for other opportunities because like whenever I communicate with them when I or they have some application links for opportunities we always do share in our WhatsApp group.’ – Grantee partner

Youth expressed that part of the support that they received from Purposeful (or from panellists in the case of grantee partners) was in the form of other opportunities that were shared with them, including for funding, collaboration, networking, etc.

‘Purposeful has also connected us to different people different NGOs to whom we provide our services. They recommended us which is the most important thing that we need.’ – Grantee partner

The support that was provided to grantee partners also allowed them to strengthen organisationally. The capacity building opportunity as well as the experience working with Purposeful and with other grantee partners and panellists allowed them to better organize and become stronger as an organisation.

‘One of the [supports] we got was from the panellists. It was a way more of a guide throughout the implementation process to build our confidence. Now another thing they formed was a WhatsApp group for all organisations that received the Grant. The panellists could ask us about the challenges that we are facing, and the panellists were always there to guide us through the several stages in the project.’ – Grantee partner

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‘Purposeful has also connected us to different people different NGOs to whom we provide our services. They recommended us which is the most important thing that we need.’ – Grantee partner
FISCAL SPONSORS, PATERNALISTIC INTERMEDIARIES OR SUPPORTIVE MENTORS?

Fiscal sponsors can be crucial intermediaries for youth-led groups. Many of these groups are not registered; some because they do not know how, others because they face specific challenges in meeting the requirements to obtain legal registration, and others because they do not want to. It may be that they exist for a concrete purpose and do not wish to institutionalize their work, that they do not want to be part of a system they are aiming to change, or that they are not interested in taking on the legal and financial responsibilities associated with registration. Whatever the reason or cause, a lack of registration can be a serious barrier for youth-led groups in accessing funding and other opportunities. In this regard, fiscal sponsors who can act as intermediaries can be valuable allies.

However, to ensure healthy and positive partnerships, fiscal sponsors, in addition to acting as intermediaries and assuming financial responsibility, must also believe in young people and their capacity to make decisions (including financial ones) and to implement their work. It must be clear to them that they are there to support the young people but not to impose restrictions on them.

In the case of Tar Kura, four grantee partners were not legally registered and thus worked together with fiscal sponsors. The evaluation team intended to interview all four of those sponsors; however, two could not be reached or were not interesting in participating. Therefore, the information available is limited. Yet, based on those that did participate, some concerns arose for the evaluation team. Fiscal sponsors received capacity building along with grantee partners to understand their role and were asked to sign agreements as part of the conditions of their involvement. Those we spoke to recognized their role as supporting the youth organisation they were working with. Still, some of their comments highlighted that they still believed that young people were not capable of making their own decisions and that they (the sponsors) were entitled to control their money and impose conditions on its release.

‘Well, normally they have to follow my instructions because my reputation is at stake so I cannot allow them to do anything… so I put my foot down [for them] to follow the instruction. If they don’t follow the instruction, they don’t get the money.’ – Fiscal sponsor

‘Like guiding young people, it is very difficult for them to understand that things have to be taken step by step. Like YES this money is meant for the organisation but you just can’t use it anyhow and so following strict instruction is a little bit difficult at times for young people. It takes time for them to understand that they must follow the instruction.’ – Fiscal sponsor

Response by panellist on their ideal community that is safe and acceptable to young people
Young people are responsible, but they are not well informed to make decisions.’ — Fiscal sponsor

Other fiscal sponsors felt that the groups they were working with were doing a good job and took the role assigned to them very seriously.

‘Our role is to continue monitoring because we have been given the responsibility by the beneficiaries and The Fund for Global Human Rights that we have to ensure that these programmes are presented by Girls behind the Lens. And they also provide their reports and they really do a great job.’ — Fiscal sponsor

There is no doubt that the fiscal sponsors interviewed value their role and want what is best for those organisations that they are sponsoring. However, some of their comments still show a lot of preconceptions about young people and a highly paternalistic attitude towards them.

It is important to highlight that the young people who were interviewed as part of this evaluation did not echo the paternalism expressed by some of their fiscal sponsors. Those that did refer to their relationship with them were positive about it and highlighted how they had supported and mentored them.

