



2024 PROGRESS REPORT

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Cover Image: In the Philippines, Nuclear and Coal Free Bataan Movement supports fishing communities in organizing, filing legal complaints, and mobilizing collectively to protect their waters and their homes from power plants and other industrial projects.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

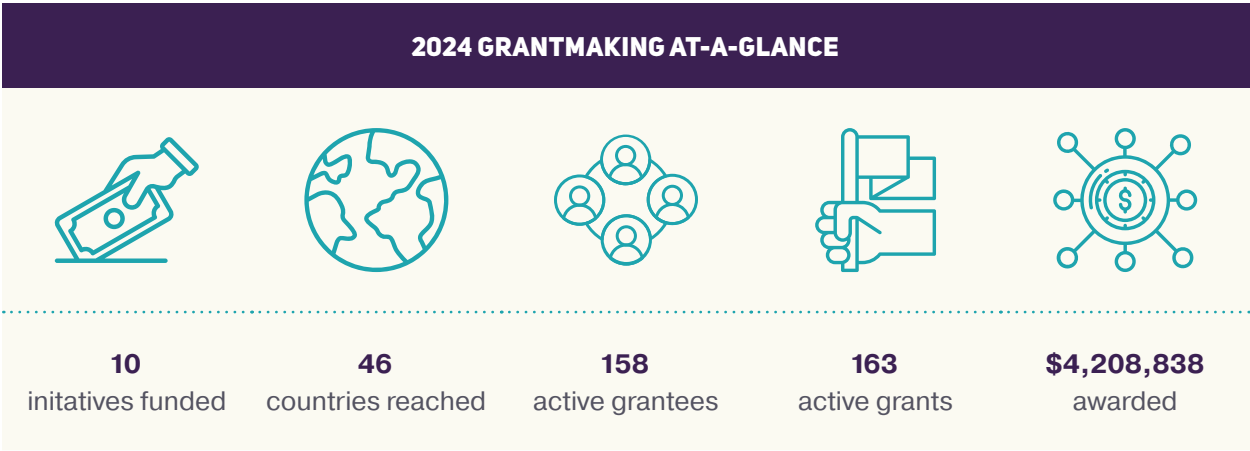


Access to justice is a fundamental right; yet billions of people worldwide remain deprived of it. The global justice gap is deepening, driven by a sustained decline in the rule of law, escalating conflicts, rising inequality, and the worsening impacts of climate change. Violations of international law, governments turning toward authoritarianism, and attacks on judicial independence and civic space have all compounded access to justice challenges. Violent conflicts are at their highest since World War II, leaving three-quarters of the world's poorest populations in fragile contexts. Despite promises of inclusivity, inequality has accelerated, leaving minority groups disproportionately affected. The slow and uneven response to climate change risks marginalizing frontline communities, while rapid technological advancements introduce new digital risks that could deepen socio-economic divides. A persistent gender gap, increasing polarization, and contested global institutions further undermine access to justice. These interconnected crises leave 253 million people trapped in extreme injustice, 1.5 billion struggling with unresolved legal issues, and 4.5 billion excluded from the protections and opportunities the law should guarantee.¹ Thus, a people-centered, empowered movement is now more imperative than ever to foster a global, rule-of-law-based order—one that safeguards marginalized populations while strengthening democracy.

¹ Please visit the [World Justice Project](#) for more information.

Amid this global turmoil, the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF), with the generous support of the Charles S. Mott Foundation, the Dutch Postcode Lottery, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Namati, and the Irene M. Staehelin Foundation, is making significant strides toward ensuring that even the most marginalized can seek justice. The LEF provides multi-year flexible funding, fosters knowledge and learning, and actively contributes to building a grassroots people-centered justice movement. **Since its inauguration in 2021, the LEF has awarded 360 grants to 252 organizations in 68 countries, totaling over \$10.8 million.**

The LEF’s commitment to shifting power and resources to grassroots justice advocates is gaining international traction. In 2024 alone, the LEF exceeded its goal by moving over \$4.2 million, demonstrating the need for a global movement aimed at closing the justice gap and increasing democratic efforts. These resources have not only financially empowered grassroots organizations but have also enhanced the LEF’s visibility and generated valuable insights for the global access to justice field. By amplifying grassroots voices worldwide, the LEF is demonstrating that transformative change is possible, even in the face of complex and entrenched global challenges.



Legal empowerment does not require a law degree; it is about putting people at the center and supporting communities to lead their own solutions for justice. When the most marginalized have the resources to **know, use, and shape the law**, justice systems become more democratic, responsive, and accessible; and governments and institutions are held to account. From the **Alliance of Migrant Domestic Workers’** approach to improving conditions and legal protections for exploited domestic workers through advocacy and rights awareness in Lebanon to the **Yogyakarta Legal Aid Institute** building legal awareness of environmentally exploitative tourism in Indonesia, grassroots groups are using their flexible support grants to put the law into the hands of everyday people.

This report provides an overview of the LEF’s activities throughout 2024, with a particular focus on grantmaking, peer and participatory learning activities, and initiatives to amplify grantee voices. It demonstrates progress toward the LEF’s indicators and explores institutional and operational updates and trends. The report concludes with a section on lessons learned and plans for 2025.

I. ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR

A. Grantmaking

“We were close to shutting down; LEF funding came at the right time and helped us keep the lights on.”

Anonymous LEF Grantee Partner

This year, the LEF team exceeded its grantmaking target. In 2024, it surpassed its goal of \$3,835,000 million by reallocating \$4,275,088 to legal empowerment groups and practitioners around the world. These 2024 figures and impact stories contribute to the LEF’s cumulative grantmaking track record. Since its first grant in May 2022, the LEF has provided 267 core grants, 24 travel grants, and 49 learning grants. A total of \$189,938 has been allocated to travel, while \$649,000 has been disbursed as learning grants, including \$345,000 dedicated to Grassroots Justice Network (GJN) members. As of December 2024, the LEF has awarded over \$10 million in core grants, of which more than \$7 million was awarded through open, global Requests for Proposals (RFPs, or “calls”).

In 2024, the LEF provided **169 grants**² to both new and existing grantee partners in 48 countries. All grants awarded in 2024 are categorized as follows:

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² As of December 31, 2024, 3 grants were awarded as a part of the Legal Empowerment for Incarcerated Women initiative with Porticus.

Throughout 2024, the LEF aimed both to diversify its grantmaking activities through new collaborations and to streamline its renewal procedures. In spring 2024, the LEF renewed funding for 26 groups from its **Cohort 1A** for one year, awarding a total of \$730,000. By revisiting the original cohort of 56 groups categorized as Cohort 1A, the LEF prioritized renewal decisions based on each group's financial and capacity needs, innovativeness, alignment with LEF priorities, and contributions to the legal empowerment field. From Association Spectra, which addresses sexual and gender-based violence by facilitating arts-based psychosocial support in Montenegro, to the **Paralegal Alliance Network**, which is formalizing paralegal support in Zambia, the Cohort 1A renewal cohort remains geographically and thematically diverse, ensuring a truly global and representative movement.



Impact at the community level is beginning to take shape, demonstrating the value of the LEF's participatory and flexible grantmaking model. While many successes cannot be attributed solely to the LEF, its multi-year flexible support is driving meaningful change for communities seeking legal recourse. As an example, **INREDH** in Ecuador has been able to scale its outstanding legal empowerment education and litigation efforts over the past few years. As a result, many of its students have reached key positions across critical civic and political spaces. Similarly, **FUJ** in Peru, which began as an informal collective of survivors and families affected by femicide and gender-based violence, has since grown and formalized its work. Thanks to LEF support, **FUJ** is now a registered organization that litigates cases and raises awareness through impactful communication campaigns, fostering a culture of change within their society.





Colectivo Casa in Bolivia has also made significant strides in environmental justice and Indigenous rights since receiving its LEF grant. Working closely with Indigenous communities, **Colectivo Casa** has successfully halted corporate encroachment on protected lands since receiving funding. In addition, they have developed creative awareness campaigns, available here. For example, they use *cholitas* dolls for their campaigns. Colloquially, *cholitas* are known to be Indigenous women that wear the traditional dresses daily. *Cholitas* dolls support survivors in reclaiming their voices through storytelling, as they allow for anonymity. A performance may be viewed here.



Since first receiving funding in July 2022, **Badabon Sangho** in Bangladesh has significantly improved access to justice for marginalized women, girls, and gender-diverse persons facing gender-based violence and land rights violations. With the Fund's support, the organization has empowered over 9,000 women through legal training, paralegal assistance, and collective action. As a result, there has been a rise in survivors reporting gender-based violence, along with several successful efforts to protect land and water resources from corporate exploitation. These include legal assistance for landowners who successfully contested corporate land grabs, as well as organized protests, rallies, and press conferences through women's federations to resist environmental abuses. Through these initiatives, **Badabon Sangho** has strengthened grassroots resistance and amplified the voices of affected communities at both local and national levels.



For **Amka Africa Justice Institute** in Kenya, the LEF grant facilitated more equitable birth registration. They trained the officials to deepen their understanding of intersex children and their experiences. These targeted trainings provided the officials with the necessary information to amend the Children's Act to better protect diverse children under the law. Moving forward, Amka Africa Justice Institute aims to replicate these advocacy efforts to push for the recognition of intersex adults.



SPOTLIGHT

The **Just Like My Child Foundation** in Uganda has made significant progress in strengthening access to justice at the community level by equipping local leaders and volunteers with the knowledge and confidence to address human rights violations. Previously, survivors of gender-based violence and child abuse faced major barriers to reporting, including stigma, lack of awareness, and financial constraints. Now, with trained legal volunteers embedded in communities, survivors have trusted first responders who guide them toward legal and medical assistance while advocating for their rights. These volunteers have also led community dialogues to challenge harmful norms, fostering greater awareness and shifting perceptions of domestic violence from a private issue to a human rights violation. As a result, more survivors feel safe coming forward, justice systems are becoming more accessible, and communities are striving toward gender justice.

One of the most inspiring transformations is that of Mama, an elderly woman who never had the opportunity to attend school and previously felt powerless to challenge traditional norms. In her conservative community, where women's voices were often dismissed, she once hesitated to engage in discussions on justice and human rights. However, after participating in legal empowerment training, she gained the confidence to speak up and advocate for others. Mama has since become a recognized leader in her community, guiding survivors of violence toward support services and leading conversations on human and women's rights. Her efforts have sparked broader discussions, encouraging more women to report cases and take collective action. Mama's journey exemplifies how grassroots legal empowerment shifts power dynamics and creating lasting change.

