

# PILOTING THE SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP FUND

LESSONS AND INSIGHTS FROM KENYA  
AND UGANDA

**Summary evaluation report**

January 2024



An evaluation led by the African Institute for Children Studies and commissioned by the Freedom Fund. This summary report was prepared by the Freedom Fund.

Front cover image: Participants at the two day Survivor Leadership Fund convening in Nairobi of all seven survivor-led frontline organisations that received a grant in the East Africa round of the fund.  
*Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund*

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## ACRONYMS

AICS	African Institute for Children Studies
IDI	In-depth interview
KII	Key informant interview
PBS	Polling booth survey
SLF	Survivor Leadership Fund

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF), initiated by the Freedom Fund, is a pioneering initiative developed to support survivor-led organisations tackling modern slavery. Launched in 2021, the SLF provides unrestricted grants, allowing flexibility in fund utilisation to enhance organisational capabilities and amplify impact.

An external evaluation was conducted by the African Institute for Children Studies (AICS) during 2022-2023 with the primary aim of assessing the impact of the SLF on the seven survivor-led organisations in Kenya and Uganda that were selected for the inaugural pilot round of the SLF. The study adopted mixed methods design and included qualitative methods such as key informant interviews (KIIs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) and quantitative data collection through Polling Booth Surveys (PBS). Sixty-eight stakeholders linked to the grantee organisations participated, providing insights into decision-making processes, programmatic impacts, advantages, obstacles and potential areas for improvement.

## KEY FINDINGS:

1

**Application and selection process:** Grantees appreciated the accessible SLF application process, citing ease, manageability and reduced bureaucracy. However, some had concerns about transparency in the selection process, indicating a need for clearer communication on criteria and decision making.

2

**Decision making and stakeholder involvement:** Stakeholders, including survivors, felt they were involved in the decision-making processes of SLF-funded projects. While PBS data showed increased engagement potential in an unrestricted funding model like that of the SLF, the scale and impact of stakeholder consultations, especially with survivors, require further documentation.

3

**Use and implementation of the grant:** Grantees used SLF funds for a diverse range of purposes, including infrastructure development, capacity building, innovation, program expansion and emergency and rehabilitative support. Additionally, findings showed an acknowledgement by the grantees on the SLF's critical role in funding initiatives that would not otherwise be funded.

4

**Monitoring and reporting systems:** Grantees valued the SLF's adaptable monitoring and reporting approaches but emphasised the need for clearer reporting guidance. Balancing accountability with flexibility emerged as a theme, with some grantees expressing a lack of technical know-how to present reports effectively.

5

**Power sharing between SLF/donors and grantees:** Findings indicated that a significant proportion of stakeholders believed their organisations had more power within their SLF relationship than with other sources of funding. Grantees reported concerns about power imbalances beyond the SLF, emphasising the need to promote more equitable donor-grantee relationships.

The SLF's trust-based approach and unrestricted funding model have positively impacted survivor-led organisations, fostering a more balanced relationship between donors and grantees. While this evaluation highlights successes, including increased agency and programmatic impact, it also identifies areas for improvement, such as enhancing transparency in the selection process and providing clearer reporting guidance. These insights aim to inform future funding strategies, ensuring the SLF continues to support an anti-slavery movement led by lived experience.

# INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The Freedom Fund recognises its responsibility to not only support individuals who have experienced exploitation and oppression but also to support and uplift their leadership. It recognises the need for those with lived experience to take leadership positions within the movement to address the needs of those exploited and to provide lasting solutions to modern slavery.

The Survivor Leadership Fund is a pioneering initiative by the Freedom Fund that is aimed at shifting power and resources to survivor-led organisations working to end modern slavery. It provides unrestricted grants, allowing these organisations to use the funds as they see fit to enhance their capabilities and improve their impacts. Since its launch in 2021, the SLF has been rolled out in thirteen countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda.

Survivor-led organisations are uniquely positioned to offer expertise and leadership in combating the systems and practices that perpetuate modern slavery. However, organisations with survivors in key leadership roles are scarce, and their struggle to secure funding for sustainability and growth is evident. To overcome these challenges, the Freedom Fund introduced the SLF as a new, innovative and trust-based funding approach to support survivor-led organisations. This approach marks a significant step in re-establishing agency and shifting the power back to those most impacted, enabling them to take the lead in the global movement to end modern slavery.

The SLF adopts a trust-based approach to grant-making that seeks to minimise power disparities and barriers to funding for survivor-led organisations. The fund deliberately employs a straightforward application process and minimal reporting requirements, making it accessible for small-scale organisations and enabling it to distribute funding quickly and efficiently. All application materials are translated into organisations' local languages to facilitate their engagement in the application, selection and grant-making process. Each grantee receives up to US\$20,000 in unrestricted funds, which they can use as they see fit to support and grow their organisations or operations. The Freedom Fund asks only that grantees report after six months how they have spent or intend to spend the funds, in a format of their choice, including written or video reports.