‘Then also we were able to develop into a more structured organisation with the intervention of the Fiscal sponsor and the Grant from Purposeful so we were able to develop our organisation structurally more.’ — Grantee partner

There can be several reasons for these apparent discrepancies. The testimonies shared may not be of the corresponding grantee and fiscal sponsor; it may be that youth did not feel completely comfortable sharing some challenges that they had faced with their fiscal sponsors. Or, it may also be that youth do not in fact yet recognize some of this paternalism as it has been heavily normalized. Whatever the case, it seems evident that further sensitization is required of organisations that will be acting as fiscal sponsors for youth groups. Also, that perhaps closer follow-up is necessary to ensure that there is no undue intervention on their part.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT
Legloma Youth for Development

This organization was formed on the 5th October 2016 with a vision of a transformed community with no poverty and illiteracy free amongst the less privileged in society and help the most rural communities eradicate poverty and ensure an educated self-reliant community with food and income-secure household in an HIV and AIDS free environment. Project: To teach 250 youth to read and write, and reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDs among girls, and fight gender-based violence through advocacy.
COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROCESS

Like elsewhere in the world, COVID-19 had a profound impact in Sierra Leone, and consequently on the Tar Kura initiative and the projects funded through it (as well as on this evaluation). Most of the groups had to suspend their activities due to the restrictions on mobility and many of their communities faced extreme hardships with the situation. Young people proactively reached out to discuss the impact of the pandemic on their work and to request permission to make changes to the work they had anticipated. Both institutions were flexible not only in understanding that implementation times had to be adjusted and deadlines could of course no longer be met, but also in recognizing that the work needed to adapt to the emerging situation, as the young people themselves stated. Thus, groups were authorized to redirect their funds as they saw fit.

This shows not only a high degree of flexibility on the part of both The Fund and Purposeful but also a commitment to placing decision-making in the hands of the young people. While the intention of Tar Kura was not to provide direct support or services, both institutions recognized the importance of trusting that young people could determine what was best for their communities at that particular time.

The flexibility and proactivity of young people must, of course, be recognized and praised. They showed their resilience and capacity to act in the face of adversity. They were also resourceful and respectful of their commitment with Purposeful, The Fund, and the process contacting them directly to discuss the situation. They innovated in their work and in their approach, and some even took the opportunity to reflect on their organisation when they were unable to work due to the restrictions.

‘Okay, when we got the COVID pandemic, it was really frightening, and it actually delayed our implementation process. But through the recommendations that we sent to Purposeful that we really need to continue with the implementation after the government had put a stop to all our activities, we made some request for additional resources to use in the communities where we were working from and all these [resources] were made available and we supplied them to the communities and then we started with our implementation to go further with our project.’ – Grantee partner

“we proposed to them [Purposeful staff] that we actually wanted to channel our funds to fight against COVID-19 and they were there to support us… they have provided us with all the necessary things and [advice] we required and also allowed us to tell them what we want to do and they… gave us a go ahead. And even before COVID we have some projects that were not completed and they gave us some additional funds which was really amazing.” – Grantee partner

Given the situation and its impact on the work and on the communities, The Fund decided to provide additional resources to the grantee partners so they could complete the work originally planned.

*Although Tar Kura grants were awarded in December of 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, subsequent aspects of the initiative—such as face to face training—were impacted by it.*
‘What has been the challenge over the time was the corona virus which interrupted the entire design of the plan because there was a ban on all public address and so on and how we overcame that challenge was that they provided us with additional grant [funds] and some of the activities that were not implemented we are implementing them now.’ – Grantee partner

It must be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic also brought some opportunities for the young grantee partners as well. Even within the Sierra Leone context, the pandemic increased the use of Zoom and other similar apps, thus reducing the costs of travel and leading young people to innovate in their work.

