

CENTRING SURVIVORS' VOICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY

Learning from the past and shaping the
future of the Survivor Leadership Fund

JULY 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report presents the key findings from the Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) collective learning exercise led by Beatriz Sanz-Corella, Sandra Bustamante and Yoseph Endeshaw and conducted from April 2024 to January 2025. It seeks to encapsulate the insights gained through a journey of collective reflection and in-depth data collection. This work would not have been possible without the openness and generosity of members of the participating survivor-led organisations (SLOs) who shared their experiences and perspectives. We are deeply grateful to them, as their willingness to share has provided invaluable depth to our understanding. Sincere thanks also go to the dedicated SLF team – Antonia Musunga, Claire Falconer and Kehinde Ojo – as well as to Eva Jew, Varsha Gyawali, Yuki Lo and the Freedom Fund staff, whose steadfast support and commitment were critical to this work.

Through this journey, we have grown to appreciate even more the innovative nature of SLF. It stands as compelling proof that solutions to modern slavery can and should be driven by those with lived experience. This approach not only centres the voices of those who intimately understand the complexities of exploitation but also ensures that strategies are grounded in the realities of affected communities. We hope that the insights presented in this report will further strengthen, deepen and expand SLF's impact, supporting its vital work in the fight against modern slavery.

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Abbreviations

ACT	Alliance for Community Transformation
CA	Contribution analysis
CBO	Community-based organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
IDI	In-depth interview
LWH	Local Women's Handicrafts
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
R&D	Research and development
TBP	Trust-based philanthropy
ToC	Theory of Change
SLF	Survivor Leadership Fund
SLO	Survivor-led organisation
USD	United States Dollar
USIH	União Social dos Imigrantes Haitianos





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report presents the key findings of the Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) collective learning exercise. Conducted between March 2024 and January 2025, the evaluation sought to provide an evidence-based analysis of SLF's effectiveness and impact in advancing survivor-led anti-slavery initiatives while identifying areas for strategic refinement. The evaluation examined the Fund's grantmaking processes, funding model and overall impact through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods including surveys, interviews and field assessments. Findings highlight both SLF's achievements to date and opportunities to strengthen its long-term sustainability, efficiency and alignment with the broader objectives of the Freedom Fund.

SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP FUND'S ROLE AND IMPACT

Since launching in 2021, SLF has played a pivotal role in filling a critical funding gap by providing unrestricted financial support to survivor-led organisations (SLOs). At the time of the evaluation, SLF has supported 77 SLOs across 13 countries in East Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America,¹ with a target of reaching 300 SLOs by 2030.

Evidence from the evaluation found that SLF has been instrumental in advancing survivor leadership, enabling SLOs to develop and implement local solutions, strengthen organisational capacity and mobilise collective action against trafficking and exploitation.

SLF's flexible funding model was especially effective in reaching organisations traditionally excluded from mainstream donor funding, aligning with the Freedom Fund's commitment to supporting the "hard to reach." The evidence highlighted three key areas of impact:

- Enhanced organisational capacities, enabling SLOs to refine their strategies, programs and operations.
- Increased agency of individual survivor leaders, growing their skills and opportunities to drive change in their communities.
- Expansion of collective advocacy, strengthening joint efforts to engage communities, raise awareness and collaborate among SLOs. However, further support is needed to turn this momentum into policy impact.

Despite these achievements, the evaluation also identified structural limitations that challenged the sustainability of SLF's impact, particularly its one-off, short-term grant model. While effective as seed funding, the absence of follow-up support risked hindering long-term organisational growth and resilience.

¹ At the end of 2024, the number of SLOs supported by SLF since the beginning of the Fund was 118, operating in 15 different countries and having disbursed more than USD 2.32 million.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

SLF strengthened a diverse ecosystem of SLOs

SLF has supported a broad spectrum of organisations, including community-based groups, registered NGOs, unions and social enterprises – 70% of which are women-led. This has significantly increased diversity in anti-slavery movements by fostering a variety of strategies, operational models and survivor-led leadership structures.

SLF balanced inclusivity and mission alignment

SLF's flexible funding approach has been highly inclusive, supporting both emerging community-based groups and well-established organisations. However, refining funding criteria is necessary to ensure stronger alignment with SLF's mission while maintaining accessibility for the most marginalised groups.

SLF had a strong impact on organisational capacities

SLF has significantly strengthened SLOs' strategic vision, governance and programmatic reach – fostering innovation in some cases. However, sustainability remained a key concern, particularly for smaller organisations that continue to face resource constraints.

SLF had mixed results on strengthening collective voice

While SLF has enhanced collaboration among SLOs and deepened their engagement with communities affected by exploitation, involvement in policy advocacy has been limited. Especially for smaller organisations, capacity constraints and a lack of structured facilitation, particularly in non-hotspot countries,² were identified as barriers.

There was strong evidence of SLF's impact on individual agency

SLF has supported survivor leaders' agency, increasing their confidence, decision-making ability and leadership skills, especially in hotspot countries where the Freedom Fund's wider programs have complemented SLF efforts. However, for some organisations receiving external funding for the first time, the grant also surfaced underlying tensions between survivor leaders and other group members.

SLF stressed the critical non-financial support

Beyond funding, SLOs emphasised capacity building, mentorship and networking as priorities for enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability. In some hotspot countries, these forms of support were provided on an ad hoc basis by Freedom Fund local teams.

Sustainability and long-term impact require a partnership journey

The one-off funding model has limited long-term impact. Establishing a phased partnership journey with structured follow-up support could significantly improve the sustainability, growth and resilience of SLOs.

2 The Freedom Fund partners with frontline organisations and communities in slavery "hotspots" – geographic areas where there is a high incidence of modern slavery (<https://www.freedomfund.org/work/hotspots/>).

A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH

SLF has established itself as a pioneering model in survivor-led funding space, demonstrating how unrestricted, trust-based grants can drive meaningful change in anti-slavery movements. Its impact on community-based organisations, survivor leadership and collective agency is undeniable. However, as SLF scales towards its goal of supporting 300 SLOs by 2030, it must strategically refine its funding model within the Freedom Fund, improve grant making processes, ensure inclusivity and strengthen sustainability pathways. The next phase of SLF's journey presents a unique opportunity to build on its successes, deepen its impact and ensure the longevity of survivor-led efforts to end modern slavery. The following recommendations aim to support this evolution, ensuring that SLF remains a driving force for change in the years ahead.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP FUND'S IMPACT

1 Strengthen SLF's core mission and strategic alignment

- Maintain the core guiding principles of SLF – that is, unrestricted funding to survivor-led organisations – within the Freedom Fund's wider portfolio.
- Integrate SLF with wider the Freedom Fund programs and prioritise community-led organisations in hotspot countries to promote synergies and collaboration, and to enhance long-term impact.
- Take steps to mitigate competition between emerging and more established SLOs by preserving entry-level grants for newer organisations while scaling support for more mature ones.

2 Enhance non-financial support

- Foster networking and peer learning through regional convenings (such as the Convening Fund) and digital infrastructure to cultivate exchanges and collaboration between SLOs and other Freedom Fund partners. Funding mechanisms such as the Convening Fund could be used to this end.³
- Provide structured mentorship and guidance to SLOs, ensuring regular feedback and support.

3 Improve grantmaking processes and inclusivity

- Be more proactive in promoting SLF to less-visible SLOs and adapt the selection process to give in-country Freedom Fund teams a clearer and more direct role.
- Strengthen communication and transparency, continue to expand outreach to ensure an inclusive and diverse application pool, and aim to provide constructive feedback to help all applicants prepare for future opportunities.
- Invest in digital infrastructure to streamline grant tracking and reporting systems. Commit to providing timely, regular feedback to grantees to strengthen their operations, while also providing the Freedom Fund with more timely access to data for decision-making.

3 See: <https://www.freedomfund.org/work/movement-building/convening/>.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Freedom Fund recognises its critical responsibility not only to support individuals who have experienced exploitation and oppression but also to centre their voices and leadership in anti-slavery movements. Core to its mission is the understanding that those with lived experience are uniquely equipped to lead the fight against modern slavery. The leadership of people with lived experience brings unparalleled insights to address the needs of those who are being exploited, as well as survivors of exploitation, and provide expertise in tackling the systems and practices that allow modern slavery to persist.⁴

However, the current reality is that organisations with survivors in key leadership roles remain significantly underrepresented in the global anti-slavery movement.⁵ These organisations are generally poorly funded and often struggle to access core funding at levels that would enable them to establish themselves as impactful and sustainable. This perpetuates a cycle of dependency and prevents the emergence of more diverse and inclusive anti-slavery movements.

Against this backdrop, and in alignment with its vision, the Freedom Fund in 2021 launched the Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) as an initiative to direct power and resources to organisations led by survivors with lived experience of exploitation in human trafficking, bonded labour and forced marriage. By fostering leadership and shifting power to those most affected, SLF upholds the principle that meaningful, lasting change must be driven by survivors themselves.

4 Freedom Fund. (2024). *Survivor Leadership Fund: Investing in Survivor-Led Change*. Available at: <https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/10/slf-leaflet-2024-10.pdf>.

5 There is still limited public data on this, but from the Freedom Fund research through Freedom Rising in 2019, less than 10% of top layer management of the Freedom Fund's partners in hotspot countries were survivors of modern slavery. Source Survivor-Leadership-Fund-Application-Process-Materials-Funding-Frontline-Impact-September-2022 (Internal document).

The essence of SLF: A quick overview

SLF is a grant mechanism that provides one-time, unrestricted grants of up to USD 20,000⁶ to survivor-led organisations, enabling them to build their organisational capacity and expand their impact in alignment with their own priorities. These grants are allocated through a trust-based approach, characterised by a simple and accessible application process, minimal reporting requirements and no specific restrictions on how funds can be used (see Table 1).

Grantees can direct the funds toward any area of need, including program implementation, staff salaries, administrative costs and office infrastructure.⁷ The only formal reporting requirement is a simple progress update after six months, for which grantees may submit in any format – written, video or another medium of their choice – ensuring that reporting aligns with each organisation's context and capacity. This flexible structure reduces administrative burdens, facilitating SLOs' ability to prioritise their strategic needs and enhance their effectiveness.

Table 1: Key characteristics of SLF

Principles and components	
Amount and characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One time grant of up to USD 20,000.• Unrestricted funding (that is, SLOs choose where to direct the funds).
Eligibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisations that have one or more persons in a leadership position who have lived experience of exploitation are eligible to apply. Leadership positions can include directors, deputy directors, senior management and heads of department.
The application system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calls for proposals are regularly launched and circulated through local networks in each eligible country.• A dedicated page is available on the Freedom Fund website for the application process.• The application process is simplified compared to the usual Freedom Fund procedures. It consists of a basic Google form available in the local language and containing essential questions. Applicants can have access to support if needed, with contact information of support staff provided for any questions or assistance.
Due diligence and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SLF has a reduced due diligence system. It waives the usual Freedom Fund due diligence criteria for registered organisations, including the requirement to show two years of audited accounts. SLOs are instead required only to provide: (1) proof of registration, ongoing registration or intention to register, (2) evidence of an organisational bank account, (3) two references and (4) results of a social media background check.• For short-listed candidates, interviews are conducted with a panel including SLF staff at the global and country levels.
Reporting and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After six months, grantees must submit a short report describing where the funding went and how it supported their mission. SLOs are invited to tell their stories "using their own words" and in their chosen format: in writing, short video, a voice note or, if none of these is possible, via a conversation with relevant support staff from the Freedom Fund.
Non-financial support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In a limited number of cases, SLF and/or hotspot staff may provide ad-hoc support for movement-building and opportunities for grantees to discuss and collaborate.

6 The first seven grants awarded in 2021 were USD 15,000 each. This amount was later reviewed in 2022.

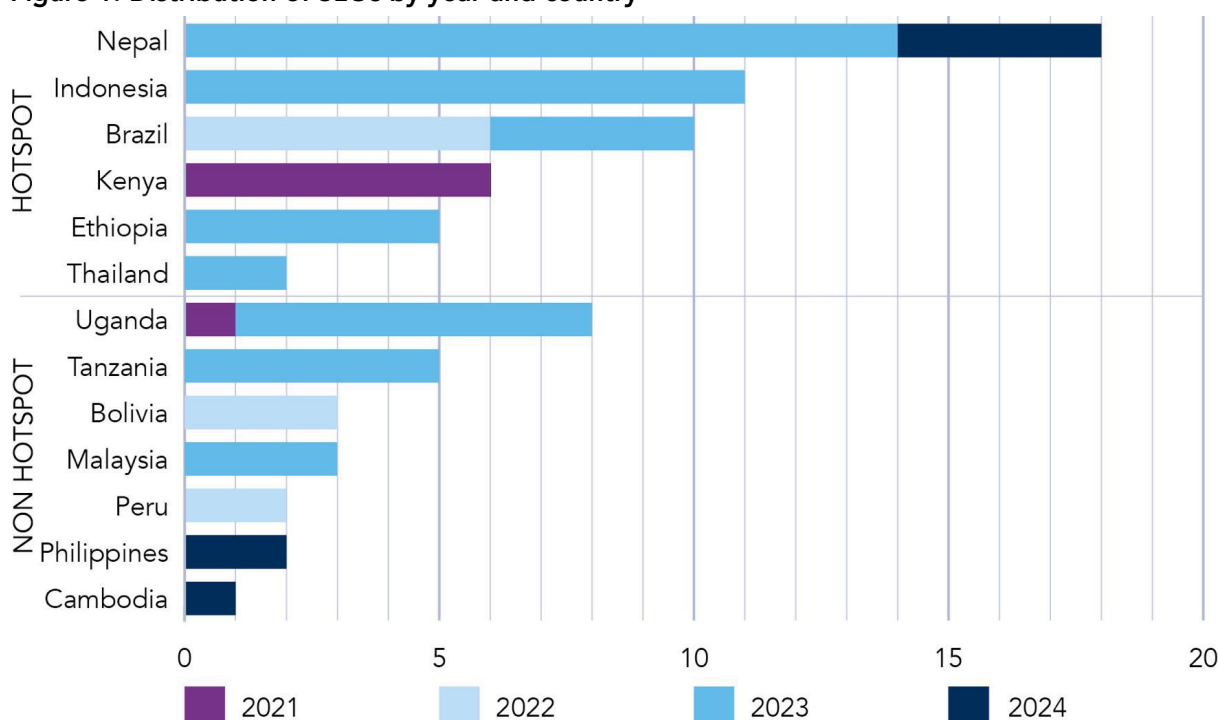
7 Freedom Fund. (2024). Survivor Leadership Fund: Investing in Survivor-Led Change. Available at: <https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/10/slf-leaflet-2024-10.pdf>.