During the inaugural pilot round of the SLF in 2021, seven survivor-led organisations were selected in Kenya and Uganda to receive unrestricted grants towards their important work to tackle modern slavery. Each of these selected organisations are led by women and have survivors among their staff and leadership. These organisations were selected from more than 150 applicants through an open and intentionally light-touch application and selection process. Each organisation received US\$15,000 to use as they saw fit to advance their work. The seven grantees are further described in Box 1.

During 2022-2023, AICS conducted an external evaluation of the SLF with these seven grantees in Kenya and Uganda. The primary objective of the evaluation was to examine the use, accessibility and impact of the fund, including exploring decision-making processes, assessing programmatic impacts, uncovering distinctive advantages and obstacles, and identifying potential areas for improvement from the grantees' perspectives. The evaluation aims to yield key insights to inform the future funding strategies of the SLF so that it can better serve the Freedom Fund's mission in supporting an anti-slavery movement led by lived experience.

## Box 1. Organisations involved in this evaluation of the Survivor Leadership Fund



### **AZADI KENYA** **Nairobi, Kenya**

Founded in 2021, Azadi provides long term support for survivors of trafficking through a resource center where they strengthen skills and pursue interests of their choosing.



### **FOUNDATION FOR INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT** **Lira, Northern Uganda**

Established in 2005, the organisation focuses on economic empowerment, microbusiness loans, financial literacy training for rural communities and survivors of child marriage.



### **POLYCOM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT** **Olympic Estate, Nairobi, Kenya**

Founded in 2004, the organisation facilitates various programs supporting survivors and women and girls with a focus on reproductive health, community engagement and by supporting mental and emotional health through the Talking Boxes project.



### **SET FREE TO THRIVE** **Nairobi, Kenya**

The organisation started in 2018 as Thrive Community and transitioned to its current name in 2020. It focuses on human trafficking prevention by raising awareness in schools, conducting grassroots workshops targeting members of the public, and performing assessments and rapid response for recent survivors.



### **SISARI WOMEN INITIATIVE GROUP** **Kakamega County, Kenya**

Established in 2011, it supports survivors of forced marriage by providing shelter, food and clothing, as well as by paying tuition fees and various education costs to return girls to school.



### **TUNAWEZA EMPOWERMENT ORGANIZATION** **Migori County, Kenya**

The organisation was founded in 2015 and it advocates for ending child violence and trafficking. It provides safe havens, psychosocial support and mentorship programs for survivors of human trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced labour and child marriage.



### **WOMEN PROMOTION CENTRE** **Nairobi County, Kenya**

The organisation was established in 2011 and registered in 2013. It provides integrated support for survivors that include economic empowerment through dressmaking and hair and beauty, as well as by providing additional resources towards education for children of survivors.

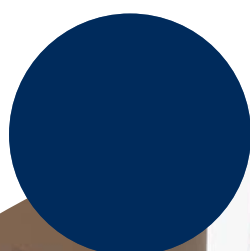
# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The evaluation employed a mixed-method study design, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. In total, 68 stakeholders provided feedback to inform this evaluation as described in Table 1. Thirteen KIIs were conducted with executive directors, program managers and board members from the seven grantee organisations and three IDIs were conducted with the representatives from trust-based funders and SLF team members to further corroborate the findings.

PBS was used to collect quantitative data; these were self-administered to help reduce social desirability bias. Seven PBS data collection workshops, one with each grantee, engaged 52 participants, including board members, staff and program participants. Quantitative data from the PBS were analysed using spreadsheets to generate frequencies and proportions. Qualitative data from interviews, recorded and transcribed in English, were coded and analysed using Atlas.ti software to identify themes aligned with the evaluation questions. A validation workshop with the grantees was held in October 2023 to seek feedback on the key findings. The methodology upheld various ethical considerations to ensure a fair and impartial evaluation, including the principles of anonymity and confidentiality.

**Table 1: Sample Size**

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	METHOD	SAMPLE SIZE
Grantee organisations, including executive directors, program managers and board members	Key informant interview (KII)	13
Grantee organisations, including board members, staff and program participants	Polling booth survey (PBS)	52
Trust-based funders	In-depth interview (IDI)	2
Freedom Fund SLF team member	In-depth interview (IDI)	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>68</b>



Harriet (left) and Christine (right) from Uganda-based organisation, Foundation for Integrated Rural Development (FIRD). Established in 2005, FIRD focuses on economic empowerment, microbusiness loans, financial literacy training for rural communities and survivors of child marriage. *Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/ The Freedom Fund*



# KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

## APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

During the key informant interviews, the grantees said they appreciated the accessibility of the SLF application process. Most learned about the funding opportunity through its dedicated website page, social media platforms, partners, networks, or alliances related to anti-trafficking and slavery efforts. Grantees found the application process relatively easy, manageable and less bureaucratic compared to other funders. They particularly highlighted the absence of an extensive due diligence process and documentation requirements, and they emphasised the real-time feedback provided by the SLF team. The easy access, time-efficient and simplified grant application process offered through the SLF resonates with the notion of inclusivity and transparency, and with that of reducing administrative burden on small, non-profit organisations within the anti-slavery movement (Humentum, 2022; Hunnik, O., De Wit, A., & Wiepking, P., 2021).