‘COVID-19 brought some challenges as well as opportunities to some of us... Even these zoom meetings we learnt all of them due to the limitation of the movements due to COVID. It also reduced the costs of transport because now we are just using zoom chat not that I have to move long distances to go and attend a meeting which was really expensive. Then COVID also affected our [finances] but when we got these extra funds it really [sped] up our work.’ – Grantee partner

Finally, the initiative shown by youth in response to the pandemic not only impressed Purposeful and The Fund but also helped to raise their profile within their communities. From monitoring carried out by Purposeful, the initiative and leadership shown by young people in response to the pandemic helped in them gaining more respect and recognition within their communities. However, this is an area that needs to be further explored to more clearly assess the impact that this had on communities’ perspective of youth and their leadership abilities from the perspectives of those community members.

‘You could see in the way that they took ownership and reached out to the grants management team saying “we need to adjust our budget” or “we now need to dedicate funds to this”, and having those resources you could clearly see that helped them to play a leadership role within their communities; to be seen in that way as people who could help, who could actually take up, both having the resources to back them up but also having the initiative to do that... the young people really stepped up and adjusted.’ – The Fund
BUILDING THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The capacity building component of this initiative was very significant. Ultimately, what Tar Kura aimed to do was to promote youth leadership. To do this, it was crucial to build their leadership capacity and to equip them with the skills that they needed to exercise their agency in all aspects of their life, in particular in their organizing.

Youth found that the capacity building was extremely valuable and helpful for their organisations and themselves. They appreciated the practical skills they were able to develop, which were vital in the management and successful implementation of their work such as how to develop a project, monitoring, reporting, and financial management skills. Young people also appreciated the opportunity to build their leadership and teamwork skills. Panellists reported that this was crucial in the success of the panellists and their work in the grant-making process. Grantees also reported that the training they received had an impact in their work within their organisation and that they took the knowledge acquired back to their organisations. For example, in implementing safeguarding policies and participatory processes. The certificates provided for the training were also appreciated by the participants.

‘We received one and that’s the training where they taught us about safeguarding policy and it was like an assignment, so they told us that you guys when you go back to your organisations make sure you employ the safeguarding policy and it was really very nice and also we had training about report writing which was also so nice.’ — Grantee partner

‘One of the capacity building opportunities that we have received so far is the session that we received on how young people can learn how to manage their resources given to them and we were also briefed on policy making as an organisation and this all was done when we were called up in Freetown.’ — Grantee partner

‘Then another thing is that I have really learnt a lot throughout this project like how to talk to people, how to manage funds and they also taught us a lot about financial policies, and all this was after we received the Grant.’ — Grantee partner
DIVERSITY AND SOLIDARITY

When the process was being designed, one of the aspects that Purposeful insisted upon was that there was an intersectional approach that ensured a diversity of young people were included. They felt it was really important that there was a wide representation – geographic, socio-economic, gender, etc. The Fund agreed, and the process was drafted with this in mind. Thus, a conscious and constant effort was made to ensure this throughout the process.

Youth from middle and upper middle-class urban areas regularly get more opportunities than their counterparts from rural areas or lower socio-economic classes, including funding opportunities. Tar Kura wanted to go beyond the usual suspects and reach those groups and organisations that would never apply and would not be on the radar of traditional funders.

‘The geographic and gender and socio-economic diversity for me is also one thing that I would like to point out. The fact that the panel and the groups funded came from all the five provinces... We would through this process target groups who came from disadvantaged backgrounds and not just from the capital cities. Often child and youth participatory processes target those who have access to the internet, those who speak the language of the donor, and we were deliberate... for me that diversity was key.’ – The Fund

The panellists and the grantee partners selected represented all regions of Sierra Leone, and the grant-making process was in no way Freetown-centred. This not only guaranteed a diversity of representation for the initiative, but it also gave young people the opportunity to interact with other youth beyond their immediate circles. It led to the creation of a youth panel that was diverse and representative of the youth of Sierra Leone. It allowed panellists to travel all around the country, visiting projects from different regions and learning more about the realities of other young people.
in their country. It also offered grantee partners the possibility to get to know projects and groups from all regions of the country and to network and exchange lessons learned with them.