SLF in numbers

In 2021, the first round of grantmaking took place, with seven grants of USD 15,000 each awarded to SLOs in Kenya and Uganda. A second round was launched in 2022 resulting in 30 new grants of USD 20,000 each to SLOs across East Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Following the Freedom Fund's commitment made in October 2022 at the Clinton Global Initiative to expand SLF by 2030 and support at least 300 SLOs,⁸ SLF achieved substantial growth, reaching at the time of the evaluation 77 SLOs across 13 countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda (see Figure 1). At the end of 2024, the number of SLOs that had been supported by SLF since the Fund's commencement was 118 – operating in 15 different countries⁹ and having disbursed more than USD 2.32 million.

Figure 1: Distribution of SLOs by year and country



1.2. EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

In 2024, the Freedom Fund launched an external evaluation to conduct an independent assessment of SLF. The evaluation's primary objective was to examine SLF impact and influence, focusing on its decision-making processes, programmatic outcomes and sustainability. Additionally, it sought to uncover the unique advantages and challenges faced by SLOs and identify potential areas for improvement from their perspectives.

Framed as a Collective Learning Exercise under the theme "*Learning from the Past, Shaping the Future*," the evaluation was envisioned as an opportunity to guide the Freedom Fund, SLOs, partners and the broader donor community in refining strategies and shaping future funding to SLOs. By combining reflective analysis with forward-looking insights, the evaluation was intended to inform programmatic decisions, enhance the impact of SLF and contribute to the global discourse on survivor-led funding models.

⁸ In October 2022, the Freedom Fund committed at the Clinton Global Initiative to expand the Survivor Leadership Fund to USD 10 million by 2030, aiming to invest in at least 300 survivor-led organisations globally. Along with an initial USD 1 million contribution from core funds, this commitment received support from the Stardust Fund and Walk Free, each pledging USD 1 million. Additionally, the Postcode Justice Trust contributed USD 250,000 in March 2023 (Progress Report – Survivor Leadership Fund, Freedom Fund, June 2023).

⁹ Since the evaluation, two additional countries – Nigeria and Liberia – have been included.



2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation spanned ten months and was conducted in three distinct phases (please see Annex 1). It was designed as a theory-based evaluation, drawing on the SLF Theory of Change (see Annex 2) and grounded in a conceptual framework developed by the evaluators (see Annex 3).

2.1. EVALUATION TOOLS

Data collection

The evaluation commenced in April 2024 with the development of an evaluation matrix, research protocol and a comprehensive desk review. The desk review analysed SLF program data, grantee reports and external studies, including evaluations conducted by other trust-based philanthropies (TBPs), to contextualise SLF's approach within broader funding trends. As part of this process, the evaluation team also conducted a benchmarking study on TBP to compare SLF's principles and practices with those of other leading institutions, assessing similarities, differentiating factors and areas for potential enhancement. Additionally, all 77 grantees were systematically characterised using a structured set of indicators.¹⁰ This profiling enabled a granular analysis of SLF's grantee base and served as the foundation for the sampling strategy used in the evaluation.

Between May and November 2024, the evaluation team implemented a multi-method data collection strategy with diverse stakeholders, including SLO leaders, program staff and volunteers, Freedom Fund staff, local authorities and other key actors. Table 2 provides an overview of the data collection tools used in the evaluation.

¹⁰ Including: country of operation, organisational type, annual budget and funding sources, year of establishment, focus and scope of activities, the representation of survivors and women in leadership roles and the number of staff and volunteers.

Table 2: Evaluation data collection tools

In-depth interviews (IDIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 online IDIs with SLO leaders across the 13 countries. • 15 in-person IDIs with SLO leaders (Brazil, Ethiopia and Indonesia). • 10 in-person IDIs with local key stakeholders (for example, authorities, other CSOs, etc.), in Brazil, Ethiopia and Indonesia). • 14 online IDIs with SLF and Freedom Fund staff (in hotspot countries and at headquarters). • 3 online IDIs with TBP institutions and resource persons.
Online survey¹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched via Survey Monkey, available in 5 languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Amharic and Nepali) and addressed at the 77 SLOs supported by SLF at the time of the evaluation. It was answered by 43 SLOs.
Focus group discussions (FGDs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 FGDs with SLO staff and volunteers and key local stakeholders in Brazil, Ethiopia and Indonesia.
Regional online workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 initial workshops to assess SLOs' interests. • 1 workshop with SLF and Freedom Fund staff to present the outcomes of Phase 1. • 6 Outcome Harvesting workshops with SLO leaders (organised by language). • 1 workshop with SLF and Freedom Fund staff and 3 regional validation workshops with SLO leaders (Africa, Asia and Latin America).
Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 interviews used to produce thematic videos showcasing 10 SLO leaders' testimonials (Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Nepal).
WhatsApp channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 WhatsApp channels (by region and language) to facilitate regular updates and ongoing group discussion among SLOs and with SLF.

Throughout the data collection process, the evaluation adhered to strict ethical standards, prioritising safeguards to protect participants. Importantly, the evaluation engaged solely with SLOs, excluding direct interaction with program participants, thereby respecting their privacy and dignity.

Data analysis and validation

For quantitative analysis, the evaluation employed descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, trends over time, etc.) to assess the reach and allocation of funding. To establish causal links between SLF interventions and observed outcomes (Table 2), the evaluation applied contribution analysis,¹²

11 Source: Survey of SLOs. The survey was designed to capture direct insights from SLOs regarding their scope, funding needs, operational challenges, and the specific impact of SLF support. The response rate of approximately 57% (43 out of 75 active SLOs) at the time of the evaluation reflected strong engagement from the SLO community, providing a robust sample for analysis. To enhance the reliability and depth of the findings, survey responses were triangulated with data from the onboarding forms that each SLO completed upon joining SLF and with information emerging from the in-depth interviews with SLO leaders. This triangulation process enabled evaluators to cross-check survey findings with structured onboarding data and qualitative information, reinforcing key insights, validating conclusions, and confirming emerging patterns.

12 Contribution analysis (CA) is an evaluation approach that is particularly well-suited to contexts where direct causal relationships are difficult to establish, such as with unrestricted funding. In the SLF evaluation, CA was used to capture both quantitative and qualitative – and often intangible – outcomes, offering insights into how different SLOs leveraged unrestricted funds. This approach highlighted the versatility and impact of such funding while also identifying the contextual factors and strategic choices that enhanced its effectiveness. By doing so, CA provided a nuanced understanding of how unrestricted funding contributed to organisational development, individual agency and collective action.

which clarified impact pathways. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic and iterative coding techniques, uncovering patterns, nuances and diverse perspectives from SLO representatives and stakeholders. Complementary methodologies further enriched the analysis. Outcome Harvesting and Outcome Mapping tracked and assessed changes driven by SLF funding, while appreciative inquiry highlighted the strengths and resilience of SLOs. The Most Significant Change technique captured transformative narratives through audiovisual tools emphasising SLO leaders' unique perspectives and the impact of SLF interventions.

To ensure participatory validation, four online validation workshops were conducted with Freedom Fund staff and SLO representatives from Asia, Africa and Latin America, allowing key stakeholders to reflect on and validate the evaluation findings.

2.2. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The evaluation was thorough and highly participatory, capturing valuable insights from a diverse range of stakeholders. While the process was comprehensive, certain factors influenced the scope and depth of the findings. One key consideration was attribution, as the flexibility of unrestricted funding made it difficult to isolate SLF's specific contributions from other factors influencing SLO achievements. Additionally, assessing long-term impacts, particularly for more recent grantees (2023 and 2024), was naturally limited, as many outcomes were still unfolding at the time of the evaluation.

The diverse ways in which grantees used SLF funds, tailoring them to their unique priorities and contexts, highlighted the Fund's adaptability but also introduced complexities in conducting direct comparative analysis. Furthermore, regional variations, such as differences in regulatory environments, organisational maturity and thematic focus areas, enriched the evaluation but also required a nuanced approach to understanding impact across contexts.



3. KEY FINDINGS

Finding 1: SLF had a key role in strengthening a diverse ecosystem of survivor-led organisations

The evaluation findings confirmed SLF's crucial role in fostering a diverse ecosystem of survivor-led organisations across the 13 countries where the Fund operated at the time of the evaluation. By supporting a broad spectrum of organisations, SLF enabled a range of approaches and strategies, with grantees differing in focus areas, organisational structures, levels of operational maturity and degrees of survivor engagement. This diversity aligned with SLF's core objective of strengthening survivor-led movements, ensuring that survivor leadership was supported not only at the community level but also within broader systemic change efforts. The evaluation further confirmed that by funding organisations at different stages of development and with varying operational scopes, SLF contributed to enhancing the overall capacity of survivor-led initiatives within anti-slavery movements.¹³ This approach was found to be directly linked to SLF's stated mission to create space and share power with survivor-led organisations in the global efforts to end modern slavery.¹⁴

Diverse organisational models: A multi-tiered landscape

The evaluation highlighted significant variation in the organisational models among SLF-supported SLOs (Figure 2). Community-based organisations (CBOs)¹⁵ constituted the largest segment (55%), aligning with SLF's core commitment to reaching "the hard to reach," as articulated in interviews with the Freedom Fund staff (see Figure 2). Evidence from the survey and in-depth interviews with SLO leaders further confirmed that these highly localised entities were deeply embedded within the survivor communities they served, allowing them to respond effectively to specific local needs and challenges.

Figure 2: SLO organisation models



13 Freedom Fund (2024). Survivor Leadership Fund: Investing in Survivor-Led Change. Available at: <https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/10/slf-leaflet-2024-10.pdf>.

14 Ibid.

15 For the purposes of this evaluation, community-based organisations (CBOs) were defined as nonprofit, localised groups that are deeply embedded within a specific community. Typically smaller than NGOs, they focus on addressing the immediate needs of local populations. CBOs are often rooted in community-driven efforts, relying heavily on local knowledge and participation. Their activities are generally confined to a particular community, prioritising issues that directly affect community members. These organisations tend to operate with less formalised structures and secure funding primarily from local sources, such as community donations. See: Aideyan, O.A. (2018). Community-Based Organizations. In: Farazmand, A. (eds) Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance. Springer, Cham. Available at: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_144.



Registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs)¹⁶ represented close to 30% of SLOs. Often operating at regional (for example, more than one location) or even national levels, these entities brought a broader scope and greater structural capacity to the SLF portfolio. Unions¹⁷ formed by workers across various sectors – including both formal and informal employment – accounted for nearly 10% of grantees and were primarily localised. Finally, less than 5% of the grantees were small, often localised, social enterprises. These were entities that leveraged business models and strategies to achieve philanthropic goals, reflecting SLF's commitment to innovative approaches that promote sustainability and impact in the fight against modern slavery.

The evaluation further revealed that nearly 50% of SLOs supported by SLF at the time of the evaluation were membership-based, including CBOs, unions, and associations registered as formal NGOs. As evidenced through the in-depth interviews conducted with SLO members, these organisations emphasised participatory governance, enabling members, often survivors, to shape programmatic direction. Conversely, the evaluation found that the remaining 50% of SLOs operated under service delivery models, where decision-making tended to be centralised. However, as interviews also indicated, this structure did not preclude survivors' engagement, as will be further analysed in this section.

16 The definition of an NGO can vary significantly from country to country, as it is typically a result of the legislation and regulations in place. For this analysis and building of the definition provided by UNDP, NGOs were defined by the evaluation team as formal nonprofit organisations with a local, national and/or global focus that aim to address issues across various sectors, including but not limited to social services, advocacy and human rights work under a nonprofit status. NGOs operate independently from the government and often seek to effect policy change and provide services and support where governmental provisions are lacking or enhance public welfare in ways that are not directly tied to government-run institutions. They generally have structured management and operational frameworks and receive funding from a variety of sources, including national and international donors, government grants, private donations and membership fees.

17 Unions, also known as labour unions or trade unions, were defined by the evaluation team as organisations formed by workers across various sectors, including both formal and informal employment, to collectively advocate for better working conditions, fair wages and other employment benefits. These organisations engage in negotiations with employers and other entities to improve workplace environments and ensure fair labour practices. In the context of informal workers or specific collectives – such as domestic workers, agricultural labourers or gig economy workers – unions often play a crucial role in bringing visibility and support to groups that may otherwise remain marginalised within labour markets. See: Brown, H.P. (1991). Trade Unions. In: Eatwell, J., Milgate, M., Newman, P. (eds) *The World of Economics*. The New Palgrave, Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21315-3_95.