*...there's a lot of requirements that come with most funders. So, you'd be asked for audited reports, three years, or something. You'd be asked for so many documentations that you needed to submit. And then also you'd find with other funders, the process takes very long. So, there's a lot of back and forth with the due diligence and there's a lot of engagement... But with this, it was very straightforward. I mean, you just apply and yeah, the feedback was real time.*

**Respondent D10, Program Manager**



*I saw a call and I filled it [application]. It in fact, was just one sitting. I saw it...I filled it in and then I got my response, I think within two days.*

**Respondent D4, Executive Director**



On the selection process, however, some respondents voiced concerns about their lack of understanding of the selection criteria and the decision-making approach, where they noted that the process was not sufficiently clear, indicating a need for greater transparency in the Freedom Fund's interactions with the grantees during this period.

## DECISION MAKING AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

In the KIs, the grantees reported involving various stakeholders in their decision-making processes on how or where to use the SLF grants. Those who were consulted ranged from board members, senior management teams and program managers to program participants and external entities such as state agencies, healthcare providers, border units and community leaders.



*To spend the money we have the board, who definitely have oversight of the money, how money is coming in, who asks for what, where we are going to use the money...and then the program team... so the board and the program team are very key in deciding what we are going to do and how we use the funding internally.*

**Respondent D7, Executive Director**



The PBS showed (Figure 1) that a significant number of stakeholders (75 percent) were engaged in the planning and designing of project interventions within their organisations. A greater proportion of stakeholders (77 percent) indicated their participation in the decision-making process for the SLF grants when contrasted with their involvement in the typical allocation of resources (62 percent). This trend could suggest an increased potential for survivors to be consulted in the context of an unrestricted funding model. However, the evaluation was not able to document the scale and actual impact of



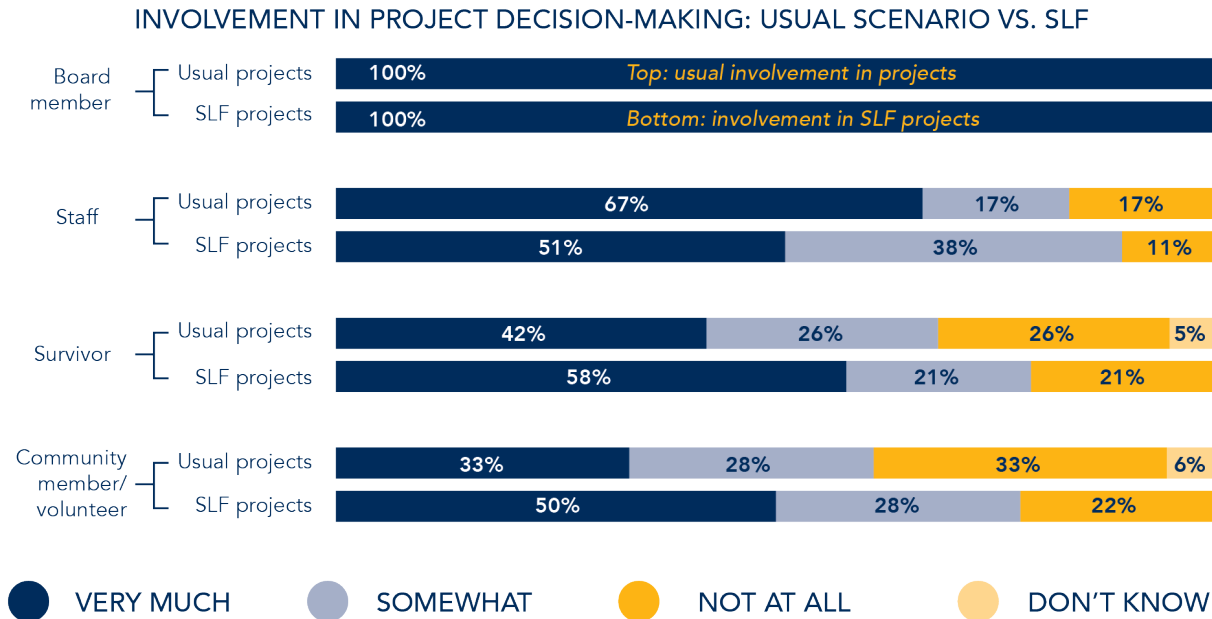
stakeholder consultations, particularly with survivors, in influencing decisions.

**Figure 1: Stakeholder involvement in decision making**



Similarly, data from the PBS (Figure 2) show the extent to which different stakeholders feel involved in project decision making. A comparison between the top and bottom bars indicates that survivors and community members/volunteers were significantly more engaged in making decisions for projects funded by the SLF than in other "typical" projects. A considerable majority (79 percent) of survivors reported feeling "very much" or "somehow" involved in decision making for SLF-funded projects, compared to 68 percent for standard projects. Likewise, 78 percent of community members/volunteers reported a sense of involvement in the decision-making process for SLF-funded activities, in contrast to 61 percent in "usual" projects.