The wide range of diversity offered young people a valuable experience and opportunity. However, it resulted in some challenges in communication and understanding. In this regard, the capacity building that panellists received on teambuilding proved crucial.

‘Well, as I said one of the key challenges was first understanding [each other] because we all come from different places, we are different attitudes so it the first time meeting we need to understand ourselves was a big challenge but we started understanding ourselves at some point.’ – Panellist

Despite these challenges, both panellists and grantee partners were able to build solid relationships among themselves. The youth panellists spent significant time with one another and were able to create a sense of belonging and team spirit. Participating in the trainings, which included team-building exercises, travelling together to visit the different organisations, and collectively deciding which organisations should be funded allowed the panellists to establish close relationships and develop a sense of solidarity with one another.

‘Our group is the best group ever, there are seven girls and three boys. We [work] as a team. We do not decide [individually] because we want to make [the decision] collectively including everybody’s ideas. We respect each and everyone.’ – Panellist

This solidarity extended to grantee partners, who reported that they were at all times supported by the panellists. Grantee partners, meanwhile, had the opportunity to participate in training sessions together which also gave them the opportunity to build bonds among themselves and find opportunities for collaboration and exchange, personal and organisational.

‘When we got the training as the organisations that received the Grant, they were able to bring all the organisations that received the Grant together where we even had a session of networking among ourselves.’ – Grantee partner
As mentioned before, the process also allowed youth participants the possibility to reflect not only on their agency and power but that of other young people. They were able to consider the importance of promoting and working towards youth empowerment and involvement, and it made them recognize how valuable youth are to their communities.

**SMALL GRANTS CAN MAKE BIG DREAMS COME TRUE**

The grants that were received by the Tar Kura grantee partners are by any standard very small (between US$3,000 and 5,000). The amount of money granted per project (6–12 months) is what a large funder typically spends on a single trip to visit a project. However, for young people and their groups, these small grants were life changing because they made dreams come true. It is not because young people have small, insignificant dreams; quite the contrary. It is because their dreams are about the impact that they can make in their own lives and in their communities.

‘This Grant though for us we see it as something small but for [those who receive it] it’s a major difference and they will never go back to the place where they were.’ – Purposeful staff

‘So, the most exciting thing was we saw that we were going to achieve most of our dreams through this package.’ – Grantee partner

‘This has basically increased our confidence level in that it has helped us [to] believe in ourselves that we have good ideas and can also be supported. So, we said that if they can give us an opportunity, we should also make good use of it.’ – Grantee partner

‘It was really not an easy struggle for me to sustain myself and my organisation so when such an opportunity came my way, I had to take it on so that my dreams could come to reality as it has happened today.’ – Grantee partner

For young people, the value of this experience went far beyond the money they received to implement their work. The true value was in the trust that was placed on them, in having someone else believe that they were capable of making a difference in their communities, in being able to stand in their power and exercise their agency.

**SUCCESS IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER**

A key component of participatory grant-making processes is letting go of adult-centric views on success. It becomes crucial to consider what success means to young people and their communities. Both panellists and grantee partners were asked what their biggest success was in this process and their responses correlated with the positive personal and community impact. Going through the selection process and securing funding was considered a big success for several of them, especially for those without previous experience in applying for and securing external funding. Being able to reach and support their community members, especially
those most vulnerable, was deemed successful by the young people. Supporting others in their empowerment processes was also viewed as a success. It was especially valuable for them to be able to support other young people and to aid in changing the misconceptions and stereotypes held about youth within their communities. For panellists, it was also very important to have the power to support the projects of young people and knowing that the funding would make a real difference for their organisations and their work. For young people, the fact that the community wanted them to continue with their work was a sign that they were successful; they heavily valued the recognition of their work by other community members. The positive impact the process has had on them as individuals, which gives them great pride, is also highly valued as a success by youth participants.