Table 3: Examples of the different types of SLOs supported by SLF

CBO	<p><u>Alliance for Community Transformation (ACT) Uganda</u> is a registered community-based organisation dedicated to supporting girls and women who have experienced forced marriage and exploitation. Founded by committed community members with deep insight into local challenges, ACT's mission is to ensure the protection of girls and women from sexual violence and exploitation by leading strategic interventions that focus on both prevention and response. ACT achieves this through leadership, communication and advocacy training, equipping women and girls with the skills and knowledge needed to reclaim their agency. Additionally, ACT provides counselling, legal aid, healthcare and other essential services, ensuring survivors receive the comprehensive support necessary for healing and long-term stability.</p>
NGO	<p><u>The Whispering Willow</u> is a registered nonprofit organisation based in Northern Thailand and dedicated to supporting women and children through education, employment and restoration programs. The NGO advocates for the protection of women and children, working to break the cycle of gender-based exploitation through comprehensive and collaborative support. Through education and targeted support, it strives to inspire women to dream beyond their current circumstances, equipping them to become changemakers and leaders who advocate for greater opportunities for other women and children in their communities.</p>
Union	<p><u>União Social dos Imigrantes Haitianos (USIH)</u> in Brazil supports Haitian immigrants in their search for shelter, employment and dignified living conditions. The union helps with documentation regularisation, support for family reunification requests and guidance on navigating public administration processes. Additionally, USIH offers critical support to Haitians facing irregular work situations or conditions analogous to slavery, advocating for their rights and facilitating access to legal and social protection mechanisms.</p>
Social enterprise	<p><u>Local Women's Handicrafts (LWH)</u> in Nepal is a social enterprise and eco-conscious collective of women artisans committed to creating unique fashion and decor while fostering sustainable livelihoods. LWH's mission is to provide fair wages and educate artisans, offering a safe haven for women who have escaped exploitative practices in the textile industry and faced hardships in their communities.</p>



Women in leadership: Advancing gender equity in anti-slavery efforts

Women's leadership emerged as a defining feature of the SLOs supported by SLF. The evaluation confirmed that 75% of SLOs were led by women, underscoring SLF's critical role in fostering gender equity in leadership within anti-slavery movements. Even among organisations not directly led by women, the evaluation findings indicated that a significant proportion (about half of the remaining 25%) actively integrated intersectional gender-sensitive approaches into their work. These organisations deliberately designed interventions that addressed the distinct risks and challenges faced by different groups of women and girls, ensuring that programs were gender-inclusive and responsive to their specific needs.

Survivor leadership: Integrating lived experience into SLO governance and operations

In line with SLF's mission, as outlined in various strategic and communication documents,¹⁸ the integration of individuals with lived experiences of exploitation into organisational roles emerged as another defining characteristic of SLOs,¹⁹ as confirmed by the evaluation findings, though its application varied across organisations. The data revealed²⁰ that 66% of organisations were founded by survivors, 70% included survivors on their boards, 63% were managed by survivors and nearly 70% involved survivors in program teams and/or engaged survivors as part of their volunteer teams. These figures underscored a commitment across anti-slavery movements to embedding survivor perspectives across governance, management and programmatic roles, thereby enriching organisational strategies and interventions with firsthand experience and insight.

Beneficiary groups: Addressing the multifaceted nature of exploitation

The evaluation findings also highlighted the breadth and complexity of populations served by SLOs, reinforcing the multifaceted nature of exploitation and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities (see Figure 3).²¹

At the time of the evaluation, the largest segment of SLOs supported by SLF (35%) focused on serving workers, particularly domestic workers (mostly women), bonded labourers, migrant workers and sex workers. This reflected the entrenched vulnerabilities within labour sectors and the systemic risks of exploitation faced by these groups. Approximately 20% of organisations supported by SLF prioritised support to human trafficking survivors, with a strong focus on women and girls. These SLOs provided critical interventions, including rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration services. Other SLOs had a broader mandate, addressing exploitation of children, women, people from marginalised communities (for example, based on race or caste) and people with disability. The broad range of populations served by these SLOs signalled an acknowledgment of the compounded vulnerabilities and the need for specialised interventions.

18 See for instance, SurvivorLeadershipFundLeaflet_ENG_2024: "Why we set up this fund. The Freedom Fund believes we have a responsibility to support the leadership of those individuals who have experienced exploitation and oppression. We recognise that initiatives led by those with lived experience play a vital role in meeting the needs of victims and survivors of exploitation. Survivor-led organisations are also ideally placed to provide expertise and leadership in tackling the systems and practices that allow modern slavery to persist. That's why we have committed to support survivor leadership through the Survivor Leadership Fund. We hope that the Fund will be a catalyst to creating space and sharing power for survivor-led organisations in the global movement to end modern slavery."

19 According to SLF, eligible SLOs include organisations that have one or more persons in a leadership position who have lived experience of exploitation. Leadership positions can include directors, deputy directors, senior management and heads of department. See: Freedom Fund (2024). Survivor Leadership Fund: Investing in Survivor-Led Change. Available at: <https://www.freedomfund.org/app/uploads/2024/10/slf-leaflet-2024-10.pdf>.

20 The categories presented in this analysis are not mutually exclusive, acknowledging the multiple ways in which survivors contribute within organisations.

21 The data are drawn from survey responses. SLOs were asked to select all relevant categories, as many organisations work with multiple groups.

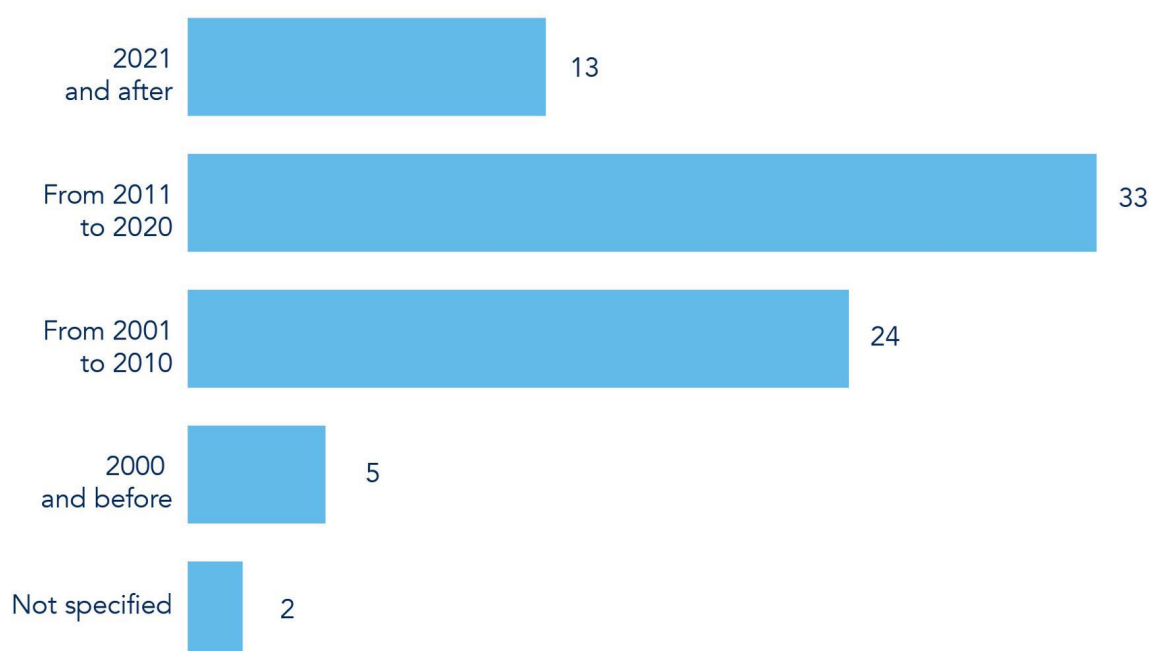
Fostering growth: Prioritising emerging SLOs

Another key aspect assessed by the evaluation was the year of establishment of SLOs (see Figure 4). The evaluation findings revealed a focus on newly established SLOs, with 43% of supported organisations founded between 2010 and 2020. These organisations had developed operational capabilities but were still in the growth phase, making funding – particularly unrestricted funding – crucial for their development and scaling efforts.

Further, the evaluation found that 17% of SLOs were established after 2020, indicating that SLF also invested in new entities, potentially filling gaps in the anti-trafficking landscape or introducing innovative approaches where preceding interventions had proven insufficient. All of these emerging initiatives were driven by survivors, reinforcing SLF's role in fostering survivor-led innovation and strengthening community responses to exploitation. This emphasis on supporting newer organisations reflected a strategy aimed at energising the field with fresh perspectives and adaptive solutions. While the evaluation found that SLOs established before 2000 represented a small proportion (5%) of the SLF portfolio, their inclusion nevertheless underscored SLF's recognition of the deep experience and long-term stability that more established groups contributed to the movements.

This blend of organisational ages was observed across most countries, with the exception of Ethiopia, where all SLOs were relatively new at the time of the evaluation. The coexistence of emerging and well-established SLOs within SLF's portfolio reflected a strategic balance between fostering innovation and leveraging institutional knowledge, reinforcing the Fund's commitment to strengthening survivor-led movements on multiple levels.

Figure 3: SLO year of establishment

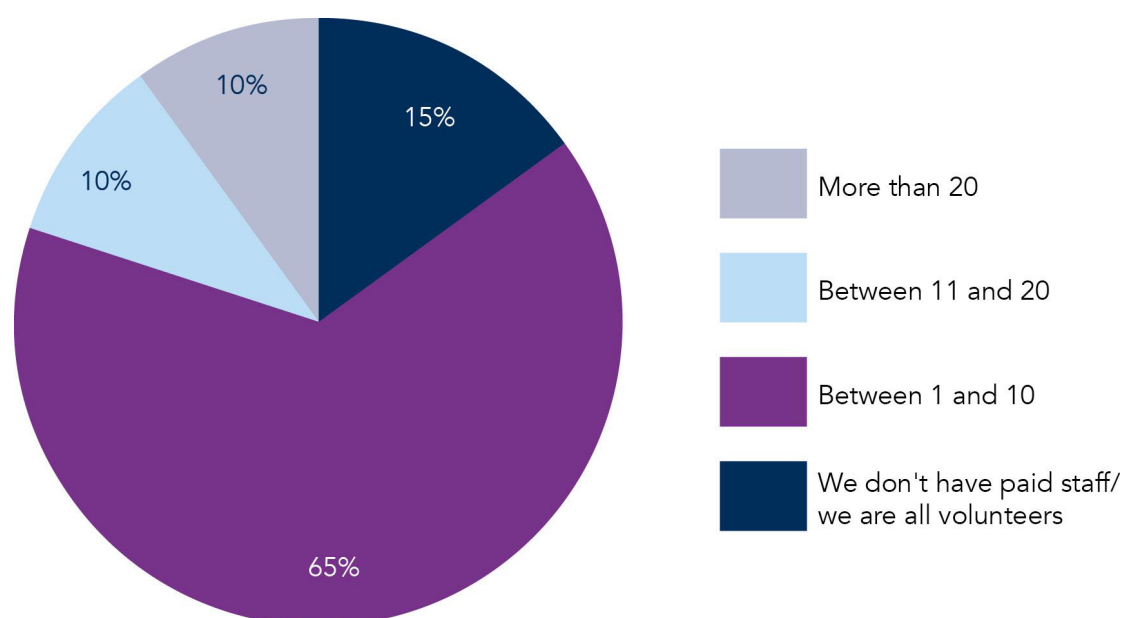


Scaling impact: Supporting organisations of varying capacities

The distribution of paid staff among SLOs provided valuable insights into their operational scale and capacity (see Figure 5). Through the survey, and later confirmed by in-depth interviews, the evaluation found that over 60% of SLOs operated with between one and ten paid staff members, and often fewer than five. This finding reinforced that a significant portion of SLF-funded organisations were relatively small, likely focusing on niche areas or specific local issues, enabling community-specific interventions.

However, the evaluation findings also highlighted notable diversity in workforce size across the grantee portfolio. Approximately 15% of organisations had no paid staff and relied entirely on volunteer efforts, further emphasising the community-led nature of some initiatives. In contrast, 10% of grantees employed more than 20 staff members, indicating a subset of larger, more established organisations with broader operational capacities. Additionally, another 10% of grantees had between 11 and 20 paid staff, representing mid-sized organisations that likely managed more complex programs and operated at regional or national levels.

Figure 4: SLO by paid staff size



Finding 2: Ensuring relevance – balancing inclusivity and mission alignment in SLO funding

Categories of SLOs supported by SLF

Through characterising the 77 SLF grantees, the evaluation identified four main categories of SLOs (see Table 4), reflecting their unique attributes, developmental stages and key challenges. While this typology risked oversimplifying the richness of the SLF portfolio, it provided a strategic framework for understanding the distinct needs and opportunities within each category. Additionally, it served as a foundation for assessing relevance – specifically, the mutual relevance between SLF and the SLOs it supports.