1. Climate Justice

Over the past year, the LEF has invested in intersectional climate justice work. As the LEF engaged with grantee partners, climate injustice emerged as an immediate concern for grassroots groups applying for funding. Their proposals also highlighted that groups traditionally excluded from decision-making power and leadership roles are often best placed to lead this urgent work. Additionally, the 2023 LEF grantee survey found that 48 percent of grantee partners experienced significant effects of climate change, thus reinforcing the LEF's decision to prioritize climate-related grant making.

Following global consultations and the recognized need for grassroots funding, the LEF identified three priority regions: Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. As many of these groups share similar priorities, the LEF's next steps in 2025 will involve facilitating inter-regional exchanges to strengthen global linkages and solidarity.

a. Land & Environmental Justice in Southeast Asia (Cohort 2)

In May 2024, the LEF awarded \$1.05 million in grants to grassroot groups challenging land and environmental injustices in Southeast Asia.³ Following an open call across the region, 26 new grantee partners were selected, each receiving a two-year grant. In partnership with the Namati-convened Grassroots Justice Network (GJN), the LEF convened a peer-led Grants Selection Committee, which prioritized an intersectional approach led by youth and minority-led groups. This cohort is particularly promising, as many groups are led by young activists eager to strengthen their networks and share learnings to tackle climate injustice, thereby fostering an interactive and engaged regional movement.



3 Cohort 2 countries include: Philippines (12 groups); Indonesia (9); Cambodia (2); Malaysia (1); and Myanmar (1).



A common theme across this cohort is the empowerment of communities that have traditionally been silenced, particularly Indigenous-led communities and youth movements. These new grantee partners boldly emphasize the need for sustainable practices by advocating for a green energy transition and promoting Indigenous peoples as ancestral stewards and land experts. Their efforts often center on educating communities about their rights, environmental laws, and the impacts of exploitative projects such as fossil fuel plants, mining, and infrastructure developments.

The legal empowerment strategies employed by the grantee partners include capacity-building, direct public campaigns, digital activism, and policy advocacy, with the goal of fostering solidarity and collective action. This cohort also contributes to broader regional and global movements working to combat environmental injustices such as land grabbing, pollution, and displacement, which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations.



SPOTLIGHT

IN THE PHILIPPINES, FISHING COMMUNITY CHALLENGES OIL DEPOT WITH CHRISTMAS CAROLS

For the fishing community of Talisay City, Cebu, the sea is their lifeblood—yet a proposed oil depot threatens their livelihoods and environment. With support from the LEF, the **Negros Workers Development Center (NWDC)** has empowered fisherfolk to fight back.

In December 2024, the community took a bold step. Turning protest into creative advocacy, they staged a Christmas caroling demonstration at the environmental agency’s office, rewriting festive songs to demand the halt of the project. The action drew media attention, amplifying their message and pressuring decision-makers to reconsider.

Guided by NWDC, the fisherfolk developed legal strategies, built alliances, and made their case heard at local and national levels. This campaign highlights the power of grassroots legal empowerment—with the right resources, communities can challenge harmful projects, shape policies, and defend their future.

b. Youth-led Climate Justice across Africa (Cohort 3)

Recognizing the severe funding gap for youth-led climate justice initiatives⁴, the LEF, in collaboration with the **Children’s and Youth Rights Program (CYP)** at the Fund for Global Human Rights (the Fund), has launched the first dedicated funding stream for grassroots youth climate justice work in Africa. This initiative ensures that critical resources reach organizations and movements that are often overlooked, empowering those on the front lines of climate action. To resource this youth-led movement, the LEF committed \$1 million in two-year grants to 42 new grantee partners.⁵



Beyond funding, the LEF recognizes the transformative potential of both legal empowerment and youth-led climate activism. To maximize the impact of LEF’s grants, additional mentorship will be provided. **Through the Fund’s accompaniment⁶ model, the LEF will equip youth-led organizations with the technical expertise, strategic guidance, and operational**

support needed to sustain and scale their legal empowerment strategies, thus fostering the next generation of climate justice leaders. Furthermore, the cohort will benefit from the LEF’s recent investments in communications, amplifying their solutions and voices on a global stage. By leveraging digital platforms, these young leaders will enhance their thought leadership, influence policies, and drive greater awareness of climate justice issues – for youth to know, use and shape the law.

As a truly peer-led cohort, the LEF convened a Grants Selection Committee (GSC) consisting entirely of young people across Africa actively engaged in climate justice and legal empowerment to award grants through a participatory process. The committee prioritized groups led by women, as well as those operating in rural areas. All groups received their grants in December 2024.

4 Only 0.76 percent of global climate funding supports youth-led climate justice initiatives (see [Youth Climate Justice Study](#))

5 Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Benin, Senegal, and Guinea Bissau

6 Accompaniment is a type of high-engagement grantmaking that gives activists and organizations holistic support—beyond funding—to help them achieve their goals. Through accompaniment, funders are partners, walking alongside grantees to achieve justice and human rights. Instead of just providing money through grants, funders can offer strategic support, skills training, and others forms of non-financial resources to frontline activists all along the way. More information on the Fund’s years of expertise and global peer leadership relating to accompaniment may be found [here](#).