‘We now have a sustainable centre that will continually provide computer trainings to young people after the Tar Kura grant-making process granted to us… because of the demand and the passion we have to empower young people we applied and we were granted and us being granted is a big success.’ – Grantee partner

CHANGING COMMUNITY IDEAS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF

‘So, it helps to open their eyes [stakeholders in the community] and make them understand that if only you can create the space for young people, if only you can believe in them, they can do anything, they can create the change that we want to see.’ – Purposeful staff

According to those engaged through this evaluation, there is no doubt that the perceptions of community members about young people and their capacities were changed through this process. For young people, fiscal sponsors and Purposeful staff, the participatory process, and the implementation of the different projects have had a positive impact on the way that communities perceive young people. Several of their communities have expressed appreciation for their interventions and have valued the role that young people have played in them. The fact that some of the interventions have created jobs within their communities has contributed to them being well-received and appreciated. Young people have also made significant efforts to engage community members within their work, which has also had a positive impact on their acceptance and recognition. Unfortunately, because community members could not be further engaged due to the COVID-19 restrictions to travel and limited internet access available in the communities, this evaluation did not capture this perspective. This is an aspect that needs to be explored further.

‘It has been awesome because the community has even [given] us their own support and they have appreciated every piece of work that we have done because we have not done this thing in isolation, we have involved everyone in the community. [The community] has really witnessed what we have done, and they have added voiced to what we have done. All together the community has behaved positive to everything that we have done.’ – Grantee partner

Having young people in positions of leadership and implementing work that has a positive impact on the community, helps in changing the preconceived ideas and stereotypes that other community members have of young people.

‘…the community people especially the stakeholders before they were not taking the young people serious because they were involved in criminal acts, but this project has changed all that perspective in that the young people can indeed do better things by themselves and young people are not to let stakeholders to decide for them but now to make their own decisions. Now even before this community was divided but now it is united because the young people can now move community to community doing good work.’ – Grantee partners
The fact that young people and their work are being recognized by external actors has made a big difference in changing community members’ perception of their work. Key in this external recognition was the visit that panellists made to the different organisations. For the young people, these visits were very important; it was really exciting for them to have someone come to see their work because it is something that rarely happens, especially for those that are in more rural areas where accessibility is difficult. The visits gave young people validation and recognition, it made them proud to be able to show their work, and it was valuable for the community to realize the importance of their work.

‘One of the benefits I got from the panellists’ visit is that it made people have confidence in the organisation because we actually didn’t know the purpose of their visit as they just told me that they are coming over and I also told the people that we have visitors coming to visit our organisation. So just seeing them in numbers at our fields really made people to have more confidence in our organisation.’ – Grantee partner

‘Most interestingly the youth panellist went right to our village. It’s like 10 miles away from the head quarter town… I really don’t know if they shared some of these videos because we have some traditional bridges three of them but they managed to cross all these risking their lives… in order to see the practical work that we are doing and actually their head said he won’t have the interview anywhere else but rather in the farm… So it was really interesting for me to see some of these things because most of the Grants that I have applied for they never even interviewed us as in to ask us what we are doing or anything of that kind but these youth panellist actually went there…’ – Grantee partner

It is also necessary to mention that the fact that some of these young people (panellists and grantee partners) received funding, also created some tension with their communities. A young woman from a grantee partner organisation reported that she had been asked several times by her community why, if she had received so much money, had she not moved out from her grandmother’s place. Other young people also expressed that their communities...
believed that they had received large sums of money and were wealthy, which created some difficulties for them with their communities.

‘First of all, I communicated to our fiscal sponsor because I have a close relationship with him, and he told me that you can’t super serve every person, so you just tell them what you have and what you are going to do for them according to your plan. So, what I did was to call for a meeting and explain myself to my staff and then we agreed that whenever we are going out, we have to first talk to the head of those communities, and we tell them whatever we are going to do in their community though it was and it is still a problem.’ – Grantee partner

The points above raise the question of community engagement and the need to better involve communities and of building local ownership in the initiatives of young people. It is common in the Sierra Leone context for organisations to give hand-outs to the communities. They have, therefore, become accustomed to this dynamic and have high expectations for what they will receive when projects are implemented. Additional misconceptions about grant amounts and the purpose of the projects can further generate unrealistic and erroneous expectations among community members. Although youth attempted to address these issues within their communities, they were not always successful and still faced some challenges, thus offering a lesson learned for future initiatives of the need to build greater community participation and ownership throughout.