Table 4: Examples of SLOs supported by SLF

Categories	Description	Example
Group 1 Emerging SLOs that operate at the community level and addressing modern slavery	<p>Approximately 40% of SLF grantees covered at the time of the evaluation fell within this category. Most of these SLOs (80%) were women-led, often operating with fewer than five staff members or as entirely volunteer-run groups.</p> <p>Consultations with SLOs highlighted that survivor leaders played pivotal roles in both governance and daily operations. However, the evaluation findings also suggested that these SLOs often lacked the robust internal systems to meet donor requirements and therefore they were especially vulnerable regarding financial stability. The survey and information from their records confirmed that for nearly 95% of these SLOs, SLF was the primary or sole external funding source, covering up to around 75% of their budgets.</p>	<p>Shanti Foundation in Nepal is a community-based organisation established and operated by human trafficking survivors and women living with HIV. It aims to help others like them transform their grief and shame into courage and power so that other women and girls like them don't have to go through the circumstances they had to.</p>
Group 2 Emerging SLOs and SLOs operating at the community level and focusing on vulnerable communities prone to modern slavery	<p>Representing approximately 30% of SLF grantees at the time of the evaluation, these SLOs were also frequently women-led (75-80%) and often founded by survivors. They typically addressed the social determinants that contributed to vulnerability to modern slavery and their primary beneficiaries were women, children and marginalised groups in high-risk areas.</p> <p>The evaluation found that, like Group 1, these SLOs relied on SLF as their primary or sole external funding source, with SLF covering up to 75% of their budgets.</p>	<p>The Association for Termination of Female Genital Mutilation is a community-based organisation in Tanzania dedicated to eradicating female genital mutilation, child marriage, child trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence against women and children.</p>
Group 3 More established SLOs with a strong focus on modern slavery	<p>Representing about 15% of SLF grantees at the time of the evaluation, these SLOs were typically larger, registered NGOs with a strong track record in combating modern slavery. They often employed more than ten staff members and focused intensively on issues such as human trafficking, migration and bonded labour.</p> <p>The findings of the evaluation confirmed that nearly 100% of these NGOs integrated direct services for survivors with policy advocacy, survivor reintegration and/or preventive efforts. The evaluation also found that SLF funding generally covered less than 25% of their budgets (and sometimes even less than 10%). SLF funding was used mostly to innovate and pilot new projects that did not attract alternative, more restricted funding sources.</p>	<p>Yayasan Embun Pelangi is a foundation based in Indonesia that is dedicated to protecting women and children from sexual exploitation, violence and human trafficking. Established to combat the rising cases of HIV/AIDS in the region, the foundation offers support services including counselling, legal assistance and safe housing for those who are impacted.</p>
Group 4 More established SLOs working on broader community issues (not exclusively focused on modern slavery)	<p>Comprising about 15% of SLF grantees at the time of the evaluation, these well-established NGOs operated across multiple sectors, including poverty reduction, health and education.</p> <p>The evaluation found that while these SLOs integrated survivor support within their broader community outreach programs, they were not exclusively focused on modern slavery and had broader goals. SLF funding was used as supplementary support, generally contributing less than 25% of their overall budgets (and sometimes even less than 10%).</p>	<p>Polycom is a Pan-African feminist women-led organisation based in Kenya that was established in 2004 in response to the sexual violence and exploitation against girls in Kibera's informal settlement in Nairobi. They have since grown to implement programs beyond Nairobi county, working closely with schools, local education authorities and communities to improve the lives of adolescent girls and women.</p>



Assessing mutual relevance: The significance of SLF for SLOs and their alignment with SLF goals

The evaluation assessed SLF relevance through two key dimensions: the extent to which SLF was significant, and in some cases essential, for the operations and effectiveness of supported SLOs and the alignment between SLOs' missions and SLF's strategic objectives.

In line with the previous section, the evaluation found that SLF's diverse grantee base contributed to a dynamic and adaptable portfolio, encompassing both nascent community-based organisations and more established entities working to address modern slavery. The evaluation further established that this diversity strengthened SLF's overall impact²² by ensuring that interventions addressed the complex and evolving realities of modern slavery through a multi-faceted strategy. Smaller, community-based organisations contributed localised, survivor-led solutions, while more established entities engaged in broader advocacy, systemic reform and network-building. This combination expanded SLF's reach, allowing SLOs to tackle both immediate survivor needs and longer-term structural challenges.

However, a closer examination of mutual relevance – considering both SLF's significance to SLOs and SLOs' alignment with SLF's mission – revealed notable variations across different categories of grantees.

The evaluation found that emerging and community-based SLOs (Groups 1 and 2) were fully aligned with SLF's reason for existence while also being significantly more reliant on SLF funding. Survey responses and consultations with SLOs consistently highlighted that SLOs belonging to Groups 1 and 2 were almost entirely dependent on SLF funding, as they lacked the formal financial and administrative infrastructure necessary to access donor grants. As one Nepali SLO leader explained: *"We have several projects in the pipeline, but we are not certain as to whether we will get the funds. The only grant that we have up and running is SLF at the moment."* Similar concerns were echoed by an SLO leader in Ethiopia: *"Currently, we do not have any other funding sources besides SLF. Of course, there are some other organisations providing us with technical assistance, but not with funding."*

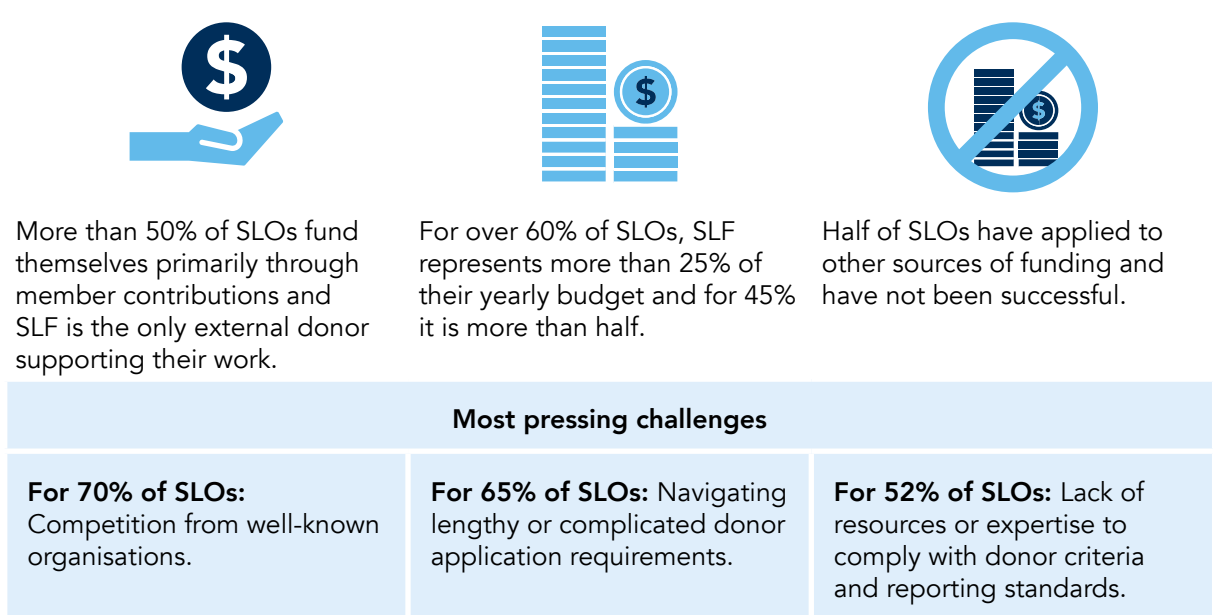
A key challenge identified, particularly by Groups 1 and 2, was the limited knowledge of the potential donor landscape, compounded by the administrative burden associated with conventional funding models, including proposal writing, complex reporting requirements and strict compliance measures.

²² The impact of SLF, assessed in relation to the three outcome areas of the conceptual framework – which further elaborates on SLF's ToC – is examined in Findings 3, 4 and 5.

As a Tanzanian SLO leader expressed: “Donor funding models are often very difficult, especially for those organisations working at the grassroots level.” This sentiment was echoed by an SLO leader in Peru: “We don’t really know who the potential donors are that we could approach, let alone have the resources necessary to prepare proposals that meet donor requirements.”

These factors were frequently cited as barriers to access, disproportionately disadvantageous to smaller, community-led groups that lacked dedicated staff or technical expertise to navigate donor processes (see Figure 6). As a result, larger, well-resourced organisations with greater experience in grant management continued to dominate competitive funding calls, while smaller, survivor-led initiatives struggled to secure financial sustainability. The evaluation further confirmed that the high cost of compliance, coupled with limited access to donor networks, exacerbated these structural challenges, reinforcing existing funding inequities. It also confirmed that this imbalance disproportionately affected survivor-led, community-based organisations in Groups 1 and 2, which, despite playing a critical role in frontline anti-slavery efforts, remained significantly underfunded and financially vulnerable compared to their more established counterparts.

Figure 5: Key insights from the survey²³ highlighting SLF relevance



By contrast, the evaluation found that more established SLOs (Groups 3 and 4) demonstrated greater financial resilience, often benefiting from diversified funding streams, longstanding donor relationships and structured operational frameworks. While findings from the evaluation (as elaborated in later sections) confirm that Group 3 organisations played an important role in Freedom Fund movement-building and advocacy,²⁴ the evaluation also found that these organisations had significantly greater access to funding sources, largely due to their established reputations, extensive networks and technical capacity to secure and manage complex grants. Many already benefitted from a wide range of local and international donor support, and had access to local and national key stakeholders, enabling them to engage in high-level policy advocacy, coalition-building and systemic change efforts.²⁵

23 The survey was oriented towards all SLF grantees (75 in total, as one SLO had dissolved and another had not yet received the grants when the evaluation began). It was completed by 43 SLOs, resulting in a 57% response rate. According to Babbie (2013), a response rate of 50% is considered adequate for analysis and reporting, 60% is good, and 70% is very good. See: Babbie, E. R. (2013). The Practice of Social Research (13th ed.), Wadsworth Publishing.

24 See the analysis under Finding 4 (assessing collective agency) for more information.

25 The case of three Nepali ex-hotspot partners further illustrates these funding dynamics. These organisations received SLF grants despite already having access to alternative funding sources within the Freedom Fund ecosystem as former hotspot partners.

Additionally, while Group 3 organisations were fully aligned with SLF’s objectives in combating modern slavery, the evaluation found that Group 4 organisations were less so. Their broader mandates, often encompassing poverty reduction and support for minority groups, indicated a slight misalignment in focus and strategic priorities between them and SLF.

The desk research conducted as part of the evaluation further confirmed deep-rooted disparities in how funding is allocated within modern slavery movements, particularly when considering donors beyond the Freedom Fund. These disparities were evident across multiple funding mechanisms, where community-based and survivor-led organisations continued to face significant barriers to access. For instance, the [United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Victims of Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children](#) was found to prioritise partnerships with well-established NGOs, thereby limiting direct access for community-based groups. Similarly, the [Global Fund to End Modern Slavery](#) was reported to be phasing out at the time of the evaluation, leaving a critical funding gap for long-term, survivor-led efforts. These structural inequities were further illustrated by the [Human Rights Funders Network](#) 2023 Trust Gap Report, which revealed that 99% of human rights funding is controlled by the global north and only 12% reaches the global south, where community-based anti-slavery efforts are most urgently needed.

Feedback from interviewed SLOs consistently reinforced the uniqueness of SLF in reaching community-based organisations that remained excluded from traditional funding mechanisms (see Table 5). As one Brazilian partner noted, *“The Freedom Fund played a crucial role in providing financial support to community leaders, something other funding institutions do not typically cover.”* Similarly, a Kenyan partner expressed appreciation: *“I would like to express my appreciation for the innovative approach of the SLF, which trusts and values community-led SLOs and shifts power to them.”*

Table 5: What makes SLF unique for community-based SLOs

Argument	Key justification
Addressing structural funding gaps	Traditional funders often favour well-established NGOs with formal financial structures, leaving community-based SLOs excluded from mainstream funding. SLF’s unrestricted funding uniquely fills this gap.
Maximising direct impact	Community-based SLOs are deeply embedded in local contexts, ensuring culturally relevant and sustainable, locally driven interventions.
Strengthening survivor leadership	Community-based SLOs are more likely to be survivor-led, enabling survivors to take leadership roles rather than being passive beneficiaries.
Ensuring equity in global funding	The majority of anti-slavery funding is controlled by the global north, while community-based organisations in the global south remain underfunded. Direct SLF support helps alleviate this imbalance.
Reducing bureaucratic barriers	Traditional funders often impose complex application and reporting requirements that smaller organisations cannot meet. SLF’s simplified processes increase accessibility.
Catalysing systemic change	Community-based SLOs play a critical role in advocacy at the local level, driving systemic change from the ground up.
Avoiding funding redundancies	More established SLOs (Groups 3 & 4) already have access to diversified funding sources, making SLF’s support less critical for their sustainability.

Finding 3: SLF had strong and widespread impact²⁶ on SLOs’ organisational capacities across all types and geographies (Outcome 1 of SLF Theory of Change)

The statistical contribution analysis conducted in the evaluation highlighted SLF’s significant impact on strengthening SLOs’ organisational capacities across all types and geographies. However, there were notable variations across different areas of support (see Table 6).

Table 6: Outcome 1 – Organisational Capacities:²⁷ Summary of quantitative findings

<p>Strongest impact</p> <p>Organisational vision and goal setting</p>	<p>61% of respondents rated SLF’s contribution as “substantial.” SLF funding was rated to be particularly effective in helping organisations define their strategic direction and align resources for long-term impact.</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.51</p>
<p>Moderate to high impact</p> <p>Program delivery and innovation</p>	<p>Program expansion: 46% of respondents rated SLF’s impact as “substantial.”</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.37</p> <p>Innovation to address unmet needs: 50% reported a “substantial” impact. SLF support was rated to be important to enable organisations to expand programs and develop innovative solutions.</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.35</p>
<p>Moderate impact</p> <p>Financial stability and internal systems</p>	<p>Financial stability: 60% rated SLF’s contribution as “moderate.”</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.13</p> <p>Internal systems: Responses were mixed. While the survey confirmed SLF’s role in enhancing financial resilience and internal processes, results indicated that additional investment were needed to establish more robust organisational and financial foundations.</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.12</p>
<p>Lowest impact</p> <p>Staff and volunteer recruitment and retention</p>	<p>Only 25% of respondents reported a “substantial” contribution.</p> <p>Overall rating: 2.02</p>

To validate and deepen the understanding of these quantitative findings, the evaluation triangulated the data with insights gained from the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and Outcome Harvesting workshops (see Figure 7).

26 A major focus of the evaluation was to assess the impact of SLF on supported SLOs. This assessment was conducted using the conceptual framework (See Annex 3) which elaborated SLF’s ToC (see Annex 2) and provided a structured approach to understanding its outcomes. The analysis was done using a dual-method impact assessment, integrating statistical analysis with qualitative contribution analysis (CA). This combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches ensured a comprehensive evaluation, capturing both measurable outcomes and nuanced insights into the factors driving SLF’s impact.

27 In the survey, SLOs were asked to rank the areas of impact related to organisational capacities based on the conceptual framework developed for the evaluation- using a four-point scale, where 1 indicated “no impact” and 4 indicated “substantial impact.” The statistical analysis presents the distribution of the 43 responses (out of 77 targeted SLOs) across this scale, allowing for comparison of perceived impact levels across different areas. This enables a nuanced understanding of where grantees felt the most and least significant changes occurred.