**Figure 2: Involvement in decision making, by stakeholder type**



## USE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRANT

The evaluation findings indicate that most SLF grantees had not previously received unrestricted funding. They used the SLF funding to meet a range of organisational, community and survivor priorities. These include infrastructure development, capacity building, innovation, networking and cross-learning, program expansion, organisational improvement and emergency and rehabilitative support. For instance, one organisation used the grant towards providing digital literacy training to girls, which led to further results such as securing an onward grant and expanding their reach. Table 2 provides some examples of how the grantees used the SLF funds.



Faith from Azadi Kenya. Azadi provides long term support for survivors of trafficking through a resource centre where they strengthen skills and pursue interests of their choosing. Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund

**Table 2: Use of SLF grant**

CATEGORIES	EXAMPLES REPORTED BY INTERVIEWEES
Infrastructure development	Setting up resource centres, purchasing furniture and IT equipment, renovating office spaces
Capacity building	Offering capacity-building opportunities and training for staff and program participants
Innovation	Acquiring equipment like cameras and mobile phones for documentation and recording
Networking and cross learning	Attending survivor-led conferences, convenings, etc. to enhance shared learning and collaboration
Program expansion	Increasing the number of program participants, reaching more survivors, more support to community survivor groups, paying school fees for girls
Organisational improvement	Improving organisational systems like developing governance policy, hiring finance personnel, conducting board meetings, etc.
Emergency and rehabilitative support	Providing funds for relocating and procuring essential supplies for survivors and their children

“ *The Survivor Leadership Fund empowered us to do that which you could otherwise not do. Our capacity was improved and expanded. Like the ability to file cases for victims in court, to repatriate some victims to give legal aid, to reach out to more victims with our legal aid program, to lobby for policy change in exploitation of labour in the Middle East.*

**Respondent D5, Program Manager**

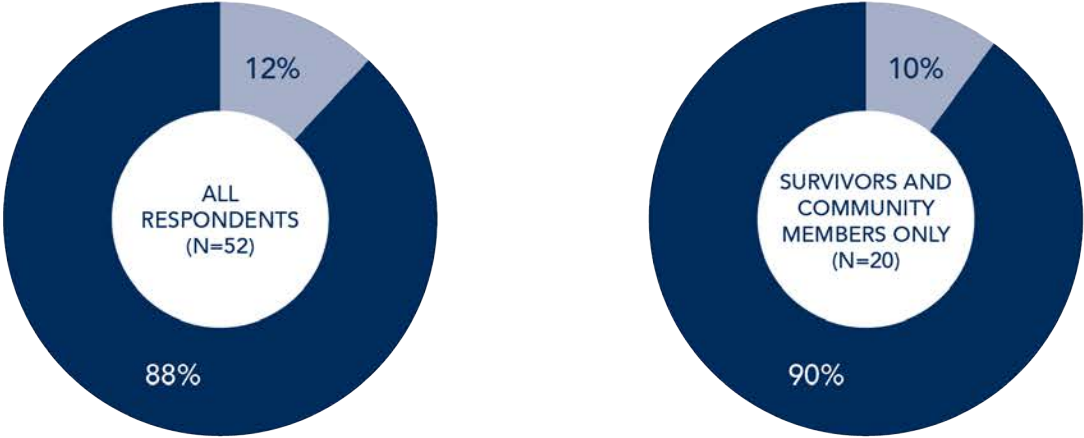
“ *We had never received major funding before SLF. With the unrestricted nature of SLF, meaning that the agreement was not cast on stone, we could do anything that supports the organisational development to individual capacity building, as well as community work and survivor leadership movement... we were also able to put other policies such as sexual harassment policies that we did not have... we did not have electricity connection and we bought solar panels. Therefore, due to the unrestricted nature of the SLF, we were able to do quite much.*