‘Then the other thing was the expectation of the people from the community because they thought that huge amount of money we received was all for our benefit because I actually remember one person told me that with all that money why should I continue staying at my Grandmother’s home, yet I have enough money to live on my own. So, all that was a lot of stress from the community.’ – Grantee partner
CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

The process was made as simple and as accessible as possible for young people, recognizing their realities and responding to them. However, there were still some barriers that they faced throughout the process to apply or to participate meaningfully. Several young people reported that although Purposeful covered their expenses to travel for interviews or trainings—as these expenses were reimbursed after being incurred for them—this posed a difficulty as they did not always have the funds available upfront to cover these costs. For the one youth panellist who expressed concern to Purposeful about not being able to cover the cost upfront, mobile money was sent to him ahead of his travels. It is unclear if the rest of the youth didn’t feel comfortable expressing that they could not cover the costs upfront or why they still felt that it was a challenge; however, it does bring to light the need to revisit whether the provisions made were sufficient and to reflect, together with young people, on what other types of support need to be provided to ensure that young people do not face a financial burden.

‘The challenges were transport fare for attending trainings and interviews as [at] that time I was in Kono. So, I had to struggle very hard for transport fare even though they do [refund] it just after the program.’ – Panellist

In addition, although the process was made as responsive as possible for young people, some still faced challenges in applying. Several young people reported that they had no access to a smartphone to send their application. One of the panellists reported that he had to borrow his brother’s phone and put his SIM card in it to be able to send the application. Another young woman explained that she had to travel to Freetown so that she could use her sister’s phone to apply. Once they were selected, the panellists who did not have a smartphone were given one; however, in the application process, this posed a barrier for a few of them. Among those youth that were not selected as panellists, the most common barrier cited with respect to the application process was the lack of necessary technology to prepare and submit the application.
‘The only barrier was poor network, so I had to move to Freetown. At that time I [did not have a] phone so I had to move to Freetown just to use my sisters phone to apply. That is the only challenge I faced.’ – Panellist

Time was also a significant barrier for young people. As mentioned above, young people have a lot going on in their lives, and it is often difficult for them to make time for such initiatives, regardless of how committed they may be to them. For the youth panellists who were in school, for example, they had to get special letters to be able to miss classes so that they could conduct the field visits of the potential grantee organisations.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE PROCESS

The Fund for Global Human Rights hopes that this participatory grant-making initiative is the first of many. With this pilot initiative in Sierra Leone, it hopes to be able to set the stage for future PGM initiatives in other contexts. As such, documenting this process, its challenges, successes, lessons learned, etc. was crucial. In this regard, both The Fund and Purposeful have been keeping detailed records of all internal processes that have taken place as part of this initiative. This report aims to be part of that documenting process. Both institutions indicated that throughout the process they have been documenting all of their work and that said documents are stored in a shared drive. The evaluators had access to many of these documents, and the process has, in fact, been closely documented. It is also worth mentioning that The Fund and Purposeful have staff members dedicated to this task, which is also highly valuable for the process.

“ The Fund for Global Human Rights hopes that this participatory grant-making initiative is the first of many. With this pilot initiative in Sierra Leone, it hopes to be able to set the stage for future PGM initiatives in other contexts.”
“How would I change the youths”
by Daniel Koroma

Sierra Leone is one of the country
where young people feels that they are left out,
but what do you think when young people think like that?
is it lack of ideas or lack of opportunities?
Our leaders’ mouth’s are full of millions of caricature, in which the expectations,
wishes and desire of we the youths are gigantic success,
but always frustrations dance to it tunes.
The solutions to my intention it can never be mentioned.
But praise be to the heavenly father for Tar Kura’s invention and motivation,
now I remember innovations.
Many completed the high school with a beautiful smile on thir faces
but today, these beautiful smiles havegenerated into bitter laughter.
But with this facility, the road is open to university.
In my quite moment, I do think about opening a car wash station
to change the dimension. But oh! How long this will come to reality?
I hope my message will not fall on the deaf ears.
Is not everybody that is born at the Same time,
neither achieve at the same time. The opening of a model car wash station,
it will give hope to the hopeless to achieve their goals.
The reliability lies in this facility,
not less than fifteen people work per locally made station,
let alone model station is constructed.
If this facility is available in my community,
not less than five hundred youths will benefit.
Car wash! to wash the system of violence. Car wash,
to captivate the negative mind set of the suffering youths in the street.
To stop the misused of their energy, there must be facility like this.
Please do not think brief.