Figure 6: Improved organisation capacities as identified by SLOs in the Outcome Harvesting workshops



Outcome 1.1: Vision and strategic planning

The evaluation confirmed that the unrestricted nature of SLF funding granted SLOs the autonomy to allocate resources according to their strategic priorities, a key advantage frequently highlighted over restricted funding models. This flexibility and autonomy were reported to be instrumental in enabling SLOs to think strategically and creatively, fostering a stronger alignment with their missions to serve their communities more effectively. As an SLO leader in Indonesia expressed: *"The funding provided us with stability and credibility, which helped us strengthen our mission and expand our influence."* This sentiment was echoed by an SLO leader in Kenya: *"What makes SLF unique is their trust in our decision-making process, respecting our understanding of what our communities need the most."* The findings also confirmed that SLF funding was crucial for formalising and operationalising several SLOs, enabling them to evolve from informal community initiatives to structured organisations with policies, strategies and operational capabilities. As a grantee in Ethiopia expressed: *"Before the SLF, this was just an idea. SLF helped us to bring our organisation from being an idea into a reality."*

Outcome 1.2: Delivery and expansion of programs

The findings also corroborated a strong consensus across all SLO categories that SLF funding was instrumental in strengthening their capacities to deliver and expand programs. The unrestricted nature of the funding allowed organisations to make substantial investments in infrastructure, staffing and operational functionality, particularly benefiting Groups 1 and 2, which primarily relied on member contributions. Respondents reported using SLF funding to secure office spaces, acquire essential technology (including computers, communication tools and IT infrastructure), furnish

workspaces and establish venues to assist people who have been exploited. These foundational investments significantly enhanced SLOs' ability to deliver services efficiently and meet community needs in a more structured manner.

Moreover, the evaluation found that SLF funding increased the adaptability of SLOs, allowing them to respond dynamically to changing circumstances and emerging community needs. Unlike restricted funding, which typically earmarks resources for specific projects, SLF's flexible model enabled organisations to reallocate resources for crisis response, operational challenges or shifting priorities. A leader from a Tanzanian SLO emphasised this, stating: *"The SLF funding allowed us to redirect resources towards emerging priorities, such as crisis response or unforeseen operational challenges, something that is often not possible with restricted funding."* Also, several grantees reported reallocating funds during health crises and unexpected emergencies, ensuring that resources were available where they were most urgently needed. A Bolivian SLO further noted: *"The funds received from SLF were strategically allocated to develop a comprehensive human trafficking prevention program and establish community systems geared towards combating human trafficking."*

Outcome 1.3: Innovation to address unmet needs

The evaluation findings validated that SLF funding served as a powerful catalyst for innovation, particularly for more established SLOs in Groups 3 and 4, enabling them to pursue pioneering initiatives that might not have been supported by traditional donors. The unrestricted nature of SLF funding provided organisations with the freedom to develop and test novel interventions, particularly in economic resilience and survivor agency. Several grantees emphasised that SLF funding allowed them to explore creative approaches that were previously constrained by funding restrictions. A Ugandan grantee highlighted this stating: *"With the freedom that SLF provides, we were able to launch new projects that other funding wouldn't cover."* Further, the ability to invest in research and development (R&D) was a significant advantage for some SLOs. The evaluation confirmed that funding for R&D is rarely available, making SLF one of the few mechanisms enabling organisations to gather deeper insights into community needs, test intervention models and refine approaches for long-term impact. This process not only enhanced program effectiveness but also laid the groundwork for scaling successful models.

Outcome 1.4: Financial stability

While the evaluation confirmed that SLF funding supported organisational growth and resilience, financial stability was rated lower relative to other dimensions. SLOs, particularly in Groups 1 and 2, expressed appreciation for SLF's contribution to their operations but noted that achieving long-term financial security remains a challenge. A grantee from Nepal highlighted this: *"SLF funding allowed us to focus on strategic growth, expanding our team and planning for the long term, but maintaining financial stability remains challenging without further support."* The evaluation also found that some organisations successfully leveraged SLF funding to build financial reserves and diversify income sources, activities that are typically difficult under short-term, output-focused grants. However, financial resilience remained a structural challenge across movements, and the findings suggested that many SLOs continued to rely on short-term funding cycles.²⁸

Outcome 1.5: Strengthening internal systems

The evaluation provided evidence that SLF funding played a critical role in strengthening the internal systems of several SLOs, though this was cited less frequently compared to other areas. Several organisations reported using the funds to develop internal policies, improve management practices and enhance transparency – key factors in building a stable and accountable organisational foundation. A Brazilian organisation stated: *"We used part of the funds to reformulate our statute and update documentation, including an ethics plan, a code of ethics, a code of good practices and a manual of financial management practices. These steps were crucial in structuring the institution to better manage future projects and funding, ensuring transparency and accountability."* Similarly, a Ugandan SLO reported: *"We used the funding to develop policies that were lacking, such as a whistleblowing policy and a comprehensive human resource policy. Additionally, we now have a volunteer policy for survivors who would like to come and volunteer."*

28 The question of sustainability is further developed under Finding 7.

Outcome 1.6: Staff and volunteer development and retention

Finally, the evaluation found that SLF funding enabled several SLOs to invest in staff capacity building, training and retention, thereby strengthening their ability to manage projects and implement survivor-led initiatives effectively. A Ugandan SLO leader emphasised this impact stating, *“The SLF support allowed our staff to undergo leadership training, enhancing their ability to communicate and represent our mission.”*

For smaller organisations, particularly those in Groups 1 and 2, which often lacked access to training resources, SLF’s unrestricted funding proved particularly valuable in developing core competencies essential for long-term impact. Additionally, several SLOs reported using SLF funding to recruit and retain staff, a critical factor in ensuring organisational stability and sustainability. These investments not only improved daily operations but also contributed to the professionalisation of the emerging organisations, equipping them with the skills needed to enhance institutional resilience and expand their influence.

Finding 4: There was mixed evidence of impact on strengthening SLOs’ collective voice, with variations by size and hotspot presence (Outcome 2.1 of SLF Theory of Change)

The statistical contribution analysis highlighted SLF’s important role in enhancing collective agency among SLOs, with notable strengths in raising community awareness and fostering collaboration for collective advocacy. However, policy engagement with authorities emerged as an area requiring further support (see Table 7).

Table 7: Outcome 2.1 – Collective agency: Summary of quantitative findings

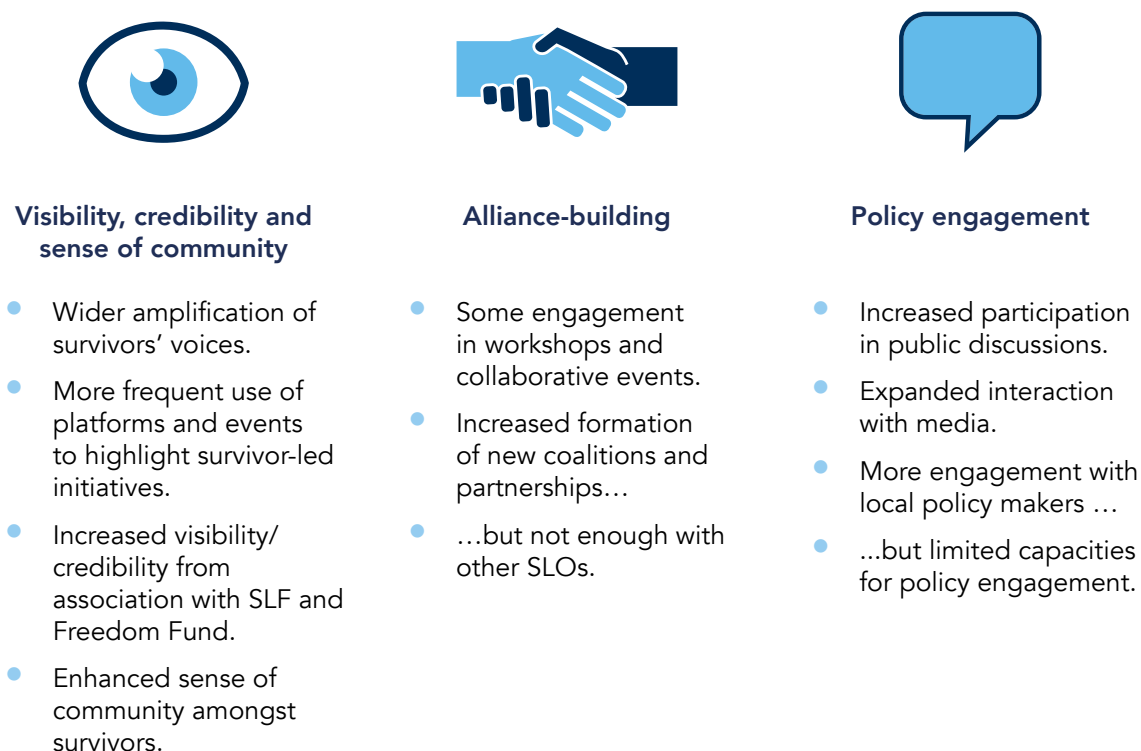
Strongest impact Community awareness	56% of respondents rated SLF’s impact as “substantial.” Overall rating: 2.46 SLF funding was rated effective in helping SLOs enhance their visibility and mobilise community support against modern slavery.
Moderate to high impact Networking and collective advocacy	50% of respondents rated SLF’s contribution as “substantial” and 40% as “moderate.” Overall rating: 2.38 SLF was rated as playing a key role in building alliances and enabling SLOs to engage in collective advocacy, strengthening collaboration across organisations.
Lowest impact Policy engagement with authorities	37% of respondents rated SLF’s contribution as “substantial.” Overall rating: 2.12 While SLF was reported to have contributed to progress in supporting policy engagement, additional efforts were needed to engage effectively with policymakers.

Similar to the findings for Outcome 1, the evaluation triangulated data with insights from direct engagement with SLO leaders, including through Outcome Harvesting workshops (see Figure 8). However, in this case, some disparities emerged, as the qualitative insights from engagement with SLOs provided a more nuanced assessment of impact, particularly in networking and policy engagement. Several key factors played a crucial role in shaping these nuances:

- **Organisational capacity:** Variations in SLOs' internal structures and resources influenced their ability to engage in policy advocacy and networking.
- **Access to hotspot support systems:** Presence in hotspot countries played an important role in enabling networking and engagement opportunities.
- **Contextual challenges:** External factors such as regulatory constraints, socio-political dynamics and funding limitations shaped the extent of policy engagement.

More specifically, larger SLOs with diversified funding sources (Groups 3 and 4) reported enhanced access to networks and policymakers, enabling them to engage more effectively in advocacy efforts. For most, this access already existed prior to receiving SLF funding. In contrast, smaller SLOs (Groups 1 and 2) reported challenges in accessing networks, particularly in non-hotspot areas. However, they noted that their affiliation with SLF and the Freedom Fund increased their visibility and credibility, both within their communities and among local decision-makers and key stakeholders. Additionally, with some exceptions (which will be further elaborated in the outcome area analysis that follows), SLOs reported limited knowledge of and contact with their SLO peers.

Figure 7: Collective agency insights from SLOs in Outcome Harvesting workshops



Outcome 2.1.1: Community awareness

The evaluation confirmed that SLF funding enabled SLOs to conduct widespread community outreach and awareness programs, significantly strengthening their efforts to foster understanding and support for anti-slavery initiatives. Across various regions, SLOs organised community forums and awareness campaigns, leading to shifts in community perceptions towards returnees and survivors. In several locations, SLOs collaborated with schools to establish anti-trafficking clubs and engaged with local stakeholders, including community leaders, to raise awareness about the risks of irregular migration.

The evaluation findings also corroborated that SLF funding enhanced SLOs' capacity to engage with media, universities and other stakeholders, increasing their visibility within anti-slavery movements. Many organisations leveraged public platforms, media interactions and outreach events to highlight the importance of survivor-led initiatives and ensure that survivor perspectives inform anti-slavery strategies. An SLO in Indonesia shared: "We organised a forum at a university, which included

survivors from other organisations and aimed to engage the academic community in our cause. We also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a major university, which includes programs for raising awareness about human trafficking, handling cases and involving students in community fieldwork related to our mission.”