**Respondent D3, Executive Director**

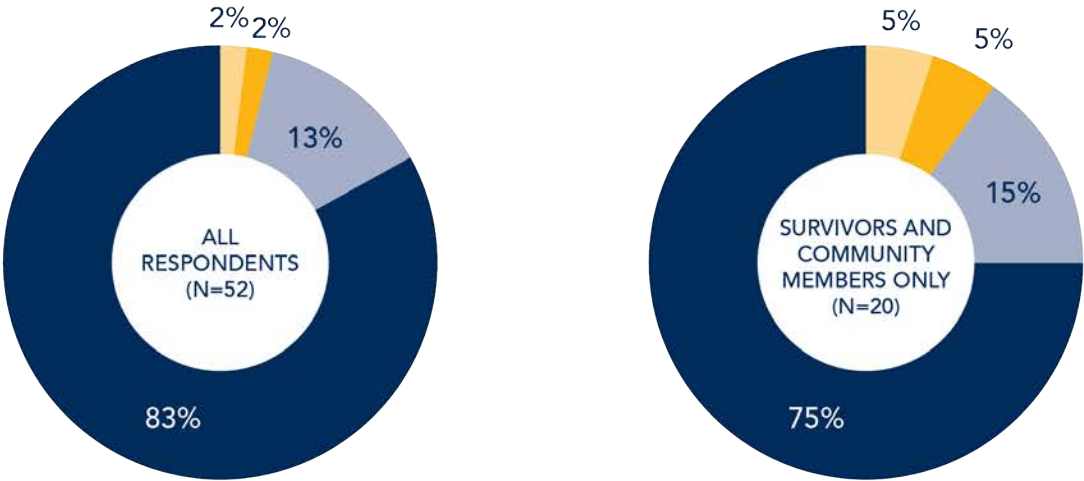
The majority of respondents claimed that allocating resources for these services and goods would have been challenging through their other funding structures and sources. According to data from the PBS (Figure 3), 83 percent of all respondents indicated that the grant supported them in expanding their organisation’s programs. Additionally, 88 percent perceived that the funds were appropriately used and 92 percent of respondents acknowledged that the SLF enabled them to fund initiatives that they wouldn’t have been able to pursue otherwise. These perceptions remain salient even when looking only at reports by survivors and community members.

**Figure 3: Implementation of SLF grant**

THE SLF GRANT WAS USED IN THE MOST APPROPRIATE WAY BY OUR ORGANISATION'S LEADERSHIP



THE SLF GRANT ALLOWED OUR ORGANISATION TO EXPAND ITS PROGRAMS



THE SLF GRANT ALLOWED OUR ORGANISATION TO FUND INITIATIVES THAT IT WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO INVEST IN WITHOUT IT



VERY MUCH
  SOMEWHAT
  NOT AT ALL
  DON'T KNOW

## MONITORING AND REPORTING SYSTEMS

During the interviews, grantees expressed appreciation for the SLF's adaptable monitoring and reporting approaches, which were seen to be clear and manageable, making the process more straightforward. They noted that the SLF refrained from imposing specific reporting templates but instead sought feedback through various flexible approaches, which they deemed beneficial.

*“ Being flexible in our reporting was good because if you give me a reporting template and it is so restricted, I can't pour out all my mind. It makes it very difficult for us to express things that we would want them [SLF] to learn. ”*

**Respondent D11, Program Manager**

Some grantees, however, emphasised the delicate balance between accountability and entrusting grantees in decision making and reporting outcomes. For example, all respondents voluntarily provided detailed written reports as a reflection of their sense of accountability for the funds received and their commitment to a sound, transparent approach to grant management. However, some expressed a lack of technical know-how to present reports effectively, especially in audio-visual formats, and proposed that the SLF offer clear reporting templates.

*“ When you make the accountability process difficult and, in a way, that's demeaning, that's the problem. But accountability is needed in any real relationship and that's the conversation that we had from the very beginning. That yes, we've received this money, but we are going to be accountable because we are responsible people with values, so it wasn't us going an extra mile. It was just us doing what needs to be done. ”*

**Respondent D3, Executive Director**

*“ ... And I don't know for us, maybe we're finding it a bit complex to do videos. But I think, reporting, it's just based on what you've been doing, you know, like a norm. We always used to do documents like a written report. So maybe that's why we decided to do that... Honestly, I feel like videos really tell stories well. But yeah, there's a lot of work in editing and trying to get it right. ”*

**Respondent D10, Program Manager**

While simpler monitoring and reporting processes offer flexibility, they may inhibit the ability to demonstrate impact. The need for the SLF to provide clearer guidance on reporting and offer technical support, when necessary, was thus emphasised.



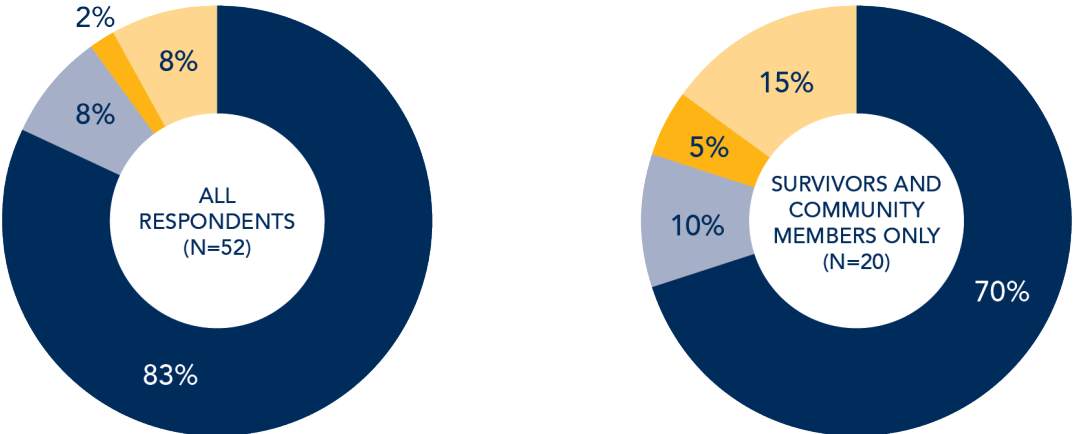
Mzito from Tunaweza Empowerment Organization. Tunaweza was founded in 2015 and it advocates for ending child violence and trafficking. It provides safe havens, psychosocial support and mentorship programs for survivors of human trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced labour and child marriage. Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund

# POWER SHARING BETWEEN SLF/DONORS AND GRANTEES

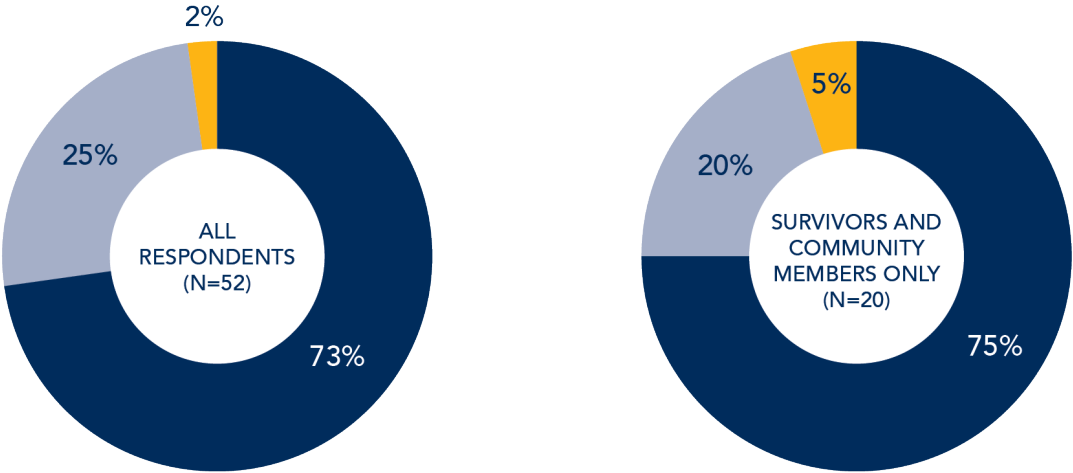
When asked on power sharing and power dynamics between the SLF (as a donor) and grantees, PBS data showed that a significant proportion (83 percent) of stakeholders believed that their organisation had more power and influence within the SLF relationship in comparison to other funders.

**Figure 4: Grantee power in SLF relationship**

OUR ORGANISATION HAD MORE POWER IN MAKING DECISIONS RELATED TO ALLOCATION OF SLF FUNDS, COMPARED TO OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING



THE SLF GRANT HELPED US FEEL MORE SECURE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF OUR ORGANISATION



- VERY MUCH
- SOMEWHAT
- NOT AT ALL
- DON'T KNOW

Insights from KIIs revealed more nuanced perspectives. Some grantees expressed a sense of power and heightened sense of agency as a result of their engagement with the SLF, while others raised wider concerns related to unequal power dynamics broadly within donor-grantee relationships. The SLF’s unique approach – centred on autonomy and unrestricted funds – resonated with many grantees. They felt that the SLF provided an opportunity to shift power dynamics and illustrate the value and viability of funding based on trust. This allowed them to make decisions that aligned with the distinct needs of their organisation and the communities they serve, thereby giving grantees greater control over resources and demonstrating that their expertise and know-how is valued and prioritised.



*... the fact that we were given funds unrestricted, ... it gives you more power and to me, it gives better results than restricted funds.*

**Respondent D4, Executive Director**



*... also, what's promising is that they [Freedom Fund] set a pace for other donors out there to learn from them on trust-based funding, because most donors do not trust organisations. Well, they think everybody they give money to is going to steal their money. But these guys [Freedom Fund] have piloted and tested and seen that actually the survivor-led organisations can be trusted.*

**Respondent D2, CEO**



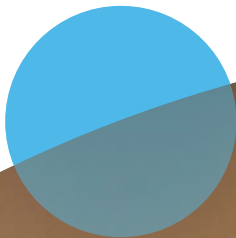
Grantees cited a number of good practices in their interactions with the SLF staff, including regular communication, engagement and flexibility as key contributing factors to a more balanced relationship between donors and grantees. They felt heard and thought they had influence on decision making, resulting in better outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

Some grantees voiced concerns about the perpetuation of power imbalances in donor-grantee relationships, extending beyond the SLF to a broader context. They expressed apprehensions about donors taking control and making unilateral decisions, at times without considering the long-term consequences of their funding decisions. The grantees argued for donors to share power and strive for more equitable peer relationships, shifting away from a paternalistic approach. They stressed the importance of achieving meaningful, sustainable outcomes. All of these perceptions - both positive and critical - among the SLF grantees mirror discussions on power dynamics in non profit funding and the need for more equitable donor-grantee relationships.



