Life & Peace INSTITUTE

How can we make this Easy?

Lessons From a Pilot Micro-Grant Initiative

DECEMBER 2023

Acknowledgments

About Life & Peace Institute

We build peace one change at a time. For more than 35 years, we have promoted nonviolent approaches to conflict in the Horn and the Great Lakes Region. Working across 8 key programmes in 6 countries and with more than 70 staff, we support the capacity of people living with violent conflict to transform their own communities and societies into inclusive, just, and peaceful ones. We also work to influence regional and global policy agendas, making sure local voices are heard around the world.

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Introduction

Ensuring initiatives are locally led has long been at the heart of the peacebuilding sector. The framing of current conversations, however, provides an important space for diverse stakeholders, including the Life & Peace Institute (LPI), to reflect on their roles and how they can better support and partner with local peace actors.[1] This is especially the case in light of discussions around decolonising the aid sector[2], localisation,[3] and **shifting the power**, which all aim to channel more power and funds to locally run organisations.

For LPI, the impetus to reflect on how to more effectively direct power and resources to local peace actors comes from multiple sources, two of which are central. First and foremost, it stems from our partnerships with civil society organisations, with which we have regular conversations about access to funding and the exclusive nature of international funding. Second, while donors and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including LPI, have made increasing commitments to localisation, they frequently encounter challenges when seeking to operationalise them. Therefore, to address some of the challenges our local partners face in accessing **quality resourcing**, [4] we designed and implemented a learning-by-doing micro-grant initiative that intentionally put local peacebuilder capacities, needs, and requests first. Operationalised within the framework of the LPI **Inclusive Peace in Practice** programme, this process allowed us to reflect on the power of intermediary organisations and donors. [5]

Building on previous LPI sub-granting experience and an **extensive network of community-based organisations (CBOs) in Kenya**, we decided to implement the micro-grant initiative in Nairobi. In particular, we sought to support youth leaders and youth-led organisations working to transform conflict and advance peace in their communities. We also took account of the broader context of the 2022 Kenyan general election. The initiative provided grants of up to 150,000 Kenyan Shillings (equivalent to USD 1250 at the time) and support to seven youth-led CBOs working in four informal settlements in Nairobi. These organisations are **Jenga Lives**, **Legendary Arts**, and **Usawa CBO** in Majengo; **Youth Engagement Link** and **Sanaa Utamaduni Dancers** in Mathare; **Recoup Initiative** in Kayole; and **Wasanii Sanaa Organisation** in Kibra.

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[1] **What is local?** The term "local" is a hotly debated term, especially if and when it is used in a condescending or disempowering way. For the purpose of this case study, we understand "local" to mean the spaces where individuals, grassroots organisations, and communities are directly affected by specific issues and/ or are working to address them.

[2] **What is the decolonisation debate about?** "**Time to Decolonise Aid**", a report by Peace Direct (May 2021), highlights that decolonising aid is rooted in understanding the power dynamics at the heart of the aid sector, removing structures and norms that privilege Western thought and approaches, and working to shift power and resources towards those who are directly affected by aid interventions. The *New Humanitarian* and the Center for Transformational Change put together a non-exhaustive **reading and resource list**.

[3] **What is localisation?** "Localisation" is a contested and evolving term, marked by different perspectives, understandings, and expectations. Organisations also vary in their commitment to its implementation. For the purpose of this case study, we define "localisation" to mean supporting "local" actors to set their own agendas, design solutions, and mobilise and manage resources to implement these solutions.

[4] **What is quality resourcing?** We understand resources as the various material and non-material elements that organisations require to carry out their work. To reflect our focus on the provision of technical support and other opportunities in addition to funding to our partners, as well as our aim to create opportunities for the mutual exchange of resources, we use the term "quality resourcing".

[5] **What are intermediary organisations?** Intermediaries are organisations that connect, including by channeling funds, organisations and spaces, including local actors with others operating in a given sector. In the peacebuilding sector, many international NGOs such as LPI, Saferworld, and Peace Direct often play the role of intermediaries. Other intermediaries include larger institutions, such as United Nations (UN) agencies, like the UN Development Programme (UNDP), or large multi-mandate NGOs like Mercy Corps.

As part of the initiative, the CBOs had the flexibility and support to design, revise, and implement three-month projects through which they made small, but meaningful contributions to social cohesion in their communities in the context of the 2022 elections.[6] Their projects focused on promoting peaceful elections, supporting young people's leadership and inclusion in governance and peacebuilding, and prevention of gender-based violence. The CBOs used approaches such as dialogues, trainings, participatory education theatre, and peace concerts to raise awareness, start conversations, and discuss potential solutions to a range of topics with diverse community members.

This case study, which was reviewed by our CBO partners during a validation workshop, details the process and learning emanating from our micro-grant initiative. The initiative was accompanied by a rigorous learning agenda that includes semi-structured interviews with CBO leaders, informal check-ins, documenting processes, and monitoring and evaluation reporting. Based on these processes, we learned how we, as an intermediary organisation, can be a better partner to our partners.

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[6] Upon receiving requests from our partners during the implementation phase, we subsequently extended the implementation period to four months.