Outcome 2.1.2: Networking and collective advocacy

Interviewed SLOs reported being actively engaged with other organisations in their territory through workshops and collaborative events. A Peruvian SLO emphasised: *“The funding from SLF has been pivotal in enhancing our capacity to connect with other networks and organisations.”*

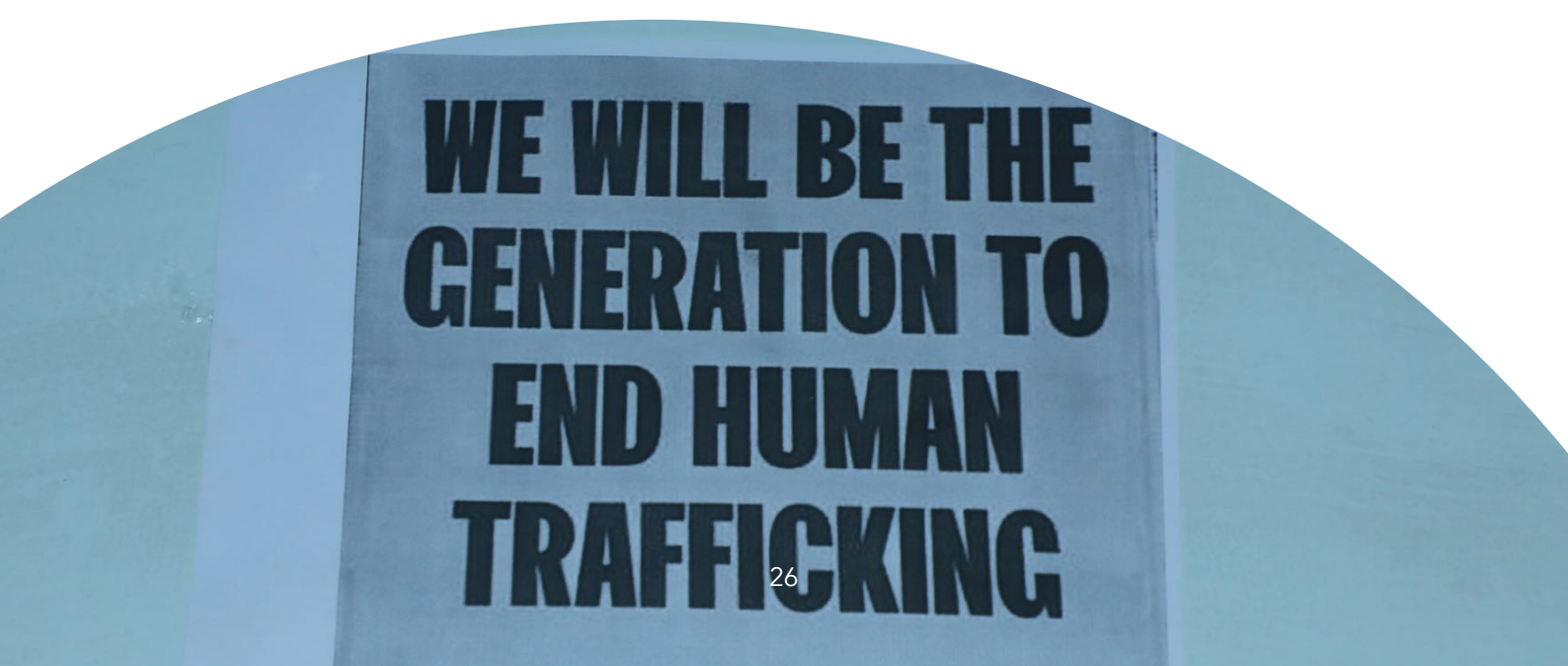
In Ethiopia, Indonesia and Kenya, many SLOs credited the Freedom Fund hotspot teams for facilitating connections that enabled them to form coalitions, establish partnerships (including with other SLOs and hotspot partners) and participate in advocacy networks. This supportive ecosystem, fostered by Freedom Fund teams, strengthened SLOs’ ability to engage collectively and advocate for anti-slavery efforts at local and national levels.

For example, in Ethiopia, SLF-supported SLOs met regularly and collaborated on key events such as International Migrants Day, promoting their collective voice. Additionally, participation in broader networks like the Global Migrants Network and Survivor Alliance enabled SLOs to extend their advocacy beyond local communities, influencing policy discussions at regional and international levels. Also in Ethiopia, SLOs have become an integral part of the Freedom Fund’s Thrive program, providing peer support and contributing to data collection.

Evidence from Ethiopia, Indonesia and Nepal further highlighted the benefits of integrating SLF-funded SLOs with other Freedom Fund initiatives. As one Freedom Fund staff member in Ethiopia observed: *“The SLF initiative has been complementing and enhancing our hotspot program.”* Similarly, in Nepal, Freedom Fund staff emphasised: *“Integrating SLF with other Freedom Fund programs strengthens movement-building.”* This integration also fostered unified advocacy efforts. In Indonesia, Freedom Fund staff noted: *“Structured collaboration with hotspot partners and other civil society organisations could enable unified advocacy and policy agendas.”*

However, the evaluation also revealed gaps in networking and collaboration. In Freedom Fund hotspot countries like Brazil and Nepal, many SLOs reported limited interaction with their peers. For some, evaluation activities marked the first time they had been brought together, highlighting a lack of cross-organisational engagement compared to the well-established networks in Ethiopia and Indonesia.

This disparity underscored the role of proactive facilitation by Freedom Fund hotspot teams in fostering collective action and movement-building. In non-hotspot areas, where Freedom Fund teams were not embedded, SLOs often operated in isolation, relying on their own initiative to establish partnerships. This limited opportunities for shared learning and collaboration, suggesting that greater investment in network-building could enhance their collective impact.



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Outcome 2.1.3: Policy engagement with authorities

The evaluation revealed that policy engagement with authorities remained a challenge for many SLOs, particularly smaller, community-based organisations (Groups 1 and 2). Limited resources and advocacy experience hindered their ability to engage in sustained policy discussions.

However, some SLOs successfully leveraged their affiliation with SLF and the Freedom Fund to gain recognition and credibility, providing a foundation for initial policy engagement efforts. A Nepali SLO noted: *"Before this fund, people did not know about our organisation. Now, we have been able to establish ourselves and the government has recognised us as an organisation working for the upliftment of disadvantaged communities. We were invited to many programs at the ward level, community level and municipal level."*

For SLOs with stronger organisational capacity (Groups 3 and 4), the evaluation findings confirmed that SLF funding helped strengthen their connections with government authorities and other key stakeholders, allowing them to bring survivor perspectives into policy discussions. An SLO in Uganda shared: *"We worked with the Ministry of Labour and also tried to engage the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We wanted to show them how we could work together to improve the lives of survivors of human trafficking and modern-day slavery in Uganda."* Similarly, an SLO in Nepal highlighted the value of their engagement with the Freedom Fund in strengthening policy advocacy efforts: *"Our engagement with the Freedom Fund strengthened our ability to work with the government on issues related to national and international law. This collaboration was crucial in advocating for the rights of women working in the entertainment sector."*

Despite these successes, the evaluation confirmed that policy engagement remained concentrated among a smaller subset of SLOs, primarily those with pre-existing resources or advocacy experience. Many smaller SLOs (Groups 1 and 2) continued to face barriers, including limited access to government officials and policy platforms, lack of training in advocacy and bureaucratic processes and resource constraints preventing sustained policy engagement. As a result, their ability to drive systemic change through policy advocacy remained largely untapped. This finding suggested that additional SLF support, particularly in training and capacity building and in facilitating exchanges between SLOs and hotspot partners, could broaden participation in survivor-led policy engagement and enhance the long-term impact of advocacy efforts. This is especially relevant given that policy engagement is, by nature, a long-term process needing sustained efforts.²⁹

²⁹ This is further analysed under Finding 6.

Finding 5: Strong evidence of impact on individual agency, with other Freedom Fund programs and presence in hotspot countries playing a key role (Outcome 2.2 of SLF Theory of Change)

The statistical contribution analysis further highlighted SLF's significant role in strengthening individual agency among SLO leaders, particularly in fostering leadership opportunities and personal development (see Table 8).

Table 8: Outcome 2.2 – Individual agency: Summary of quantitative findings

<p>Strongest impact</p> <p>Community leadership opportunities</p>	<p>66% of respondents rated SLF's contribution as "substantial."</p> <p>Overall rating: 3.51</p> <p>SLF funding was reported to be particularly effective in enabling individuals with lived experiences of exploitation to step into leadership roles, reinforcing the survivor-led nature of initiatives and strengthening community resilience.</p>
<p>High impact</p> <p>Leadership skills development</p>	<p>54% of respondents rated SLF's contribution as "substantial."</p> <p>Overall rating: 3.41</p> <p>SLF was considered to play a key role in equipping SLO leaders with essential leadership skills and enhancing their ability to advance their missions and promote survivor voices within communities.</p>
<p>High impact</p> <p>Personal development</p>	<p>51% of respondents rated SLF's contribution as "substantial."</p> <p>Overall rating: 3.37</p> <p>SLF funding was reported to lead to enhanced confidence and autonomy among SLO leaders, enabling them to develop as advocates and contribute meaningfully to anti-slavery movements.</p>



Similar to the findings for Outcomes 1 and 2.1, the evaluation triangulated data with insights from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and Outcome Harvesting workshops (see Figure 9). Although no major inconsistencies emerged, the qualitative information obtained through direct engagement with SLO leaders provided a more nuanced perspective on the impact in Outcome 2.2. It highlighted a number of key challenges, including changes in leadership and tensions related to funding allocation (discussed in more detail below). At the same time, it reinforced the complementary and highly relevant role played by other Freedom Fund programs, particularly leadership-focused initiatives such as Freedom Rising in Brazil and Nepal. Access to these programs was consistently reported as a key mechanism for strengthening leadership development within SLOs, especially in hotspot areas, where structured support mechanisms were available.

Figure 8: Individual agency insights from SLOs in Outcome Harvesting workshops



Outcome 2.2.1: Ownership and autonomy

The evaluation revealed that the unrestricted nature of SLF funding allowed SLOs to exercise greater autonomy in allocating resources in ways that best supported their goals. Unlike restricted grants, this flexibility reinforced a sense of ownership and motivation, strengthening their commitment to their mission and enhancing their confidence. As a leader from an Ethiopian SLO noted: *"Two years ago, I was not speaking like this. I used to get emotional easily, often blaming the government for our predicament. However, as a leader, I have learned to adopt a broader and more balanced perspective. I am now more mature, mainly due to the SLF funding and my engagement with the Freedom Fund."* In Brazil, a leader expressed a similar sentiment, describing SLF funding as a validating force: *"Receiving funding from SLF is not just about financial support; it is also about recognition. The application process itself was a validating experience, as it reinforced our work and strengthened our belief in the importance of our mission."*

For many leaders, this support extended beyond financial autonomy, equipping them with resources, credibility and a stronger voice. A Philippine SLO emphasised how tangible resources, such as

laptops and sound systems funded by SLF, were crucial for their leadership efforts: *“The SLF funding has been instrumental in supporting me as a leader. It allowed me to take on leadership roles more effectively by providing essential resources and equipment for our activities and campaigns.”* This increased capacity also manifested in practical leadership experiences, as a Ugandan leader described: *“As leaders, we have learned how to engage with donors and speak to them.”*

However, the evaluation also found that in some cases, the influx of funding created internal tensions within SLOs, particularly for organisations receiving their first significant external grant. These tensions often stemmed from differing expectations among stakeholders regarding how funds should be allocated and managed. In some cases, the availability of new financial resources exacerbated existing power dynamics, creating disparities between leadership and staff and leading to conflicts over decision-making authority and transparency.

For SLOs where leadership structures were not yet firmly established, the arrival of funding sometimes intensified underlying governance issues, such as unclear roles, a lack of policies or differing visions for the organisation’s growth. In a few instances, these challenges led to leadership changes.

Outcome 2.2.2: Leadership opportunities

The evaluation found that SLF’s influence extended beyond individual leadership development, inspiring other survivors within the community to step forward and take on leadership roles. In several cases, the visibility of supported SLO leaders within the network created a ripple effect, encouraging more survivors to recognise their potential and actively contribute to their communities. This inspiration did not stem solely from formal leadership programs but also from personal success stories and everyday interactions with existing SLO leaders. As one Ethiopian SLO leader explained: *“SLF inspired many other survivors to become leaders – just by seeing us, they gain confidence and feel encouraged to lead.”*

Outcome 2.2.3: Skills and competencies

While leadership development emerged as an area of strong SLF contribution, many SLOs reported that enhanced leadership skills were achieved not solely through SLF funding. Instead, they attributed their growth to complementary programs, such as the Freedom Rising Program (in Brazil and Nepal) and leadership training sessions facilitated either by SLOs themselves or Freedom Fund staff in countries such as Ethiopia.

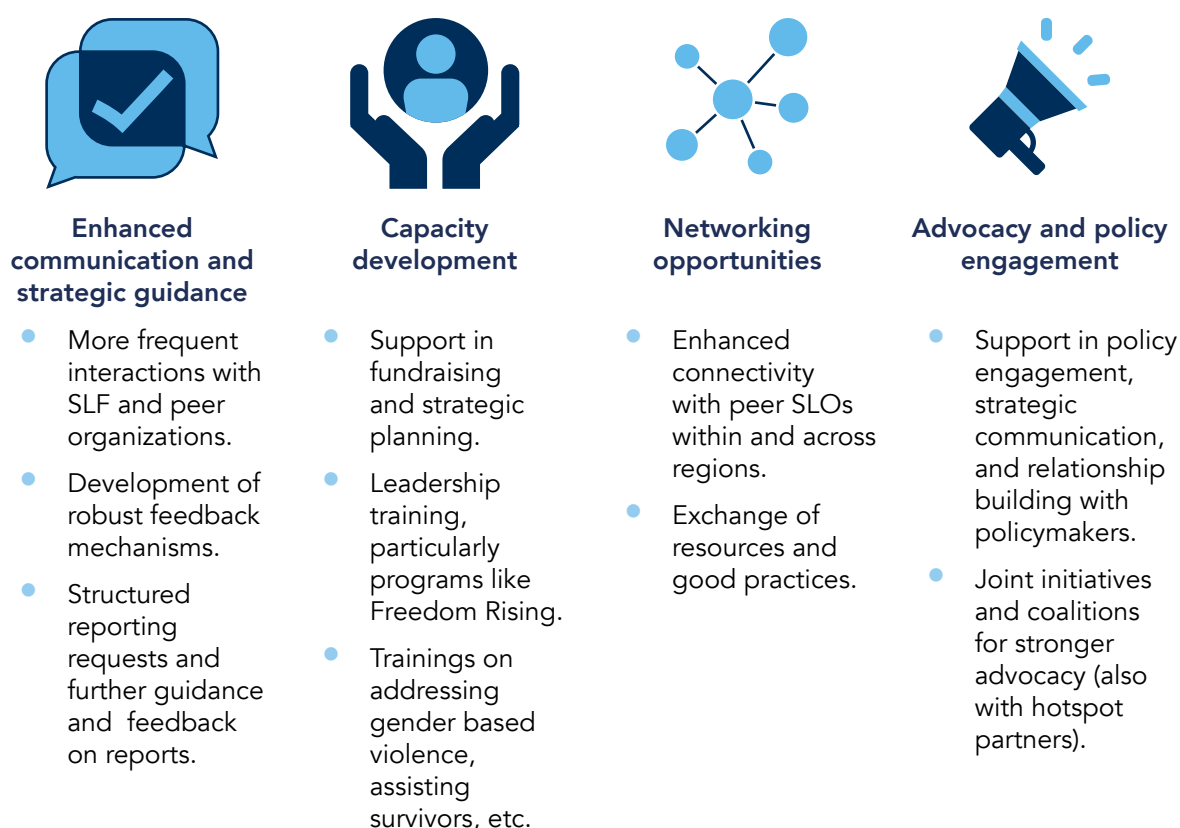


These initiatives played a pivotal role in reshaping leaders' perceptions of their roles, instilling a deeper sense of confidence and responsibility in their leadership journeys. As one Brazilian SLO leader reflected: *"The SLF funding and engagement with the Freedom Fund have been instrumental in supporting my development as a leader. It has helped me enhance my leadership skills and build a stronger connection with the community, allowing me to defend and promote our initiatives on various platforms."* This skills development process has been transformative, enabling leaders to become influential voices within their communities and advocate more effectively for their missions on a broader scale.