2. Gender Justice

In August 2024, the LEF began an exciting new partnership that addresses systemic barriers faced by marginalized women impacted by the criminal justice system. This one-year pilot supports ten representative grassroots organizations led by, or representing, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated women across the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. These organizations use legal empowerment strategies to address barriers experienced by women and their families both during and post-incarceration. Through this initiative, more women will engage in participatory defense models, assert their rights, and access community and government support upon release.



By connecting this cohort across languages and geographies, the LEF aims to strengthen cross-border collaboration and facilitate the exchange of best practices. This will not only enhance the impact of their work but will also demonstrate the power of legal empowerment as

a tool for incarcerated, marginalized women to reclaim their rights and challenge systemic injustices. To guide the program, the LEF is working closely with the Bernstein Institute at New York University Law School, leveraging its expertise in grassroots legal empowerment to provide strategic guidance to the cohort.

Each group received a general operating support grant of \$20,000, and sessions will be conducted in English, Spanish, and Portuguese simultaneously.

3. Learning Grants

a. Gender Transformative Land & Environmental Justice

In collaboration with the Grassroots Justice Network through the Gender Transformative Land and Environmental Justice Learning Exchange, the LEF disbursed a total of \$195,000 to 10 organizations, including LEF grantee partners. These grants have supported the development of practical strategies to ensure that women and marginalized groups have equitable access to land, participate in natural resource governance, and influence legal and policy reforms. As an example, **IMPACT** in Kenya used its grant to strengthen women's participation in community land management committees, fostering meaningful engagement.

Over several months, the participants engaged in online meetings to exchange insights, refined strategies, and built collective knowledge leading up to an in-person meeting. In November 2024 they convened in Zimbabwe to deepen their collaboration. Even after the gathering, grantees continued collaborating via WhatsApp, ensuring ongoing dialogue and shared learning.

Throughout the exchange, members emphasized the need to go beyond simply applying a gender lens to environmental justice. A truly gender-transformative approach means understanding power structures and ensuring that women have meaningful participation and influence in decision-making. Participants also explored how legal empowerment can challenge entrenched inequalities, elevate women's leadership, and create systemic change in land and environmental governance.

Upon reflection, this process underscored that shifting power dynamics and embedding gender-transformative practices require ongoing capacity-building, mentorship, and resources. LEF's funding has been instrumental in sustaining momentum and building on these discussions. Additionally, a multimedia toolkit to share best practices and webinars on lessons learned were key steps in scaling impact.

b. Community Legal Advocates Program in Latin America (Incubator)

Another critical grantmaking partnership in 2024 with the GJN included the Community Legal Advocates Program that builds the transformative power of community-led legal empowerment. Co-developed with stakeholders across the Latin American Legal Empowerment community, this program combines customized learning exchange with financial support and specialized mentoring. In November 2024, the LEF provided grants of up to \$15,000 to 10 grassroots organizations and collectives, distributing \$142,500 in total. This empowered GJN members to develop or enhance programs for community legal advocates, defenders, and paralegals. The program includes virtual courses to ensure participants receive the tools and resources needed to build sustainable, community-rooted access to justice initiatives.

c. Innovation & Learning Grants

Since learning is a key part of the LEF accompaniment model, the LEF team sought to deepen its learning practices in partnership with LEF grantee partners. To prioritize this in 2024, the LEF introduced innovation and learning grants to support the exploration and implementation of new or refined approaches to community engagement and mobilization, thus strengthening legal empowerment.

Applications were evaluated by a team from the LEF and the GJN based on several criteria: the clarity and rationale of the proposed innovation; the identification of community stakeholders; the strength of the innovation hypothesis; and the presence of an implementation team and plan. All LEF grantee partners were invited to apply.

In December 2024, 10 grantee partners across Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe,⁷ each received a one-year grant of \$10,000, totaling \$100,000 in funding. These organizations demonstrate transformative potential and their abilities to operate in complex environments. One particularly compelling initiative comes from

⁷ Innovation & Learning Grants based in the following 10 countries: Thailand; Nepal; Greece; Uganda; Bolivia; Mexico; Pakistan; Germany; Sierra Leone; and DRC.

Vision des Filles Leaders pour le Développement (VIFILED) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). **VIFILED** is defending displaced Pygmy Indigenous communities in Mwenga from corporate mining that threatens their land. Their approach integrates technology with community-driven strategies, including an early warning system and mobile tools for documenting and reporting human rights abuses. Despite political instability, **VIFILED** envisions a future where mining companies respect Indigenous peoples' rights and environmental resources. By collaborating with human rights defenders, they amplify community voices, expose violations, and strengthen grassroots advocacy.

4. Grantmaking Plans for 2025



The LEF has begun planning grantmaking for the upcoming calendar year. In November 2024, the LEF conducted a scoping trip to Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, and Jamaica to explore the intersection of legal empowerment and climate justice activism. The trip provided valuable insights, as discussions with 18 organizations highlighted key learnings on how legal empowerment can address climate injustices. Findings indicate that LEF is well-positioned to support locally driven solutions through participatory grantmaking, building on its experiences grantmaking in Southeast Asia (Cohort 2).