Map of CBO micro-grant recipient operations in Nairobi

N

- **Sanaa Utamaduni Dancers**
- **Youth Engagement Link**

MATHARE

KAYOLE

MAJENGO

KIBRA

R. Getathuru

R. Nairobi

R. Nairobi

R. Nairobi

R. Ngong

Drain

Recoup Initiative

Wasanii Sanaa Organisation

- **Legendary Arts**
- **Usawa CBO**
- **Jenga Lives**

5 0 5 10 Kilometre

Scale 1:250000
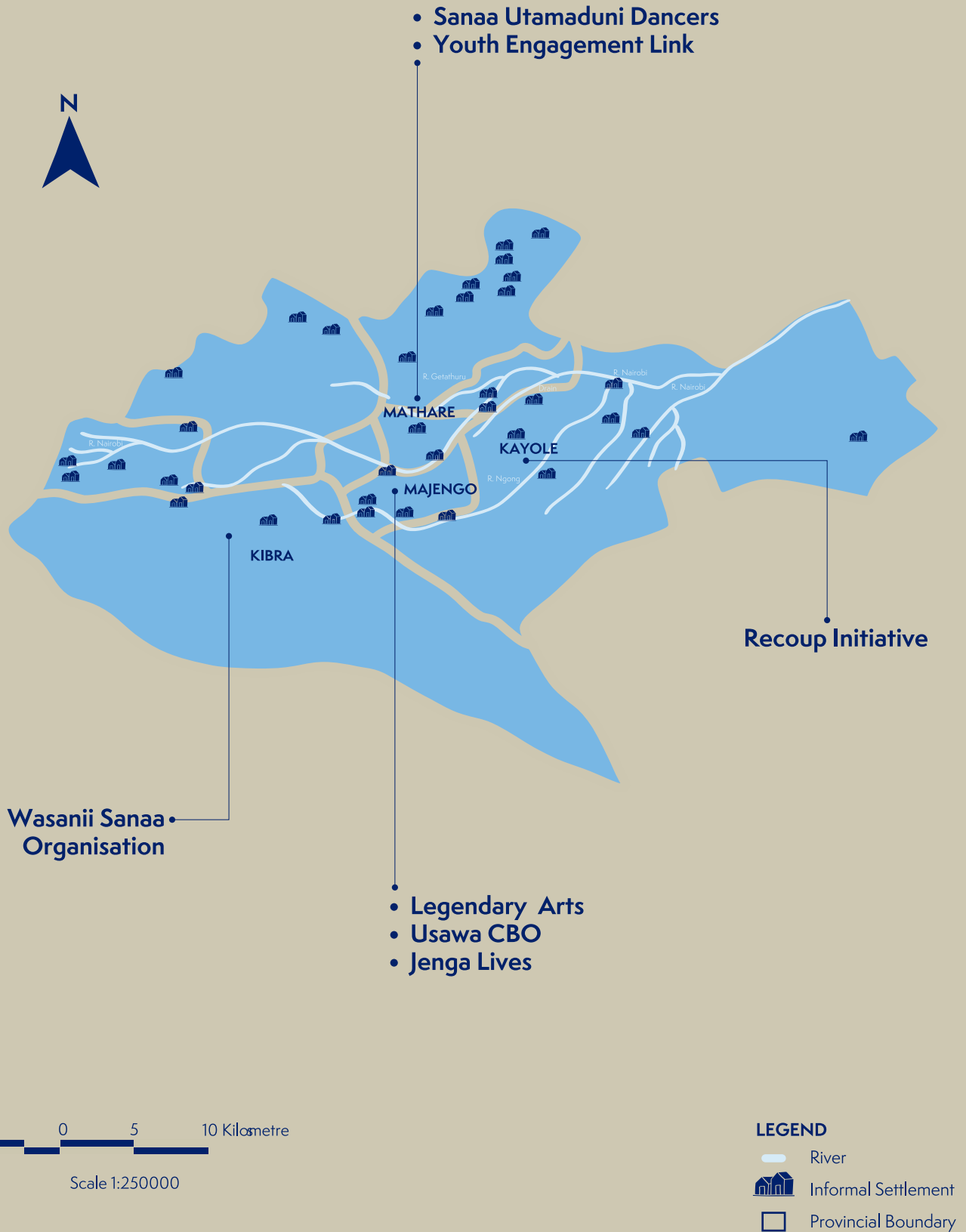
Concretely, what did we do and why?

To ensure that the grant was locally led, we made a number of changes to what we understand to be more traditional **sub-granting mechanisms**, which are typically driven by intermediary organisations or donor interests, imperatives, and requirements. Below are eight keychanges and how they worked out.

01

Removing mandated project topics and types

02

Applicants were invited to propose any initiative they believed would contribute to social cohesion. We only asked that they respond to community needs, integrate learning from their work, and ensure the conflict sensitivity of their proposed projects.

Why did we do this?

We removed mandated project topics and types to ensure that the projects proposed by the applicants responded to community needs and built on their organisational work, knowledge, and experiences, rather than to external imperatives. In addition, since we could not provide long-term funding to our partners, we wanted to avoid some of the pitfalls of projectisation by ensuring that our support benefitted the CBOs beyond the timeframe of the micro-grant initiative.

What came out of it?