Finding 6: Beyond funding – SLF stressed the critical role of capacity building, networking and non-financial support for SLOs

While SLF was conceived as a grantmaking program, the evaluation findings underscored the critical importance of complementary non-financial support in maximising the impact of funding and ensuring long-term sustainability.³⁰ Feedback from SLOs consistently highlighted the need for capacity building, networking opportunities, mentorship and regular feedback as essential elements for strengthening their resilience and effectiveness (see Figure 10). Moreover, the evaluation identified a number of limitations in impact, particularly concerning Outcome Areas 2.1 and 2.2 (as outlined in the preceding findings), reinforcing the necessity of a more holistic approach. These findings aligned with best practices from other trust-based funding institutions, as demonstrated in the benchmarking analysis conducted during the evaluation.

Figure 9: Non-financial support requested by SLOs



30 Sustainability is further addressed under Finding 7.

Building skills for sustainable growth

Throughout the engagement with SLOs, the demand for more capacity-building opportunities was consistently highlighted as essential for maximising the benefits of SLF funding and sustaining their impact beyond the short grant period. While SLF's unrestricted model allowed grantees autonomy in allocating resources, and therefore the flexibility to invest in capacity development, the evaluation found that many SLOs, particularly those in Groups 1 and 2, struggled to prioritise capacity building due to competing demands. Also, several of them did not necessarily recognise the need or have the capacity to secure relevant trainings.

SLO leaders repeatedly emphasised the need for training in fundraising, strategic planning, leadership and financial management to improve their long-term sustainability. A leader from Nepal noted: *"It would be great if SLF could support us in skill development, story writing, leadership, financial management and connecting us with other funding organisations."* Similarly, an Indonesian SLO leader stressed the importance of advocacy and community organising training, stating: *"Specifically, training on community organising and leadership development would allow our leaders to sustain advocacy efforts, even without external funding."*

Beyond financial management and leadership, many SLOs identified critical gaps in specialised training, particularly in safeguarding, gender-based violence response and survivor assistance. A leader from Thailand articulated this need: *"We need more in-depth training in areas like gender-based violence and assisting survivors so we can properly address violence and help others."*



The power of networking and collaboration

Interviewed SLO leaders strongly emphasised the need for better networking opportunities, both within their regions and across Freedom Fund's hotspot areas. As outlined in the assessment of collective agency (Outcome 2.1), the evaluation confirmed that, with some exceptions (Ethiopia, Indonesia), SLOs often operated in isolation and lacked structured opportunities to connect, share resources and collaborate on joint advocacy efforts with their peer SLF-supported SLOs. As one Nepali leader expressed, *"We don't even know the other SLF grantees. We want to collaborate for collective campaigns, mutual learning and exchanges, but we don't know who they are."* Another SLO from Nepal reinforced this sentiment, stating, *"We do not have any special relationship with other organisations... No networks or connections have been facilitated by SLF or Freedom Fund."*

The evaluation findings further corroborated that where SLOs did have regular communication – such as in Ethiopia, where five local SLOs maintained consistent contact with each other and with Freedom Fund staff – collaborative advocacy efforts had significantly strengthened their collective impact. Similarly, in Kenya and Uganda, SLOs engaged in ongoing dialogue via WhatsApp groups, which facilitated peer learning, support and joint action. A Tanzanian leader underscored the benefits of stronger connections stating, *"Creating stronger networks with other anti-trafficking organisations would amplify our impact and resource sharing."* Likewise, an Indonesian leader highlighted the long-term value of collaboration, explaining: *"Fostering connections with other organisations, particularly those involved in similar advocacy work, would be beneficial for building a stronger, more resilient organisation capable of achieving long-term change."*

More and better feedback and guidance

The evaluation findings also underscored the need for more frequent communication and guidance from the SLF team. While interviewed SLOs appreciated SLF's responsive and respectful "hands-off" approach, they believed that regular interactions would help them refine their strategies, align more effectively with best practices and better respond to donor expectations.

Many grantees also expressed a desire for structured reporting guidelines and constructive feedback, both to validate their efforts and to guide continuous improvement. They welcomed the idea of constructive feedback, not as an accountability mechanism, but as a form of supportive accompaniment that could help them grow, strengthen their internal processes and promote their impact. A Brazilian leader emphasised this need, stating: *"There has been a lack of regular follow-up from the Fund. More frequent check-ins and feedback sessions would help us stay aligned with the Fund's expectations and better understand how to utilise the support effectively."* An Indonesian SLO leader echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of clearer initial guidance: *"We would have appreciated clearer instructions from the start, including a timeline, expected deliverables and reporting formats."* Similarly, a Kenyan SLO remarked: *"It would have been better if we had feedback on our reports or even more structured reporting requests, so our work could be recognised and improved."* A Malaysian partner voiced similar concerns, stating: *"The lack of guidance made it difficult to ensure that the final report met the funder's expectations. Without clear instructions on what aspects to focus on, I felt that the report may not have fully captured the impact and outcomes of our work, which left me somewhat dissatisfied with the reporting process."*

Finding 7: Sustainability and long-term impact require a partnership journey

The evaluation findings confirm that sustainability of SLF impact remained a critical concern, particularly for the smaller SLOs that constituted 70% of grantees and faced significant challenges in maintaining their operations once the funding period came to an end.

Many SLOs, particularly smaller and newer organisations, reported that the one-time grant structure was limiting in achieving lasting change. A Ugandan SLO leader reflected: *"The SLF is a very good fund. However, it is a short-term and a one-time grant... when the grant period ends, it leaves us in a dilemma about how to continue to support survivors and address emerging issues."* This concern was echoed by a Nepali partner, who emphasised the importance of continued support: *"Freedom Fund*

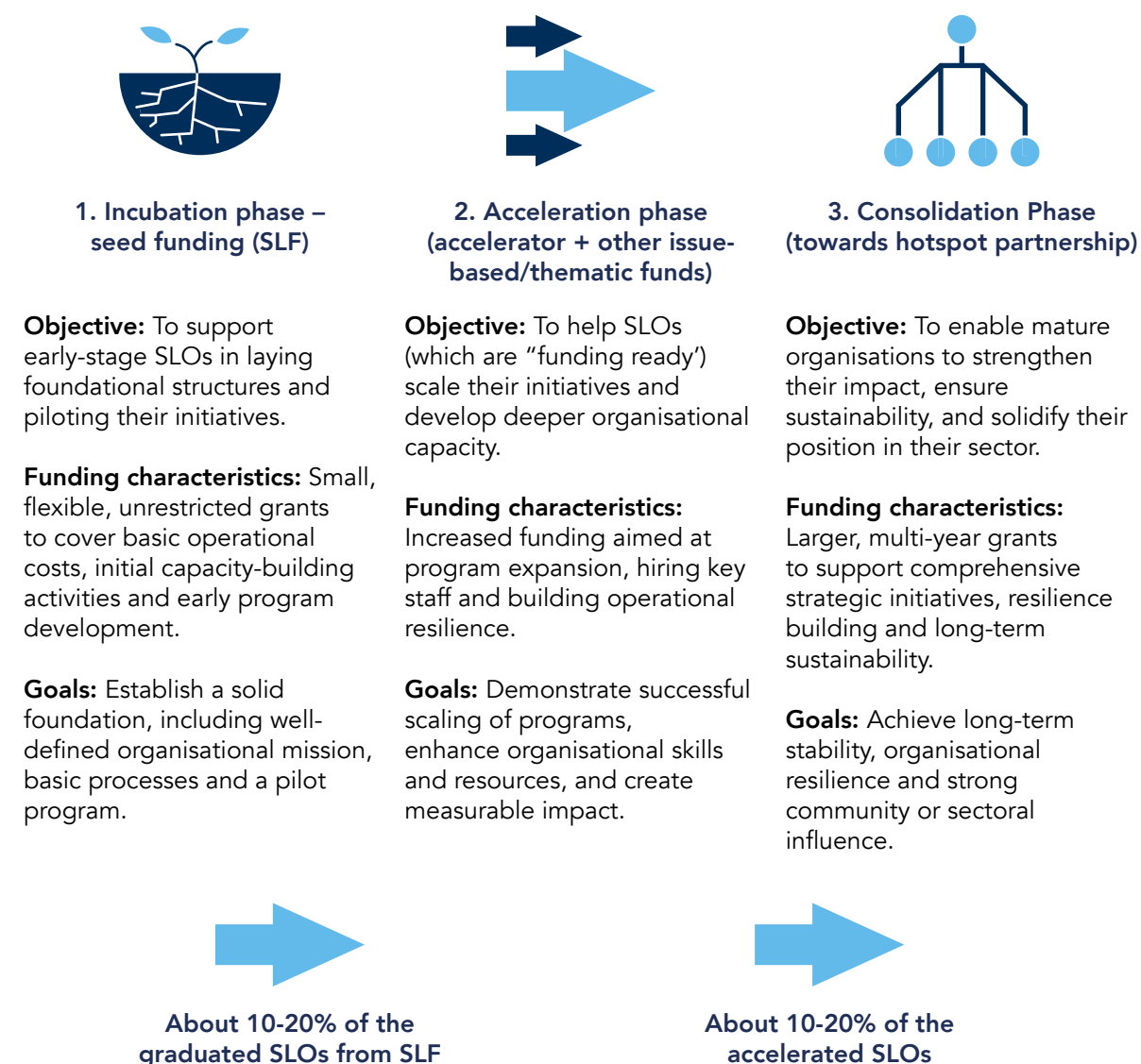
has helped us a lot... continuity of the SLF funding or additional support from Freedom Fund would be important and very much needed." An Ethiopian partner expressed a simple but clear request: "Please continue with the trust."

While the evidence on SLF's impact was compelling (as outlined in previous sections), strong evidence also emerged that its one-off funding cycle limits its potential to catalyse long-term growth and organisational development. The prevailing one-off approach, while essential in providing initial seed funding (especially for Groups 1 and 2), did not offer SLOs a pathway for further engagement or progression within the Freedom Fund ecosystem. For the more than 70% of SLF grantees that were small, community-based SLOs, the absence of a phased, growth-oriented support model hindered their ability to expand and solidify their roles within anti-slavery movements.

When compared to other trust-based philanthropic approaches, the SLF model had not yet developed a structured "partnership journey" – a phased approach that would enable selected high-performing organisations to transition from early-stage development into established entities, supported by progressively tailored resources.

Trust-based philanthropies such as [Mama Cash](#), the [Global Fund for Women](#) and [UHAI EASHRI](#), among others, have successfully addressed this gap by offering graduated support models. These models guide organisations from initial seed funding to larger, more flexible core grants, fostering long-term partnerships and enabling sustainable growth. Figure 10 illustrates what such an approach could look like for the Freedom Fund.

Figure 10: Illustrative growth pathway for SLOs





4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the evaluation confirmed that SLF has made important and impactful contributions to anti-slavery movements, effectively addressing critical funding gaps and supporting survivor-led organisations to drive community-based solutions. By providing unrestricted financial support to organisations that are often excluded from traditional funding streams, SLF plays a vital role within Freedom Fund's strategy to combat modern slavery, ensuring that individuals with lived experience are at the forefront of driving change.

Notwithstanding the limitations outlined in this report – particularly the sustainability concerns stemming from its one-off and short-term (12-month) nature – the evaluation found evidence of progress across SLF's three key outcome areas. While the short duration of funding presents challenges to long-term stability, the evidence gathered strongly indicated that SLF has played a catalytic role in strengthening the capacities of SLOs, enabling transformative work in vulnerable communities and pioneering survivor-led approaches that are shaping anti-slavery movements. The evaluation found that SLF has been instrumental in filling a critical funding gap for community-based, survivor-led initiatives by providing "hard to reach" organisations that are traditionally excluded from mainstream funding mechanisms with the resources necessary to drive local solutions. Its impact is evident in the enhanced skills, leadership and agency of survivor-led organisations, the collective mobilisation efforts that have emerged and the broader systemic shifts being initiated through community-driven advocacy.

As SLF continues to scale its efforts and broaden its reach, the evaluation makes clear that it has an unprecedented opportunity to build on these achievements and further enhance its long-term impact. Strengthening its strategic and operational foundations will not only reinforce the credibility and effectiveness of its model but also expand its capacity to promote survivor voices and position them at the forefront of the global anti-slavery movements.

The following recommendations are designed to support SLF's transformative power, refine its strategies and solidify its role as a movement-builder. By enhancing alignment with the Freedom Fund's overarching goals, tailoring support to the diverse needs of SLOs and fostering sustainable growth, SLF can continue to drive systemic change and support survivor-led organisations to create a future free from modern slavery.

4.1 Strengthen SLF's core mission and strategic alignment

Embed the core guiding principles of SLF into Freedom Fund's wider portfolio

Ensuring that SLOs continue to be given the opportunity to play a central role in efforts to combat trafficking and exploitation. Expanding its reach within existing hotspot areas through additional resources for both newly identified SLOs and high-potential existing grantees would enhance both the breadth and depth of impact.

Adopt a hotspot-centric approach

SLF resources should be strategically concentrated in hotspot countries where the Freedom Fund has an established presence and where evidence of impact is strongest, particularly in Outcome Areas 2.1 and 2.2 (collective and individual agency). This would ensure a more focused and effective allocation of resources.