To shape the scope of this upcoming Caribbean cohort, the LEF will conduct participatory co-design workshops with grassroots organizations and in collaboration with a donor collective. This partnership will help determine funding priorities as well as operational considerations in the region.

The LEF will also launch **Communications Grants** to enhance visibility and storytelling in legal empowerment. Many grantee partners struggle to amplify their work due to limited resources and capacity, despite their ambitions and goals to mobilize communities, influence decision-makers, and expand legal awareness through digital engagement and thought leadership. To support these efforts, the LEF will pilot 10 grants of \$10,000 each, offering flexible support for media training, content creation, strategic campaigns, and digital outreach. Beyond funding, grantees will receive practical mentorship from the LEF communications team. Grants are expected to be disbursed in July 2025.

The LEF will also continue to partner with the GJN throughout 2025 by contributing to the **Building Community Power** and the **Digital ID and Security** partnership.



SPOTLIGHT

FROM GRIEF TO JUSTICE THROUGH LEGAL EMPOWERMENT



In February 2015, Lorena G's 12-year-old daughter, Fátima, was brutally murdered in Lerma, Mexico. Though the community apprehended the perpetrators, the judicial system failed, forcing Lorena into a relentless fight against impunity. Facing threats, intimidation, and the later loss of her son Daniel due to government negligence, she refused to be silenced.

In 2018, with support from the **National Citizen Observatory on Femicide (OCNF)**, an LEF grantee partner, Lorena gained the legal knowledge and confidence to take control of her case. Her persistence led to a landmark victory: in December 2024, after nearly a decade of struggle. Finally, Fátima's murderer was sentenced to 70 years in prison; a rare, precedent-setting ruling in Mexico's fight against femicide.

Beyond her case, Lorena empowers other mothers, helping them understand their rights, navigate Mexico's judicial system, and demand accountability. She spearheaded a public awareness campaign, using silhouettes representing femicide victims to galvanize communities and ensure victims' voices are not erased.

Lorena's story exemplifies the power of legal empowerment. With **OCNF** support, she turned personal tragedy into a movement for justice, proving that survivors, when equipped with the right tools, can challenge impunity and drive change.

B. Learning

1. Building Power for Justice: The LEF Learning Agenda

In 2024, the LEF Learning Agenda took shape through a participatory process, guided by insights from grantee surveys and grantee partner application data. In response, LEF designed a dynamic learning agenda to strengthen connections and solidarity among legal empowerment grantee partners to explore the **power-building for justice theme**. Between July and September 2024, fifteen grantee partners continued to collaboratively shape this agenda with facilitation from IWORDS Global.⁸

The discussions revealed that while groups operate in different contexts, grantee partners' legal empowerment strategies are deeply aligned and mutually reinforcing. They shared approaches to making justice institutions more accessible and defined the hallmarks of an ideal system: efficiency, responsiveness, impartiality, and inclusivity. Grantee partner participants also found strong commonalities in their approaches to building power.

Grantee partners stressed the need for inclusive and accessible learning tools, including translations, to increase engagement. However, as many groups struggle to prioritize learning due to limited capacity and resources, they requested this support and expressed a pressing need for capacity building and training for local actors, decision-makers, and duty bearers. In response, the LEF introduced dedicated learning grants in late 2024.

2. The Mid-Term Evaluation

“LEF doesn’t box us in, they give us the freedom to adapt and make real change based on what our community needs”

Anonymous LEF Grantee Partner

As part of its commitment to learning and accountability, the LEF launched an ambitious mid-term evaluation, designed and implemented using a peer-led participatory methodology. Led by international consultants, the evaluation began with a co-designed framework to define key questions, followed by an in-depth desk review of critical documents. To ensure methodological consistency, local co-evaluators in Indonesia, Kenya, and Uganda were trained before launching a global data collection effort. Once standardized, local co-evaluators conducted virtual focus groups and individual interviews, engaging over 20 grantee partners, while international consultants gathered an impressive 99 survey responses from current and former grantees in over 40 countries. Additionally, in-person participatory workshops in Colombia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and Uganda brought together over 100 grantee partners, facilitating deep engagement and meaningful reflection.

⁸ [IWORDS Global](#): Innovating Work on Rights, Development and Sustainability around the world.

Preliminary findings

The mid-term evaluation focused on outcomes rather than impact, given that the LEF has only been in operation for four years. The evaluation determined that groups employ diverse legal empowerment strategies such as legal education, capacity building, advocacy, and community engagement. **Collaboration** emerged as a key theme, as grantees eager to form strategic partnerships to strengthen their influence. As one grantee noted: “LEF connects informal and formal systems, allowing us to explore new ways to advance justice.”

The evaluation also highlighted LEF’s role in fostering **knowledge exchange**. The evaluation found that some grantees use their grants to initiate training and mentorship, and partnerships. Initiatives like WhatsApp groups and convenings were well-received, though addressing language barriers and expanding reflection sessions must be prioritized in 2025.