Following the implementation of the initiatives, we were informed that the CBOs had advised one another about the type of projects they thought LPI would want to support. Several CBOs subsequently mention that they may have proposed different projects had they realised how open we were to different types of social cohesion-related projects. While this points to CBO understanding of how the aid system works and how they try to make it work in their favour, it also seems to point to the limited opportunities they have in shaping their engagement within that system. At the same time, the CBOs appreciated the opportunity and flexibility to design projects that supported their ongoing work. One CBO representative notes:

> **The ideas came from us. We have experience and knowledge on the context of our community. Therefore, the activities we proposed are relevant."**

Another explains that:

> **Whatever we proposed ... is what we are doing. It is not what we are doing because of LPI."**

Micro-grant timeline

AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2021
Interviews:
LPI conducts 19 interviews with peer organisations and donors exploring quality resourcing.

FEBRUARY 2022
Internal partnership:
LPI's Inclusive Peace in Practice initiative and Kenya Country Programme co-design the micro-grant initiative.

FEBRUARY AND APRIL 2022
Preparation phase:
LPI identifies pre-selected CBOs, reviews capacity assessment and due diligence tools, and develops a learning plan.

JUNE 2022
Review workshop:
CBOs strengthen their proposals and budgets, and receive financial management training.

END OF MAY 2022
Proposal review:
LPI provides feedback to each CBO.

EARLY MAY 2022
Capacity assessments:
LPI engages the CBOs to identify their needs and wants.

28 APRIL 2022
Microgrant launch:
The call for proposal is shared with the CBOs through email and WhatsApp, including via a recorded audio message in Swahili.

END OF JUNE 2022
Plans and budgeting:
CBOs submit reviewed implementation plans and budgets.

END OF JULY 2022
Contracting:
LPI and CBOs sign contracts, and disburse the first tranches of funding.

MID-JULY 2022
Monitoring and evaluation workshop:
CBOs co-design an M&E tool to monitor their work and keep track of achievements.
Baseline interviews:
LPI enquires about CBOs' experiences applying for grants and developing proposals.

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2022,
Close-out:
CBOs submit their last financial reports to LPI.
Endline interviews:
LPI enquires about CBOs' experiences managing the initiatives and engaging with LPI and each other.

END OF OCTOBER 2022
Closing workshop:
CBOs reflect on achievements and lessons learned from the initiative.

JULY AND NOVEMBER 2022
Implementation:
CBOs implement their initiatives with ongoing support from LPI for management, adaptation, financial reporting, and learning.

JANUARY 2023 AND ONWARDS
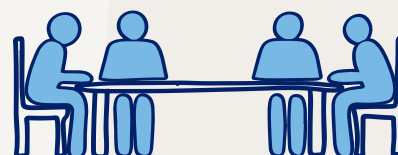Data analysis and sharing:
LPI aggregates collated data, organises an internal reflection workshop, and starts sharing learning across the organisation and externally.

15 JUNE 2023,
Knowledge Cafe:
LPI hosts an event bringing together representatives from the CBOs, INGOs and donors to discuss experiences with quality resourcing for peacebuilding.

02

Simplifying the application process

In the call for proposals, we were mindful to ask focused questions about the proposed applicant interventions. They also had flexibility regarding the format and language of their application. Specifically, the CBOs were invited to submit their proposal in English or Swahili in a video recording, an audio recording, or a written document that could include visuals such as photos, drawings, and infographics. We also coordinated word and time limits based on average speaking rates to ensure fairness between the submission mediums.

Why did we do this?

Proposals, whether full grant or sub-grant proposals, are time consuming to both prepare and review. We wanted to streamline the application process for our partners and for LPI. This approach simultaneously ensured that we supported them in designing strong interventions and that they could meet our need for information. In addition, we wanted to ensure that our partners could express their ideas in the way with which they were most comfortable.

What came out of it?

The CBO representatives express appreciation for being given the choice to select the format:

We can use anything that we want to use so long as it shares out information."

To our surprise, however, they all chose to submit their applications in writing and in English. When we asked them about their choices, most explain that they have more experience and feel more confident using a written format. They also indicate that a written document is easier to edit. They further explain that they prefer writing in English than in Swahili (which is common in Nairobi), with some believing that LPI would be able to better understand a proposal written in English. Finally, they express a lack of confidence in submitting a proposal in a format they did not have experience using or for which they did not have the right tools. For LPI, this is a lesson that either one or several options should be provided alongside guidance, examples, and possibly resources; for example, we could have offered to lend the CBOs a recording device. We could have also indicated that the audio, video or written quality of the submission would not impact the proposal evaluation. As suggested by one representative, we could have simplified the process further by hosting only one-on-one meetings and removing a formal application requirement. Such an approach could allow for a conversational approach more suited to creating shared understanding and supporting collaborative project planning.

03

Encouraging adaptive programming

The micro-grant opportunity was made available to a pre-identified cohort of applicants. We decided in advance that all projects would be funded if the CBOs participated in the required proposal development activities. The required activities included a proposal review workshop, where CBOs received feedback and could revise their proposals to ensure they were community relevant, strategic, conflict sensitive, and achievable [7]. In practice, this meant that we were not concerned with receiving perfect proposals or approving finalised project documents. We considered proposals to be conversation starters between the CBO applicants and LPI. This approach also meant that throughout the process, we encouraged organisations to update their projects as needed to respond to community needs and context dynamics, and facilitate learning.