*The whole idea of sharing power is that you deem me worthy to actually have like a proper peer relationship then that's part of sharing power, and I don't think that most donors want to do that.*

**Respondent D3, Executive Director**

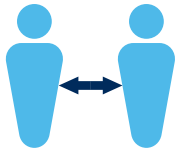


Antonia Musunga, Freedom Fund's Program Manager for Movement Building, attends the two day convening in Nairobi. Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund



## UNIQUE AND PROMISING ASPECTS OF THE SLF MODEL

Several unique and promising practices were identified by the grantees:



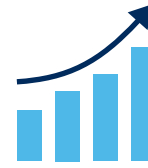
### POWER SHARING

Grantees felt empowered, valued and involved in decision-making processes, promoting respectful relationships with the donor.



### FOCUS ON SMALL ORGANISATIONS

The emphasis on small organisations that struggle to secure funding was viewed positively by grantees, encouraging inclusivity.



### SIMPLIFIED MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING STRUCTURES

Grantees valued the freedom to choose how to report and express their impact, emphasising quality over quantity.



### SUPPORT MOVEMENT BUILDING

The SLF supported movement building by connecting grantees and encouraging collaboration among organisations with complementary skills.



### SWIFT AND TIMELY RESPONSES

Quick response times offered by the SLF team throughout the grant process, from project proposal preparation to implementation, was appreciated. This responsiveness facilitated efficient project planning and adjustments when necessary.



### LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

The SLF team established avenues for grantees to connect with fellow survivors and organisations doing similar work. This was seen as promising by grantees, facilitating knowledge sharing and partnerships.



### EASE OF APPLICATION

Grantees found the application process straightforward and accessible, mostly due to social media promotion, enabling smaller organisations to easily access opportunities.



### DESIGNED FOR SURVIVOR-LED ORGANISATIONS

The SLF's sole focus on survivor-led organisations was appreciated as a unique aspect of the model, promoting inclusivity and survivor leadership.



### FLEXIBILITY IN GRANT MANAGEMENT

The SLF's flexibility encouraged grantees to address emerging needs and respond to emergencies, aligning with the dynamic nature of anti-modern slavery work.



Talisha from Women Promotion Centre, an organisation established in 2011 and registered in 2013. It provides integrated support for survivors that include economic empowerment through dressmaking and hair and beauty, as well as by providing additional resources towards education for children of survivors. Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund

“ It’s the kind of funding that anybody would love. A funding that is not restrictive, a funding that doesn’t have conditions, a funding that has a lot of flexibility in terms of usage but also a funding that is like ok, what do you want?  
**Respondent D7, Executive Director** ”

“ Just the emphasis of a survivor being at the heart of the program was also very good, because then, we got to see what impact decisions made by someone with a lived experience has on our activities and programs, which was exponentially very effective and also eye opening.  
**Respondent D5, Program Manager** ”

“ I learned so much from the process of other grantees ... they supported me to go to a conference in Rwanda for other survivors. It was a survivor-led conference and so the opportunity of being in that space and learning and meeting interacting with other members was amazing.  
**Respondent D7, Executive Director** ”

“ ... the birth of the survivor movement or support groups for survivors was actually an initiation that came into being because of the funding from SLF... as an organisation I can say that we have also contributed in terms of knowledge sharing...  
**Respondent D6, Executive Director** ”

Elizabeth (left) and Nasimiyu (right) from Polycom Development Project. Founded in 2004, the organisation facilitates various programs supporting survivors and women and girls with a focus on reproductive health, community engagement and by supporting mental and emotional health through the Talking Boxes project. *Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund*



## LIMITATIONS OF THE SLF MODEL

While there are many promising aspects of the SLF outlined in the previous section, grantees identified areas of limitation in the model. The quotes below illustrate some of the concerns expressed by interviewees.

Three main themes on the limitation of the SLF model emerged from the interviews:

- 1 Sustainability:** Many grantees noted that for small, nascent organisations, many for whom the SLF may be the only source of funding, the one-off grant's approach may increase funding uncertainties. Respondents claimed that they expanded their programs with the grant but would struggle to meet survivors' or community members' ongoing needs, and also to manage the expectations raised amongst survivors who benefited from the grant. Given that the SLF targets small organisations, a longer period of funding support was recommended.  
 *But the issues come when we are not able to sustain this because the funding was cut short. We thought probably there could be an extension but later on we were told that it was just a one-off. So, most of the things that we started like income generating activities for the survivor, a few of them are still moving on well but there are others that dropped.*  
**Respondent D6,  
Executive Director** 
- 2 Emphasis on accountability:** A few grantees felt that although the SLF had streamlined its application and due diligence procedures, accountability and the broader impact of SLF investments should not be compromised. Hence, a suggestion was to invest in long-term relationship building and in understanding an organisation's operations before funding so that some level of accountability could be maintained. According to the grantees, a minimum threshold for reporting among grantees could improve accountability.  
 *... I think they could implement a very easy reporting mechanism of finances like, let's say, a very easy to use excel sheet which could easily reflect the budgeting for the programs and also the expenditure of the funds on the organisational programs. I think that wouldn't be too hectic.*  
**Respondent D5,  
Program Manager** 
- 3 Light-touch monitoring and reporting:** Some grantees opined that the absence of established monitoring, evaluation and reporting standards could limit the SLF's ability to demonstrate effectiveness and impact. Moreover, the deliberately minimal reporting required by the SLF may run counter to the important aim of upskilling grantees so they can become ready to receive other donor funds.