The LEF’s flexible funding has also **strengthened grantee capacity and resilience**. Because LEF grants may cover core operational costs, grantee partners are able to formalize structures, expand outreach, and enhance security and psychosocial support. Many groups pointed out that, unlike other funders that impose rigid conditions, the LEF’s approach allows grantees partners to adapt to emerging needs, invest in infrastructure, and pursue long-term goals. **Because the LEF prioritizes grassroots and community-led initiatives, the LEF has, at this mid-point, shifted power for marginalized groups, Indigenous communities, and others advocating for gender justice and legal literacy.** While many grantee partners appreciated the minimal reporting burden, some did express a need for longer funding periods and grant term. As one grantee put it: “We are free to do what is needed when it’s needed.”

The full report will be available by April 2025.

3. Learning Convenings with the Grassroots Justice Network (GJN)

The LEF and the GJN continued to collaborate throughout 2024. Following through on plans developed during the joint retreat in Cebu, Philippines (January 2024), the LEF participated in several learning convenings.

In November 2024, LEF grantee partners joined the GJN in Zambia to explore community-power building. There, grantee partners expressed that they value training and capacity building, and opportunities to collaborate and learn about the work of other groups and stakeholders. It also provided space for the groups to see the similarity of challenges in different contexts to build more system-focused approaches to legal empowerment. Furthermore, this convening fostered learning for the LEF team. Grantee participants expressed that creating space for peer review of proposals was valuable, as it made it possible for the groups to learn and build each other’s work from shared learning and shared experience. Regarding legal empowerment strategies, most participants were focused on knowing the law and less on using and shaping the law. This means that future learning exchanges should focus on community engagement, digital advocacy and other means of education in 2025.



C. Amplifying Grassroot Voices

“LEF gives us reputation and the good profile that our work is accepted by an international funding organization”

Anonymous LEF Mid-Term Evaluation Participant

Amplifying grassroots voices is essential to shifting power dynamics and ensuring that marginalized communities play a meaningful role in decision-making. By elevating grassroots perspectives, the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) helps those most affected by injustice advocate for their own needs, fostering a truly participatory movement.

Recognizing the growing interest among grantee partners in developing their communication strategies, the LEF leverages digital platforms as accessible and democratic spaces for them to share their stories, expose systemic issues, and drive change. Support from the LEF includes promoting grantees’ work through its social media channels while also providing resources to help them build their platforms. This amplification enables them to mobilize their communities locally and internationally, ensuring people know, use, and shape the laws that impact them.

To further promote its grantee partners, the LEF shares their stories through various platforms. Launched in September 2024, the LEF website provides an up-to-date and professional space for stakeholders to receive grantee partner updates. Particularly, the [Stories and Updates](#) section highlights grassroots efforts such as [Fishing for Justice: How Coastal Communities in the Philippines Are Fighting for Their Rights](#), showcasing advocacy in environmental justice. Additionally, the LEF’s presence on social media platforms expands the reach of grantee achievements, fostering greater awareness and support for their causes.

Greater visibility also strengthens the broader legal empowerment movement. To ensure community-driven solutions take center stage, the LEF facilitates access to international forums where grantee partners and the LEF representatives can engage peers, policy makers, funders, and other stakeholders. By sharing key insights and lessons the LEF, contributes to global conversations and learning on legal empowerment, promoting sustainable community-driven solutions and systemic change.

1. Participation at Global Events

At the **UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)** in July 2024, LEF grantee partners Derek Cabe of **Nuclear and Coal Free Bataan Movement (Philippines)** and Jhody Polk of **Jailhouse Lawyers (USA)** presented at a USAID sponsored event titled *Turning the Tide: Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 for the Future, Reinforcing Access to Justice*. Their presentations brought critical grassroots perspectives to the discussion on people-centered justice, amplifying the voices of the communities they serve. Following their presentations, various intuitions and individuals approached them to explore further collaboration, leading to invitations to participate in other global justice dialogues. This demonstrates how LEF's efforts to elevate grassroots voices can open doors for grantee partners to engage in international policymaking and advocacy, strengthening their influence on justice reform worldwide.



In November 2024, the annual **Conference of Parties (COP 29)** was held in Azerbaijan. Held within the framework of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to tackle climate change, limit emissions, and halt global warming, COP 29 provided opportunities for civil society and grassroots organizations to shape global policy. However, access⁹ for civil society into decision-making spaces at the COP has been fraught with challenges such as bureaucracy, cost, and lack of accessible direction.

⁹ COP includes two “zones”: the Blue Zone is the formal conference and negotiation space managed by UNFCCC. All the official sessions, meetings, side events and press conferences take place here. Only UNFCCC- accredited participants, including Member State delegations, multilateral civil servants, accredited press, and other admitted ob-servers, such as global corporate leadership can enter the zone. The Green Zone serves as a meeting point for a wide range of stakeholders, from the public to media personnel, experts and academics, youth, Indigenous commu-nities, NGOs and civil society. The Green Zone provides a dynamic forum for participants to share their perspec-tives and to showcase current innovations and potential solutions.

To help alleviate these access challenges and to promote grassroots legal empowerment strategies, the LEF provided travel grants to 10 climate justice advocates from its global cohort.¹⁰ In addition to covering all travel and participation-related expenses for its grantee partners, the LEF facilitated mentorship and peer networking.

Instagram posts spotlight LEF grantee partners' involvement at COP29.