Encouraging adaptive programming

[7] The other required activities were their participation in trainings on financial management and monitoring and evaluation.

Why did we do this?

First, we wanted to remove the cost of rejection, or the significant personnel and time costs that go uncompensated when a proposal is rejected as part of a competitive grant application process, which is typically the case in a traditional sub-granting mechanism. In addition, by supporting the CBOs to design strong interventions, we illustrated our commitment to providing them with quality resources throughout the process. Understanding the dynamic nature of the contexts in which our partners operate, we also wanted to demonstrate our trust in their ability to make relevant updates and communicate decisions about their work.

What came out of it?

Our partners note how the accompaniment provided during the design stage helped them to strengthen their work. One CBO representative states: "We reflected as a group and realised that we needed to change our target group in order to achieve the change we wanted to see." Another shares that they had "a theory of change in mind, but ... never knew how to put it on paper", but also that their project "might have done more harm than good". As such, they note that the support they received "helped us to really shape our project". The partners also appreciate how LPI flexibility during the implementation stage allowed them to respond to opportunities and unforeseen challenges. One CBO representative, however, expressed concern about requesting small changes to their implementation plan and budget from LPI. They feared such requests would be deemed unreasonable and require additional time to address. While others did not share this experience, it underscores the importance of adaptive programming and having appropriate processes and communicating them.

In addition, feeling that LPI trusted them to design, deliver, and monitor their interventions also contributed to a strong sense of ownership for their projects and outputs. Reflecting on flexibility and trust, one person elaborates:

> **We were not feeling pressured to impress. It gave us that angle of being genuine, of following through with the work that we were to do. ... This enhanced our delivery and we have some notable outcomes because of that."**

04

Streamlining the capacity assessment and due diligence process

Many CBOs would immediately be classified as high risk in traditional capacity assessment and due diligence processes. Therefore, we adapted our capacity assessment questionnaire to ensure it was right-sized, allowing us to get to know our partners, identify their needs and goals, and co-develop ways to support them. Instead of going through the same due diligence process as for more established partners, we adapted our assessment questions to ensure they were relevant to the experiences and financial and administrative systems of the CBOs. By being more focused, we were able to simplify and shorten the process and ensure it met the needs of everyone, while embedding risk mitigation measures on financial accountability in the process.

Why did we do this?

In more traditional approaches to sub-granting, capacity assessment and due diligence processes can be time consuming and place undue burdens on partners. While we were required by both LPI and donor policies to go through an assessment process, we wanted to ensure that it was fit for purpose, especially in light of the nature of the organisations we would be accompanying and the support they would receive through this initiative. [8] The streamlined process allowed us to get to know our partners better and support them rather than disqualify them from accessing the opportunity due to unrealistic or unnecessary administrative preconditions.

What came out of it?

Going through this process allowed us to see that systems can be improved and simplified without compromising process quality or donor accountability. Practically, changing internal systems required time and a dedicated LPI staff champion to lead the process forward with programme and finance colleagues.

The participating CBOs note that the capacity assessment process was a critical step in their relationship and partnership building with LPI. This highlights the importance of what is often treated as a technical step, outsourced to finance and administrative teams, with little engagement from programme staff. They also indicate that the capacity assessment, which LPI carried out with the CBOs in the areas where they operate, was an opportunity to talk about their work and demonstrate why they were qualified to receive funding. Several CBOs also note how they saw the capacity assessment process as a form of capacity strengthening, allowing them to reflect on their organisational goals, structures, and systems.

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[8] Given that most of the CBOs had no or only rudimentary administrative and financial systems in place, the LPI due diligence process would have marked these grant as risky. Given that we would be providing partners with in-depth targeted support, including financial management training and accompaniment, we were confident this would address any possible challenges that arose.

05

Emphasising learning and co-creating monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools and requirements

LPI invited the CBOs to jointly co-create a MEL tool, which they used to monitor and reflect on their work. [9] We also developed our own learning on how the changes we brought to the micro-grant process impacted CBO experiences and work.

Why did we do this?

In co-creating a MEL tool, we wanted the CBOs to understand MEL processes as part of adaptive programming and learning rather than as a donor requirement or tool for donor oversight, which is typically the case with sub-granting mechanisms. We wanted the CBOs to monitor what mattered to them and for us to support their learning goals. In parallel, we wanted to monitor what mattered to us (that is, how the micro-grant set up impacted the CBOs), without imposing our learning agenda on our partners.

What came out of it?

The CBOs report that the opportunity to co-create monitoring and evaluation tools and requirements enhanced their understanding of MEL, increased their confidence in conducting MEL activities, and deepened their sense of ownership about the lessons they learned through their initiatives. Notably, mid-term check-ins with LPI allowed them to reflect on the impact of their work and identify possible areas for follow up.

For LPI, having a separate learning process consisting of internal reflections and baseline/endline interviews with the CBOs meant we could gather the information we needed efficiently and rigorously. This approach ensured that our partners and LPI owned and were responsible for their respective learning, and were able to learn from one another.

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[9] **What is co-creation?** We understand the term "co-creation" to entail any design process that brings together people with diverse and relevant skills and experiences as equal collaborators. In particular, co-creation is meant to engage those people who are directly affected by specific issues and any solutions designed to address these.