The SLF has demonstrated several unique and promising practices that support survivor-led organisations and promote collaboration within the anti-modern slavery movement. However, addressing the limitations, such as sustainability challenges and the need for more structured monitoring and reporting, could enhance its overall impact and effectiveness.

# PROGRAMMATIC LESSONS LEARNT

The first round of grant-making for the SLF was a pilot, offering the Freedom Fund the opportunity to learn what worked and identify further adjustments that needed to be made for the SLF to be more relevant and effective. During this initial round, the grant criteria and processes were kept relatively open. Subsequently, and considering the large number of applications received, more specificity was added to guide applicants through the selection process and provide greater transparency in decision making. The maximum grant size was also increased – from US\$15,000 in the initial round to US\$20,000 in subsequent rounds – to reflect the “one-off” nature of the grant.

The findings of the evaluation on greater involvement of staff and survivors in decision making and use of the grant supports the conception of an unrestricted grant model that encourages autonomy and flexibility for grantees and their communities. This involvement was not mandated by the SLF but perhaps flowed from the sense of ownership and value for lived experience that the trust-based funding and grant-making promoted. At the same time, the Freedom Fund has continued to consider ways to make the SLF processes more participatory, including inviting previous grantees to inform the selection process, join selection panels, provide feedback on the SLF and share their learning with new grantees in virtual grantee briefing sessions.

Reflecting on the feedback from grantees, more information and guidance on the grant-making and reporting processes are now provided through routine communication, including the provision of reporting “questions” to guide but not restrict grantee reporting process. The Freedom Fund is also currently reviewing its monitoring and evaluation framework, to ensure that its impact (both positive and negative) is being adequately captured and understood without adding additional burden to grantees. To this end, a larger external evaluation is planned for 2024.

Following this pilot phase, the Freedom Fund reflected on the nature of the SLF as one of its many granting mechanisms – with the SLF developed as a distinctly “one-off” and “hands-off” grant-making model. This allows the SLF to be more scalable and transformative – requiring relatively fewer resources from the Freedom Fund to administer the SLF grants while also serving as a demonstration of trust-based principles that seeks to address the power imbalance between grantees and donors. However, some grantees have indicated that they value community building and collaboration and would like to remain connected with the Freedom Fund beyond the grant itself. Moving forward, the SLF intends to further leverage existing Freedom Fund resources to share opportunities, make connections, gather feedback and include grantees in broader Freedom Fund activities where appropriate.

Dianah from Sisari Women Initiative Group. Established in 2011, the organisation supports survivors of forced marriage by providing shelter, food and clothing, as well as by paying tuition fees and various education costs to return girls to school. Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evaluation of the Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) has revealed that its approach, emphasising flexibility, simplicity and agency, has positively impacted grantee organisations and survivors in their efforts to end modern slavery. Diverse outreach methods – an open and inclusive approach, a simplified application process, flexible and unrestricted fund usage, and stakeholder engagement – have all contributed to its success.

The adaptability in how SLF funds can be deployed embodies a fundamental principle of unrestricted funding: trusting organisations to define their priorities and distribute resources accordingly (The Stanford PACS, 2021). This mirrors the emerging trend within the philanthropic sector towards granting non-profit organisations greater independence and autonomy in resource allocation (Steele, L., 2021a). The SLF's onboarding procedure also underscores the importance of a multi-faceted outreach approach, simplified application procedures and the freedom in fund utilisation, which are all in line with established standards in unrestricted funding models. Similarly, the degree of stakeholder participation in deciding how grants are used aligns with current literature that highlights the significance of involving beneficiaries and communities in program design and evaluation (Steele, L., 2021b). Lastly, the positive impacts reported by the SLF grantees, which encompass increased agency, capacity building and programmatic influence, are consistent with the potential advantages of unrestricted funding model, which can result in a more comprehensive and sustained impact on organisations (Edwards, S., 2019).

The challenges identified relating to sustainability, accountability, and power dynamics, reflect broader and ongoing discussions about reshaping traditional donor-grantee relationships (Fairfield, K.D., & Wing, K.T., 2008). Greater balance between trust-based funding and accountability, and autonomy alongside transparency, could result in more positive outcomes for grantees. As SLF continues to expand and reach dozens more survivor-led organisations around the world, improvements will continue to be made in grant structure, decision-making processes, reporting, and support to grantees, to ensure the SLF is effectively supporting survivor-led organisations to carry out their important work.

Pauline from Set Free to Thrive, started in 2018 as Thrive Community and transitioned to its current name in 2020. It focuses on human trafficking prevention by raising awareness in schools, conducting grassroots workshops targeting members of the public, and performing assessments and rapid response for recent survivors. *Photo credit: Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund*



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# VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

# MISSION

Our mission is to mobilise the knowledge, capital and will needed to end slavery.

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