Hadiqa Bashir

Executive Director —
Girls United for Human
Rights Pakistan



Ferdinand Sanchez

Negros Workers
Development Centre



Lokai Charles

Executive Director —
Lokichar Action Network
in Kenya

¹⁰ Included representatives from: Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, India (2), Tunisia, Liberia, Philippines, Chile and Kenya.

2. Digital Amplification as a Legal Empowerment Tool

The LEF's digital amplification of the plight of grantee partners also serves as a rapid response tool, amplifying the voices of grantee partners facing urgent justice issues and mobilizing support, and potential solutions in times of crisis. For example, when coastal fishing communities in Sitio Kabilang Ilog in Barangay Capuntian Orion, Bataan, Philippines, faced mass evictions to pave the way for development projects, the LEF highlighted their situation on social media. As a result, the LEF's grantee partner received messages of solidarity and strategic advice from organizations around the world facing similar challenges. Civil society groups in the Philippines offered direct support.



Image (Above): Community mobilization session in Sitio Kabilang Ilog, Bataan, Philippines.

In collaboration with the Mott Foundation, LEF conducted two content-gathering trips to document the impact of its support for grassroots organizations advancing social justice, economic rights, and environmental advocacy. Filmed in Kenya (October 2024) and Mexico (January 2025), the videos feature interviews with key leaders from grantee partners including **Mathare Social Justice Centre**, **Pamoja Trust**, **Amka Africa Justice Initiative**, **INSADE**, and **OCNF**. The videos capture their efforts to empower marginalized communities and promote legal rights. To further amplify their voices on a global stage, these productions will be showcased at the World Justice Forum in June 2025, highlighting the critical role of legal empowerment in driving systemic change and influencing international conversations on justice and equity.

II. PROGRESS TOWARD OUTCOMES

The key findings from the mid-term evaluation may be summarized as follows:



Empowering grassroots legal strategies: LEF's flexible funding has enabled community-driven initiatives and strengthened operations.

Advancing inclusivity: By supporting often overlooked grassroots groups operating outside centers of power, LEF has expanded diversity in legal empowerment and increased more equitable access to resources.

Strengthening the ecosystem: LEF has catalyzed learning and collaboration, though systemic change is still emerging.

The following section provides a snapshot of the LEF's progress toward achieving its outcomes. **PURPLE** indicates that the LEF is well on its way to achieving this initially planned outcome, while **BLUE** and **RED** indicate that the LEF must prioritize or reassess activities to achieve the outcome. More analysis will be provided in the final mid-term report.

1. Grantees use diverse community-based strategies for change

Flexible funding enables locally tailored and intersectional approaches to community legal changes

2. Grantees leverage learning and action relationships with others

Limited direct contribution to networks; collaborations are mainly grantee-driven, with GJN as key exception

3. Grassroots activists build power in global spaces

Limited direct impact on global visibility; focus remains local and national with international engagement primarily grantee-led

4. LEF and partners leverage resources for legal activism

LEF support enhances grantee credibility with other donors and strengthens organizational capacity



Some further outcome level observations may be gleaned from the **preliminary results of the mid-term evaluation**. Firstly, the LEF is effectively supporting systems change with its partners by contributing to synergies that advance participatory grantmaking, provide core funding to grassroots organizations, and foster learning in legal empowerment. This means that resources are reaching organizations that need them the most, while promoting paradigm shifts by funding marginalized groups, setting new standards for donor risk-taking, and experimenting with innovative legal empowerment models. Additionally, the LEF is broadening intersectional approaches, incorporating climate justice, youth leadership, and community-driven power-building into its initiatives, further reinforcing its commitment to transformative change.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES


A. LEF Operational Team & Tools

The LEF team continued to grow throughout 2024 with the goal of enhancing visibility in international spaces, expanding networking opportunities, and providing high-quality support to grantees. In the summer of 2024, the team welcomed two new colleagues.

The LEF team also introduced new tools throughout 2024. A key development was the successful implementation of **Fluxx**, a robust grant management platform that has transformed the LEF's approach to application processing and data management. By centralizing reviews and scoring, Fluxx has improved data consistency and operational efficiency, with plans underway to train the entire LEF team to ensure standardized practices across all grantmaking activities in 2025.

1. Cultivating Visibility


Throughout 2024, the Communications Team increased international visibility of the LEF to promote the importance of funding grassroot SDG 16.3 initiatives and to disseminate learnings across the legal empowerment field. The team continued to gather case studies to demonstrate the impact of the grantee partners’ work.



SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

The following figures reflect data from July until December 2024, the period in which dedicated communication support was implemented.


Number of posts	39	179% increase compared to the same period in 2023
Number of views	3,135	114% increase compared to the same period in 2023
Number of post impressions	24,221	24% increase compared to the same period in 2023



LEF WEBSITE

The following figures reflect data from September 2024, the launch of the LEF’s website

Number of visitors	3,389
Number of sessions	4,722 sessions
Number of Article Views	1,297
The website engagement rate	78%
The average time spent on the page	38 seconds superseding the benchmark time of 35 seconds





SPOTLIGHT

HUMAN RIGHTS TAKE CENTRE STAGE IN CAMBODIA

In a country where public gatherings are often met with restrictions, standing up for human rights requires both courage and resilience. With the LEF's support, **Cambodian Human Rights Action Coalition (CHRAC)** successfully organized two pivotal events in December 2024. LEF funding enabled **CHRAC** to mobilize communities, amplify voices, and create safe spaces for activism in an environment where such efforts are often met with hostility.