Impact

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CO-CREATION

Interventions are rarely designed by or with those whom are directly affected by the dynamics they seek to address. Our experience has shown us that co-creation goes a long way in ensuring that interventions and their supporting tools are both owned by and valuable to those they are intended to benefit. We believe this can ensure that interventions more effectively support peacebuilding objectives. As part of the micro-grant initiative, we introduced co-creation in several ways.

First, we put our partners in the lead of designing their initiatives and created opportunities for them to gather inputs from LPI staff and cohort members. This was done to ensure they had complete ownership over their initiatives, but could strengthen them as needed.

We invited the CBOs to propose any action that would contribute to enhanced social cohesion in their respective communities and requested that this respond to community needs and integrate learning from their work.[10] LPI colleagues then reviewed the proposals and identified gaps to be addressed to ensure that interventions were strategic, conflict sensitive, and achievable, especially given the funds and time available for this initiative.

We subsequently shared our feedback in the form of questions (in writing) and then we discussed them during a proposal review workshop attended by representatives of all the CBOs. Asking questions was meant to ensure that the CBOs had ownership over how they would adapt their proposals.

During the workshop, we also invited the CBOs to discuss their proposals among themselves. In doing so, they were able to learn and draw from their respective experiences and approaches. By creating such an opportunity, we recognised that horizontal learning is a powerful tool.

Second, we invited partners to jointly design the MEL tools and requirements for the micro-grant initiative. Whereas partners requested LPI training on MEL, for our part we wanted to ensure that they understood its usefulness and relevance for their work and had an influence over MEL as part of this initiative.

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[10] While we provided funding for specific projects, we also wanted to ensure that our support would benefit the CBOs beyond the project timeframe. We did this in two ways: 1) providing support to initiatives that were connected to the objectives and ongoing work of the CBOs; and 2) providing responsive and targeted technical support (such as on financial management) and opportunities (such as by creating an advocacy and networking meeting for donors and other intermediary organisations).

Conscious that MEL language can be confusing even for those of us for whom it is familiar,[11] we started by introducing the concepts of change, impact, and contribution and asking our partners, during a dedicated workshop, to share a story of change from their work or personal lives, and to reflect on how it came about and what contributing factors were important. Following this discussion, we invited our partners to discuss the various elements they should track to be able to identify positive contributions, extract good practices, and draw lessons from their initiatives. We divided the participants into two groups, with a representative from all seven CBOs in each group, and asked them to develop a MEL tool that would reflect these elements. Each group subsequently presented and passionately defended their suggestions. LPI then supported the groups to agree on one tool based on their respective suggestions, which they went on the use throughout the initiative.

The opportunity to co-create contributed to enhancing CBO understanding and ownership of MEL and built their confidence in conducting MEL activities. One representative points out, "Because we designed the tool together ... it was really easy for us to understand it." Another partner mentions that the process "enabled us to see our importance in the project. It brought us on board and gave us the chance to make decisions". Another states that in the future: "We will be able to advocate for a space to be able to work in a similar conducive environment, where we are able to co-create with the partners."

While we supported our partners in their learning, we did not want to impose our own learning agenda on them. As such, we took responsibility for collecting the data related to our own MEL needs and writing up our own reports. This meant that we received relevant information from our partners, enhanced our understanding of their work and its significance, and were able to streamline the process for all involved.

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[11] Concepts and terms such as "objective", "outcome", "output", "impact", "result", "theory of change", "result framework", and "indicator" touch upon similar elements, making it difficult to distinguish their specific meaning. Sometimes, they are also used differently by different institutions, which adds to the confusion. In addition, these concepts and terms can be difficult to translate into other languages, further challenging understanding.

Third, we brought co-creation into the workshops we organised for our partners. The workshops we organised responded to requests from the CBOs, which they formulated during the capacity assessment process. For the last workshop, and having gathered input from the CBOs throughout the initiative, we identified several topics and asked them to vote on those they wanted covered.[12] This proved both straightforward for LPI and beneficial for the CBOs. During this workshop, we also invited a youth leader from the broader LPI network to facilitate a session on fundraising, including at the community level, for our partners. This session (which we facilitated but did not design) proved extremely beneficial to our partners. It highlighted the importance of having people with the right experience and skills in the room to ensure the opportunities we provide meet the needs of our partners.

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[12] Through an online voting link that we shared with our partners in our Whatsapp group, we proposed sessions on the following topics: advocacy, conflict sensitivity, financial management, fundraising, learning, and reflection. We also included an "other" option if partners were interested in any other topic. They rate the options as follows in order of importance or relevance: 1) financial management; 2) learning and reflection; 3) conflict sensitivity; 4) fundraising; and 5) advocacy. No other suggestions were made over the course of the micro-grant initiative. We responded by organising a three-day workshop around the top four topics. We did not include advocacy because the LPI Kenya programme was planning an advocacy workshop for other partners, to which they invited CBO representatives participating in the micro- grant initiative.