Poem by panellist on ideas that could have a positive impact on
the execution of the initiative in the future
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered through this evaluation and the experiences shared with the evaluation team by all stakeholders, a few recommendations for future similar initiatives can be found below:

- Given the concern regarding the role of the fiscal sponsors, greater engagement with them is recommended as well as additional sensitization training to ensure they are not exercising any undue interference.

- Most of the youth that participated in the process considered the financial support provided by The Fund and Purposeful as very valuable and important for them and their groups. However, they also recognized that although the funds provided were important, they were not enough. They recommended increasing the amounts to also increase reach and impact of the youth initiatives.

- The work that has been done with the panellists and grantee partners is very valuable. Whether future processes in Sierra Leone include the same group of panellists making decisions or not, the team recommends that they continue engaging them. They can be invited to share their experiences, involved to provide capacity building to future panellists, or engaged to select said panellists. Whatever the case, the relationship that has been established with them should be maintained as much as possible. These young people have already experienced a profound personal and collective journey and they should not be abandoned or forgotten. It will be important for them and for the sustainability of the work that they remain engaged with Purposeful. Grantee partners should also remain engaged beyond the renewal of their grant.

- One of the main concerns that was raised by The Fund with regards to this initiative was the fact that in having open calls for applicants, the expectations of many young people were raised and then let down. This is certainly true and an issue that needs to be considered. One potential way to address this is to create a network of young people in the country (if it does not yet exist) and engage all applicants in it. This would still allow those people who applied to come together (even if virtually through WhatsApp groups, etc.) and share experiences, support one another, network, and build solidarity among each other. It will also be very important for Purposeful and The Fund to share other potential opportunities with them and keep them continuously engaged. Youth-friendly resources and tools can also be shared and disseminated there. Creating, and especially managing the network, requires human and financial resources; thus, this should be considered and resources should be appropriately allocated, when possible.

- With regards to the above issue of how to better manage young people’s expectations, it might also be worth considering how to limit the number of applications by establishing additional selection criteria. For example, an option would be to sit with the youth panel at the beginning of the grant-making process and jointly decide on specific geographic or thematic areas to be prioritized through the specific call. This would allow establishing clear areas on which to invite applications, thus limiting the number of applications and young people who apply and do not receive funding.

- All youth participants considered that the capacity building and leadership training provided at the beginning of the process was very valuable. There were initial plans to hold in-person training and mentoring events throughout the entire time of the initiative; however, this was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposeful still continued providing online support focused on accompanying young people. Considering how much young people valued the capacity building and support received, the team recommends that in future initiatives this remains a vital component and that the type of support and capacity
building that would most benefit them is discussed with young people. Materials from past capacity building sessions can also be shared if available.

Another point raised by youth participants was that, in this case, the grants focused on young people who were already working within their communities. However, there are many young people who have great ideas but have not yet been able to begin implementing them. Thus, it would be great if additional resources could be dedicated to reach and support such young people. Capacity building and small seed funding could be provided to support these young people in launching their projects.

Those groups that applied for funding and were not selected recommended that the panellists share feedback with those not selected for funding; it should include the reasons why they were not chosen and recommendations on how to improve for future grant-making processes. Even if the reason was that available resources were limited, it would still be beneficial for groups to hear that their work is valued and recognized despite the lack of funding to support them at the moment. Groups would also appreciate further engaging with applicants beyond the grant-making cycle and sharing other opportunities and resources with them.