Firstly, from December 6-8, 2024, 50 human rights defenders, youth activists, and civil society organizations set out on the Dhammayietra Sithyietra (Human Rights Walk). Spanning 150 kilometers from Kampot City to Phnom Penh, this march symbolized the collective struggle for human rights and justice in Cambodia. Despite government-imposed restrictions, the participants remained steadfast to ensure the walk continued. Along the route, they engaged communities by raising awareness about freedom of expression, environmental protection, and labor rights. Their perseverance sent a powerful message that, even in the face of intimidation, all citizens have a right to know, use and shape the law.

Secondly, on December 10, 2024, over 1,500 people gathered in Phnom Penh for a national celebration of International Human Rights Day, themed **Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now: Promoting Freedom of Expression for Equality and Justice**. This unprecedented gathering brought together grassroots organizations, environmental defenders, and victims of human rights violations, united in their demand for justice and accountability. Despite the government's history of suppressing large demonstrations, the event moved forward successfully. The significance was further amplified by the presence of diplomatic representatives from five democratic embassies, three of whom publicly addressed the crowd, showing international solidarity for Cambodia's human rights movement.

The success of these events sends a clear message that even in restrictive environments, civic space can be reclaimed, and the fight for justice must continue.

B. LESSONS LEARNED IN 2024

Over the past year, the LEF has increased its understanding of how to best support grassroots legal empowerment movements, address systemic challenges, and refine its operational and grantmaking strategies. Insights from the LEF's mid-term evaluation, ongoing engagement with grantee partners, including the 2023 grantee survey and 2024 learning agenda, as well as consultations with the Steering Committee have provided valuable guidance ensure that the LEF was strengthening the grassroots movement and increasing access to justice for the most marginalized. These lessons will shape the LEF's strategic direction moving forward.

Increasing Grantee Engagement and Peer Learning Opportunities

Insights from the mid-term evaluation underscored the importance of fostering deeper connections between grantee partners and the broader ecosystem of grassroots justice actors. Many grantee partners expressed interest in knowledge exchanges, collaboration across regions, and receiving tailored support from the LEF team.

To promote peer-to-peer collaboration, the LEF will expand virtual and in-person exchanges, leverage the LEF grantee partner WhatsApp group, explore new mentorship models, and increase participatory learning spaces. Moving forward, to ensure that grantee partners understand the resources and opportunities available from both the LEF and the GJN, the LEF will clarify and communicate non-grantmaking support, ensuring grantee partners fully understand the range of available resources.

Grantee partners also highlighted the need for accessible learning tools, localized translations, and digital advocacy strategies. To meet these needs, the LEF will integrate these elements into its learning agenda, prioritizing digital literacy, movement building techniques, and strategies for influencing policy and institutional reforms.

Enhancing Stability Through Multi-Year Funding

A key finding from the evaluation was the need for longer and more predictable funding cycles. While the LEF's flexible funding model has played a crucial role in sustaining grassroots legal empowerment groups, many organizations struggle with short grant terms that limit their ability to plan and implement long-term strategies.

To address this, the LEF will introduce a refreshed funding cycle schedule that will balance grant renewals with new open calls for proposals.¹¹ This will ensure that grantee partners who strongly align with the LEF's Theory of Change (ToC) receive sustained support and funding. Additionally, the LEF will explore hybrid funding models, such as accompaniment grants, which blend financial support with capacity building and strategic mentorship, ensuring that grantee partners receive both resources and guidance to strengthen their impact. Additionally,

¹¹ The preliminary plans are as follows: During odd-numbered years (e.g., 2025), the LEF will launch new Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to onboard new grantee partners to fill geographic or thematic gaps in its overall cohort. The following, even-numbered years (e.g., 2026), the LEF will prioritize grant renewals, deeper engagement, and strategic learning to maximize long-term impact for existing cohorts.

the LEF will explore hybrid funding models that may include accompaniment, which blend financial support with capacity building and strategic mentorship.



IV. NEXT STEPS IN 2025

In 2025, the LEF will renew approximately 50 grants, expand its grantmaking efforts into the Caribbean, and pilot 10 Communications grants to support advocacy and visibility for grassroots legal empowerment initiatives. Alongside these efforts, the LEF will deepen its partnership with the Grassroots Justice Network (GJN) through joint grantmaking, grassroots convenings, and thought leadership. A key highlight of the year will be the World Justice Forum, where the LEF and GJN will elevate grassroots voices to showcase the effectiveness of legal empowerment and position the LEF as a critical vehicle for resourcing frontline justice efforts.

As democratic space continues to shrink globally, the LEF must also refine its strategic approach and better articulate its vision and purpose. This will include a revision of the Theory of Change to strengthen alignment between its grantmaking model and grantee partner engagement strategy. To support this shift, the LEF will invest in accompaniment and mentorship programs, as well as training and peer learning exchanges, to further strengthen the field of legal empowerment. A final priority will be ensuring that knowledge and lessons learned are actively shared across the sector, reinforcing the LEF's role not just as a funder but as a thought leader influencing the broader ecosystem of donors, policymakers, and grassroots justice movements.



 bsky.app/profile/fundhumanrights.bsky.social