06

Providing responsive, tailored, in-depth, and continuous accompaniment to the CBOs

Through the capacity assessment and our ongoing engagement with the CBOs, we invited them to tell us how we could support them. We also found creative ways to solicit inputs from the CBOs, such as by asking them to vote on the topics they wanted covered during our closing workshop. This meant that throughout the initiative we provided a wide range of support, including: proposal development, financial management, MEL, resource mobilisation and community fundraising, networking, team building, advocacy, and conflict sensitivity. We also found ways to support our partners outside the framework of this micro-grant initiative. For instance, CBO representatives joined an advocacy training organised by the LPI Kenya Country Programme as part of a different project. Similarly, at their request and several months after the micro-grant initiative ended, we organised a **Knowledge Café event** during which we brought CBO and donor representatives together to discuss their respective experiences in accessing, managing, and distributing funds.

To provide such flexible and responsive support, we ensured that we had the appropriate human and financial resources. In many cases, this also meant accommodating work schedules outside of the typical working hours of 9 AM to 5 PM. Many CBO leaders have diverse, often voluntary, community engagements, which required us to be understanding and accommodating of their schedules and flexible with ours. Finally, from the very beginning, we were also clear about what we were unable to or could not provide, such as additional funding.

Why did we do this?

We wanted to provide our partners with the best possible support to ensure they could efficiently carry out their work, both in the context of this specific initiative and beyond. In doing so, we moved away from seeing our partners as passive recipients of support, recognising them as active and trusted members of an equitable and collaborative partnership.

What came out of it?

The CBOs express appreciation for the availability, responsive, and continuous support they received from LPI. They particularly value the support they received in proposal development, financial management, MEL, and relationship and team building. They also note how this would benefit them, from an individual and organisational standpoint, over the long term. For instance, one CBO representative notes that the training on financial management:

...strengthened our capacity with financial policies - most of the time we didn't have them, declarations of expenditure - we used to spend but didn't declare, write, or document, financial reports - LPI strengthened our capacity for reporting and helped us to come up with a template for our financial reports, the very serious issues of fraud and corruption - we learned of the importance of keeping and filing receipts, ensuring they are genuine, in preparation for audits, procurement processes.
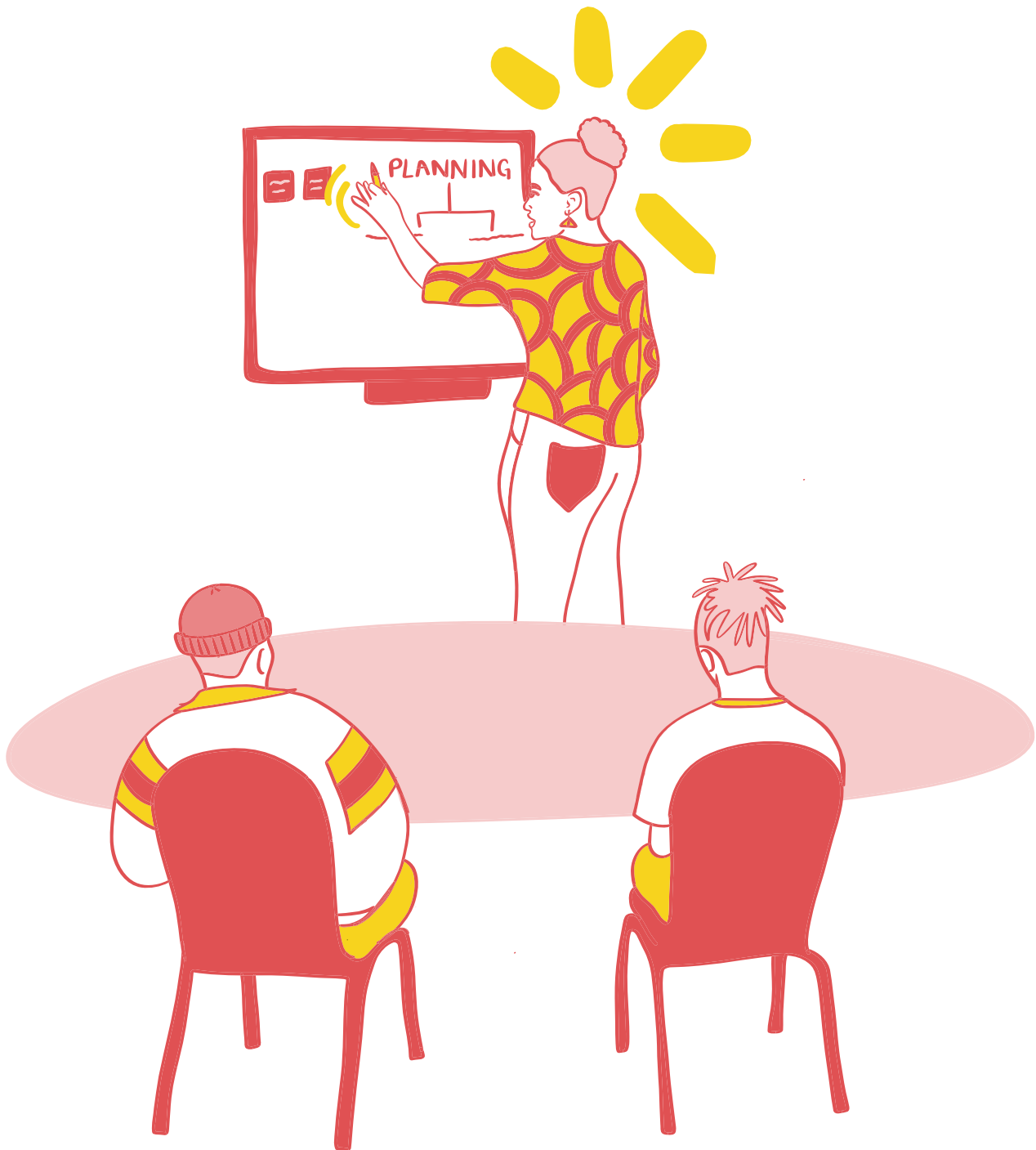
07 Creating opportunities for horizontal learning