As previously mentioned throughout the report, significant outreach efforts were made by Purposeful to disseminate the calls for applications and the information about the process. Both participants selected and those who were not selected as panellists felt that there was still more that could be done to reach more young people. They also recommended increasing the efforts, perhaps with street campaigns. This, however, needs to be balanced against the fact that there are limited resources and not wanting to create expectations that cannot be met. Potential ways to address this challenge could be more targeted approaches to reach marginalized groups, thematic calls for proposals, or calls that focus on certain geographic areas of the
country. Alternative ways to manage expectations and further engage applicants who were not successful are also outlined below.

A conscious effort was made by The Fund and Purposeful to ensure that there was gender equality within the process. They ensured that girls were not underrepresented in the processes and, in fact, 70% of the panellists were female. However, some concern was expressed by staff from Purposeful and The Fund that this might not have been enough to guarantee a gender transformative initiative. Although not enough specific information was provided—other than to mention that during workshops discussions were often dominated by the minority males while females were being relegated—further reflecting on this issue is still recommended. A key recommendation will be to consider if it is necessary to include further gender sensitization training as part of the training and capacity building offered to youth panellists, grantee partners, and fiscal sponsors. Creating female-only spaces within the initiative, especially in the beginning, might also allow young women to feel more comfortable with participating and allow them to better exercise their agency.

A key recommendation is the possibility of connecting both grantee partners and applicants with other funders and supporting them in applying for other sources of funding. Ideally, efforts should include supporting youth-led groups in accessing funds from other donors. Sharing opportunities is an important way to do this, but a more structured plan must also be put in place. First, a component of capacity building must be included in supporting young people in developing the skills necessary to access other types of funding. Second, showcasing the work of young people to other funders is crucial as donors often use one another as sources to identify community-rooted groups, especially those funders that do not have a local presence. One way of doing this could be through showcasing the work of grantees and applicants in social media pages of both Purposeful and The Fund.

For example, creating Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter posts showing the work of these organisations (with their consent) and giving them visibility. A directory of grantees and applicants can also be created and disseminated among other donors and partner organisations. Third, organizing and promoting networking events (even virtual) where other donors can get to know the work of these young people. Supporting groups in attending events already being organized where they may network with other funders is also important. Small travel and networking grants can be established.
One of the main challenges that the evaluation team faced was in reaching youth applicants who had not been selected, both as panellists and for funding. Many of the phone numbers that Purposeful had on record were disconnected or not answered. Because of their very nature, children and youth are constantly changing and moving in many aspects of their lives. This makes it increasingly difficult to keep them engaged. One key recommendation would be to emphasize the importance of remaining reachable in all processes. There may be many reasons for young people to change their phone numbers in the context of Sierra Leone, but it might be worth it to encourage young people to maintain them so that they can remain further engaged in future opportunities. They can also be encouraged to leave additional numbers of family members that could potentially reach out to them or to regularly update their contact information with the organisation. For those that have internet access, they could also be encouraged to provide their emails or social media accounts. The team should emphasize that this is not meant to keep tabs on them or their work and that it is of course voluntary, but that it could give them a chance to connect with other youth and find out about other opportunities for them or their groups.

Following the above recommendation, groups should be encouraged and provided with support to establish a social media presence, if that is possible and safe for them. Having a social media account will give visibility to their work and allow funders and partners to get in touch with them.

Promoting exchanges between youth-led groups beyond the life of the grant-making cycle is crucial to ensure ongoing learning and network building. In this regard, it would be ideal to have exchange funds that could facilitate these learning interactions among young people. These could be between grantee partners or applicants that did not get selected. It might also be an opportunity for current and former (in future years) grantee partners to support potential grantee partners with the application processes or implementation.

For future participatory initiatives, including the second phase of this evaluation, the evaluating team would recommend conducting a recruitment process for co-participants. Even if an open call is not held and a selected group of young people is invited to participate, the team still recommends asking them for a short motivation letter and conducting interviews. This would ensure that youth are truly motivated with the process, and it would reduce the likelihood that they are participating because they feel pressured to do so. Finally, it would contribute to ensuring that youth understand what the process would entail, and what it would require of them so that they can freely decide if they are interested and able to participate.