Prioritise survivor-led, community-based organisations

In line with its mission to support the "hard to reach," SLF funding should primarily support emerging, survivor-led organisations operating at the community levels (Groups 1 and 2). This would ensure that resources directly reach those most in need while strengthening survivor leadership in anti-slavery movements. Financial support should also be complemented with non-financial support, as developed under Recommendation 2, to maximise the impact of SLF grants.

Develop a strategy for more established SLOs

SLF should implement a tailored support model for more established SLOs to prevent competition for funding with smaller, emerging organisations. A designated percentage of the SLF budget could be allocated to these more consolidated organisations, prioritising innovation and addressing critical gaps. This targeted funding would support scaling successful projects and piloting new initiatives, enabling mature organisations to expand their impact while preserving opportunities for newer SLOs.

Enhance SLF integration with Freedom Fund programs

To address the limitations of the "one-off" funding model, SLF should establish a structured "partnership journey" that enables SLOs to progress from initial seed funding to more advanced roles within the Freedom Fund's broader movement-building initiatives. This phased approach could include follow-up grants and access to other funding opportunities for qualifying SLOs with capacity-building initiatives and mentorship opportunities.

4.2 Enhance non-financial support through capacity building and networking opportunities

Foster networking and peer learning

Without compromising the grant-based nature of SLF and within existing resource limitations, SLF should promote regional workshops, peer-learning events and digital platforms (for example, WhatsApp groups used during the evaluation) to facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing among SLOs supported by SLF and with hotspot partners. These platforms could serve as hubs for exchanging best practices, addressing common challenges and fostering innovation. Cross-regional coalitions should also be encouraged to promote advocacy efforts and collective action, building stronger networks within and beyond hotspot areas. To ensure sustainability, the Freedom Fund could:

- **Design structured events:** Host annual or biannual regional forums focused on specific themes such as advocacy strategies, survivor engagement or organisational sustainability.
- **Leverage digital tools:** Expand the use of low-cost, accessible digital platforms to maintain real-time communication and collaboration across SLOs.
- **Facilitate cross-regional alliances:** Support the formation of coalitions that enable SLOs to collaborate on joint advocacy campaigns and influence policy discussions at the national and international levels.

Provide non-financial mentorship and guidance

Additionally, SLF should integrate structured mentorship opportunities into its framework, drawing on the expertise of the Freedom Fund's local teams and established partners. These mentorship initiatives should provide tailored, practical advice to help SLOs navigate challenges and align with best practices. Realistic implementation could include:

- **Mentor matching:** Pair emerging SLOs with experienced organisations or individuals within hotspot areas for one-on-one guidance.
- **Regular feedback mechanisms:** Provide more consistent, constructive feedback on reports and strategic progress, helping SLOs refine their approaches and align with best practices.
- **Scheduled check-ins:** Establish regular touchpoints for Freedom Fund local teams to provide feedback on progress, address challenges and offer strategic input.
- **A focus on practical guidance:** Emphasise actionable advice in key areas such as program design, advocacy planning and resource mobilisation, enabling SLOs to implement improvements effectively.

4.3 Improve grantmaking processes and inclusivity

Adopt a phased selection process with defined roles for the Freedom Fund hotspot teams

With a view to ensure better selection and due diligence, SLF should establish a structured process incorporating local Freedom Fund staff in early-stage applicant screening, shortlisting and field verifications (where feasible) to ensure a more context-sensitive review.

Implement a more proactive outreach strategy

SLF should also transition from a reactive, application-based approach to a model incorporating intentional outreach, ensuring that it reaches smaller, less-visible SLOs.

Upgrade information management systems

With the aim of enabling grantees to receive timely feedback to strengthen their operations, SLF should continue investing in digital infrastructure to streamline grant tracking and reporting. This would provide the Freedom Fund with more timely data for decision-making.

Enhance communication and provide (when possible) feedback to applicants

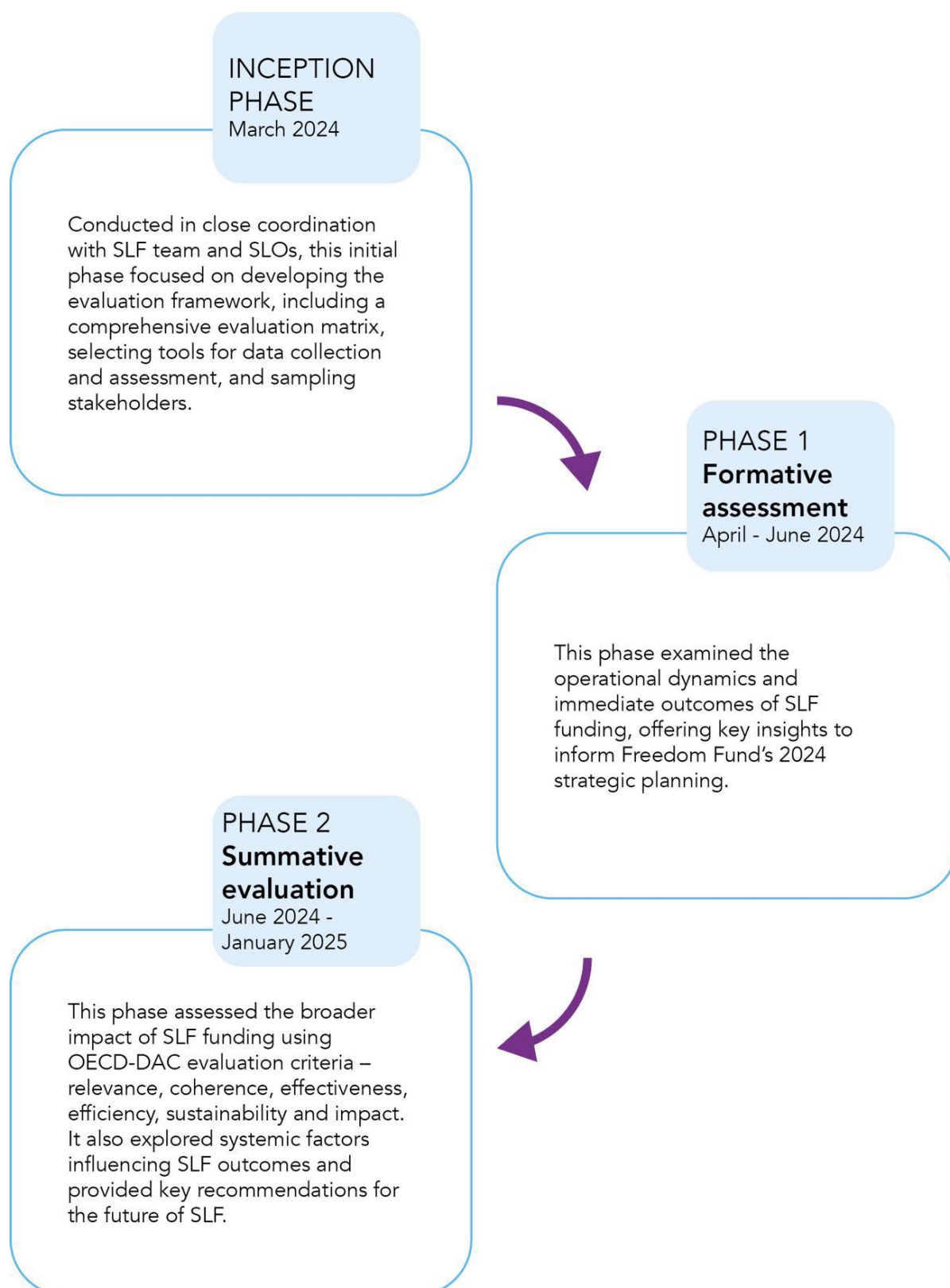
If possible, SLF could provide constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants, helping them refine their applications for future opportunities.



ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: EVALUATION PHASES

Figure 11: Phases of the evaluation



ANNEX 2: SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP FUND THEORY OF CHANGE³¹

Outcome	Output	Sample indicator	Means of verification
OUTCOME 1 Organisations receiving grants from the Survivor Leadership Fund sustain and/or strengthen their organisational capacity or activities.	Investments in programmatic capacity or activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number (or increase) of staff and/or new positions created (disaggregated by gender/lived experience) with sample of grantees. Number of activities for staff professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12-month grantee reports. 10-12 end of grant interviews.
	Investments in organisational capacity or activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of programs delivered, extended or expanded (for example, new programs or geographic areas covered). Number of new/improved internal processes (for example, drafted new governance policy; improved monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems). Number of new tools, technology or equipment acquired. 	
OUTCOME 2 Survivor leaders and their organisations increase their power, influence and agency, both within their own organisations and across the anti-slavery and related movements.	Increase inclusion and representation of survivors within grantee organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number (or increase) of survivor leaders in decision-making roles within the organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12-month grantee reports. 10-12 end of grant interviews with sample of grantees. Spreadsheet recording relevant Freedom Fund articles, social media activity, emails, events.
	Increased participation, representation and influence of SLF grantees within anti-slavery and other related movements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count of participation of grantee organisations in key forums/conferences/networks, etc. 	
	Increased awareness and visibility of survivor-led organisations within anti-slavery movements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Freedom Fund communications – media/social media features (for example, articles, blogs, posts or interviews), donor communications or participation in public events highlighting survivor-led organisations. 	

31 This is the ToC at the time of the evaluation. It has since been modified, also considering the findings from the evaluation.

ANNEX 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ADOPTED BY THE EVALUATION

Given the inherent challenges of evaluating unrestricted funding – particularly its flexibility and the lack of earmarking for specific activities or initiatives – a comprehensive conceptual framework was developed during the evaluation’s inception phase.³² This framework, aligned with the two primary outcomes of SLF’s Theory of Change (see Annex 2), provided a structured approach to assessing SLF’s contributions and capturing its impact.

Table 9: Conceptual framework to assess SLF impact

Organisational capacities (Outcome 1 of SLF ToC)	How SLF unrestricted funding enhances SLOs’ operational resilience and effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision and strategic planning: The ability to set long-term goals, adapt strategies and align operations with organisational missions and external changes. • Program capacity: Effectiveness in delivering and expanding programs to meet the needs of the communities they operate in. • Innovation: Ability to develop new solutions and adapt processes to address unmet needs within communities. • Internal systems and governance: Ability to establish robust governance policies, monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems. • Human resources: Strengthening recruitment, retention and capacity development of staff and volunteers. • Financial stability: Access to diversified funding sources and financial management capabilities.
Individual agency (Outcome 2 of SLF ToC)	Skills, personal development and leadership opportunities available to survivor leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and leadership development: Development of key skills and leadership capabilities among survivor leaders. • Autonomy: The extent to which survivor leaders have autonomy to make decisions impacting their work and personal development. • Leadership opportunities: Availability and accessibility of opportunities for survivors to assume greater leadership roles within their organisations and communities.
Collective agency (Outcome 2 of SLF ToC)	Capacity of SLOs to engage with others and leverage their collective capabilities for change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and networking: Ability to engage in coalitions, engage in/maintain partnerships, participate in networks and participate in collective advocacy efforts that promote their cause. • Participation and influence: Ability to participate, be represented and have influence within anti-slavery and other related movements. • Awareness and visibility: Ability to raise awareness and visibility of SLOs within anti-slavery movements.

³² The model adapts the conceptual framework by Pamala Wiepking and Arjen de Wit (2020), which links unrestricted funding to key nonprofit capacities underpinning organisational health and resilience (“effectiveness”). Building on this, the evaluation incorporates two additional dimensions: 1) the individual agency of survivor leaders and 2) the relational and systemic capacities of organisations to drive systemic change within the anti-slavery ecosystem. These elements provide a comprehensive view of how leadership and collective action foster sustainability and growth. See Wiepking and de Wit (2020), *The perceived consequences of unrestricted funding for grantee effectiveness: The case of the Dutch Charity Lotteries*. Available at: <https://www.grantmakingresearch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Wiepking-De-Wit-2020-Unrestricted-Funding-ARNOVA-Conference.pdf>.

Image captions:

Flora from Women Promotion Centre, a Kenya-based frontline organisation which provides integrated support for survivors including economic empowerment through dressmaking, hair, and beauty as well as additional resources towards education for children of survivors, attends the SLF convening in Kenya. ©Sarah Waiswa/

The Freedom Fund.....	Cover
SLF convening in Kenya. ©Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund.....	1
The area surrounding SLF grantee, Escola Pernambuco, based in Olinda, Brazil. ©Sandra Bustamante/The Freedom Fund.....	2
SLF convening in Kenya. ©Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund.....	5
SLF convening in Indonesia. ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	8
The office of SLF grantee, Shanti Foundation, based in Kathmandu, Nepal. ©Beatriz Sanz-Corella/The Freedom Fund.....	10
Live translation was available for participants at the SLF convening in Indonesia. ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	12
Area surrounding SLF grantee, Biruh Addis, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. ©Yoseph Endeshaw/The Freedom Fund.....	13
SLF convening in Indonesia. ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	18
Sign on wall in SLF grantee Biruh Addis' office. ©Yoseph Endeshaw/The Freedom Fund.....	26
SLF convening in Indonesia. ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	27
Area surrounding SLF grantee, Sindomestico Salvador, Brazil. ©Sandra Bustamante/The Freedom Fund.....	28
SLF convening in Indonesia. ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	30
Creuza Maria Oliveira, from SLF grantee Instituto Salvador, Brazil. ©Sandra Bustamante/The Freedom Fund.....	32
SLF grantee, Set Free to Thrive, based in Nairobi offers pro-bono legal aid to survivors and victims of trafficking. ©Sarah Waiswa/The Freedom Fund.....	35
Artworks created during the SLF convening in Indonesia ©Felix Prabowo/The Freedom Fund.....	37

VISION

Our vision is a world free of slavery.

MISSION



We invest in frontline organisations and movements to drive a measurable reduction of modern slavery in high-prevalence countries and industries.

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