We treated the CBOs as a cohort and created opportunities for their representatives to connect, build relationships, provide peer-to-peer feedback, and work together. For instance, the CBOs all had opportunities to provide feedback on the project proposals of the other cohort members and to jointly reflect on the impacts and challenges they encountered while implementing their initiatives. Our invitation to a youth leader from the broader LPI network to speak to the CBOs about community fundraising also factors into the horizontal learning equation.

Opportunities for horizontal learning

Why did we do this?

Creating opportunities for horizontal learning allowed us to value the knowledge and experiences of our partners. It also reflects our understanding that peer-to-peer engagement can be one of the most powerful tools for learning and relationship building. Notably, through our consultations with other organisations providing local funding through sub-grants, we learned that a cohort approach with intentional peer-to-peer learning can create sustainable secondary effects, whereby relationships last well beyond the project period. We also wanted to demonstrate that we, as an intermediary organisation, can create spaces for our partners, without taking up space. This contrasts with more traditional spaces where local actors often have little influence over the focus and manner in which processes unfold.

What came out of it?

We saw that through peer-to-peer engagement, the CBOs learned about the similar and different challenges that they face. They also learned about the different approaches and strategies that they have tested and adopted to address these challenges. In turn, they borrowed ideas from and inspired one another, they built relationships, and strengthened their networks. Several CBOs reported that they continued to work collaboratively beyond their LPI funded projects. They also grew in confidence as they advised and supported one another. One partner explains:

It was nice to listen to how people are solving their problems, mitigating some of the challenges they were running into. ... The opportunity to come together to share what you did, what worked well, what did not work well... It was inspiring to learn what other people had done. It builds us as individuals and as organisations.

As such, we believe that this approach went a long way in creating a space where all of the organisations felt valued. In what they describe as a space that is usually competitive, they were also able to work together and see the value of collaboration and partnership.

08 Communicating intentionally

Throughout the process, we adapted our language by explaining and defining terms, and removing unnecessary jargon in the call for proposals.[13] We spoke the language of our partners by communicating in English, Swahili, or Sheng.[14] We also made efforts to connect specific content (such as MEL) to the work of the CBOs and the lives of the people who participated in and benefited from the micro-grant initiative. In addition, we used diverse communication channels to ensure that our partners could easily reach us. We provided regular supportive and constructive feedback, and verbally checked in through in-person meetings, audio recordings, and phone calls.

Why did we do this?

We believe that transparent and regular communication is key to building understanding and trust in any relationship. We also believe that partnerships need to be founded in trusting relationships to be successful. In a context where competition can contribute to siloed approaches and guarded and proprietary behaviour, we understand that genuinely transparent communication can contribute to collaboration and cooperation. We also understand that communication practices and needs can be different. Therefore, we tried to understand what worked for our partners and adapted our ways of working to meet them where they were.

What came out of it?

Our partners felt seen, heard, and understood. One partner sums up this way:

> "
>
> **We learned a lesson. If someone wants to help you, they will walk with you."**

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[13] Read more about our thinking on language and inclusion **here**.

[14] Sheng is an urban vernacular, which primarily combines English and Kiswahili, while also incorporating various Kenyan ethnic languages. It is widely spoken by young people in the informal settlements in Nairobi.

Ownership

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT OWNERSHIP AND IMPACT

In addition to the co-creation opportunities, our partners report that being trusted by LPI to design, deliver, and monitor their interventions contributed to their sense of ownership. In particular, they note the importance of being trusted to carry out their initiatives and to disburse and account for the funding they received.

This had several impacts on the work of the CBOs. First, partners indicated that being fully in charge of their initiatives gave them **confidence, legitimacy, and credibility when engaging with authorities and community representatives**. They note that their initiatives helped them be better known, understood, and respected in their communities, including by the local administration. For instance, one partner reports that a community member said: "You have grown as a community organisation. You are not just mobilisers. You are the ones who are taking care of our welfare." Another representative, whose initiative engaged young people in the community, shares: "They were amazed to see youth like them organised around a project and bringing impact in the community. So they were interested to turn up."

This sense of ownership reinforced CBO **abilities to mobilise, engage, and influence key stakeholders, thus strengthening the impact of their initiatives**. Notably:

- The **CBOs report that local authorities actively participated in their activities and engaged with community members whose voices are seldom heard in decision-making spaces**.[15] They engaged on various issues, including criminality, drug use, youth unemployment, garbage collection, access to education, access to health services, and the politicisation of public spaces in the context of the elections. Through this engagement, community members were able to access factual information about issues that were fuelling misinformation and could have led to conflict (for instance, around the use of specific plots of land). Local authorities were made aware of specific challenges that individuals were facing (such as irregular payments schools were demanding of parents). Some CBOs also provided information to community members about how to reach their local representatives. In one location, this led community leaders to set up an advocacy network group to coordinate their engagement with the local administration.

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[15] This includes the voices of young people, single mothers, people with disabilities, people directly associated with or indirectly connected to violent groups, and people working in the informal economy such as sex workers or boda boda (motorcycle) drivers.

- The **CBOs meaningfully engaged with young women and men in their communities, including about the importance of their participation in political, governance, and peace processes**. Ahead of the elections, some organisations facilitated discussions about the significance of voting and provided information to young women and men about how to vote. After this, they indicate that some young people who were not planning to vote decided to do so. Others carried banners promoting peace on the day of the elections. Following the elections, some CBOs encouraged acceptance of the results as a key ingredient to maintaining social cohesion, through dialogues and participatory theatre. In addition, many of the CBOs created safe spaces where young people came together and opened up about complex issues they deal with in their daily lives, such as unemployment, drug use, and gender-based violence. In these spaces, the CBOs also provided them with training and mentorship.
- Several CBOs also report being **contacted by community members and local authorities to help de-escalate and resolve family or community conflicts**.

The CBOs also share how this strong sense of ownership has contributed to their **growth**. Several organisations mention that having full ownership over their initiatives meant that they also had full **ownership over the lessons they learned through the initiatives**. In turn, they say they would be less likely to repeat mistakes and more likely to build on lessons learned. On a practical note, they also note how the opportunity to keep track of their activities and expenses (including through receipts, sign-in sheets, transport reimbursement forms, and banners) meant that they would be able to show their experience and capabilities to authorities and donors in the future and thus allow their organisations to grow.

Finally, our partners mention that having ownership over their initiatives fostered community ownership, which is critical to ensuring **their work can have sustainable impacts**. As one partner explains:

If we, who are part of the community ... can implement the project, the community members start identifying that project as coming from within the community. For example, when we were doing our activities, we heard people say

Another CBO representative elaborates:

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Hawa ni vijana wetu” **, meaning "These are our young people" who are doing the project.**

It is very important when communities own the initiatives that are being implemented in the community because of issues of sustainability. The moment a project is being funded by a donor that comes into the community, implements its project and goes, there is no sustainability. But when a project is being implemented by a grassroots organisation working in the same community, there is more community ownership. The community members embrace the project, and they can proceed even if the funding comes to an end.

Overall, these positive contributions highlight how these CBOs, by being deeply rooted at the community level and understanding local actors, needs, and opportunities, could operate efficiently and have concrete impacts, while operating on small budgets. It is easy to imagine what they could do if they received increased and flexible quality resourcing.

A way forward?

When LPI started this micro-grant initiative, we aimed to provide more flexible, relevant, and reliable resources to CBOs. We wanted to put our partner experiences, capacities, needs, and requests first by removing some of the challenges they typically face in accessing quality resourcing. In light of current donor trends that continue to signal commitments to localisation, but are also proving challenging to meet, we saw the opportunity to test approaches and learn about how an international NGO can play a valuable intermediary role as a way to advance quality resourcing.

Despite our best intentions, we were limited in what we could do as part of this initiative. We provided small sums of funding for a short period of time, which did not support organisational sustainability. We were unable to support movements or unregistered organisations. We did not have the funds to support a local advisory group that could have built more connections and facilitated mentorship and greater access to different spaces. We still had complicated contracts designed for larger organisations and more extensive projects. Some of these limitations were donor driven, others were due to Kenyan law, and many were a result of risk management procedures at LPI.

While aid agencies and philanthropic organisations attempt to distribute greater percentages of their budget to local organisations, we believe a role still remains for intermediaries. Their structures often put them in a better place to create and maintain relationships with CBOs, provide relevant training and support, and be more flexible. This means that to promote quality resourcing, organisations such as LPI should reflect on the space they occupy and the power they exercise in the aid sector. As part of this, they should be in conversation with donors and local organisations to agree on how they can better support their partners.

In the short and medium term, we all need to comprehend the roles different actors in the aid sector can play and how they can make positive and meaningful contributions to the localisation agenda. This is crucial to avoid a scenario in which localisation merely results in international organisations being replaced with large, capital-based NGOs with insufficient CBO engagement. Instead, community-driven organisations, which are critical actors in the civil society sphere, must be placed at the heart of the aid sector and supported with reliable, relevant, and accessible resources. In particular, intermediaries need to be mindful of how they establish partnerships, and both donors and local organisations should play active roles in fostering and ensuring high-quality intermediary relationships. Donors should also recognise the power that comes with distributing funds and increasingly involve those who are actively engaged in the context in funding decisions.

As we move forward and build on this learning, LPI continues to pilot grant making that is more accessible and participatory in various conflict systems. We are designing sub-granting mechanisms that consider the power dynamics in our partnerships and in the contexts in which we operate to better support our partners and ensure they access quality resources. LPI is also convening dialogues, **bringing together donors, intermediaries, and local organisations**, to foster collaboration and shared objectives, and constructively discuss critical topics such as power dynamics, risk and liability, diversification, and flexibility.

Ultimately, our commitment to learning and sharing lessons from our work is aimed at making meaningful contributions to the broader conversations about **localisation**, enhancing **dignity** within the aid sector, and fostering **more equitable and collaborative partnerships**.