



LEGAL EMPOWERMENT FUND LEARNING AGENDA:

BUILDING POWER FOR JUSTICE





3

Introduction:
About the process

5

I. Building power
for justice under
the LEF

6

II. What is a
learning
agenda?

7

III. Two thematic
areas for
learning

12

IV. LEF grantee
partners on
the journey to
contributing to
more accessible
justice
institutions

20

V. LEF grantee
partners on
the journey to
building power
for themselves
and others

25

VI. Learning
agenda

27

VII. Annexes

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DRC: Democratic
Republic of the Congo

GJN: Grassroots Justice
Network

LEF: Legal Empowerment
Fund

MENA: Middle East and
North Africa

FGHR: The Fund for
Global Human Rights

ICC: International
Community Court

ICJ: International Court of
Justice

ECHR: European Court of
Human Rights

USAID: United States
Agency for International

INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE PROCESS



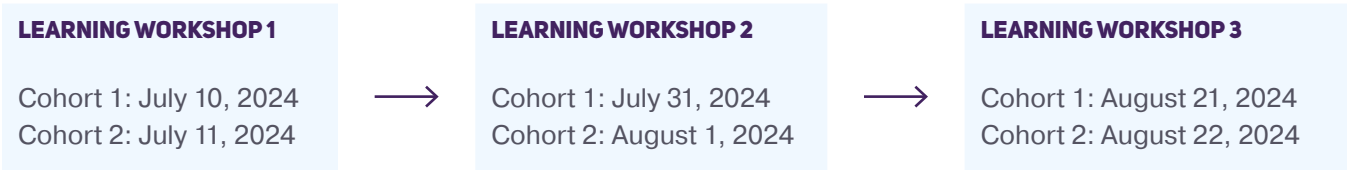
The [Legal Empowerment Fund \(LEF\)](#)—a program hosted by the Fund for Global Human Rights (FGHR), empowers community-led groups globally as part of a participatory, multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at bridging the global justice gap. Through strategic Grantmaking, we enable these groups to address systemic injustices and advocate for enhanced legal protections.

Through its diverse grantee partners, **the LEF supports building power for justice**. Despite laws designed to protect human rights and prevent abuses, over two-thirds of the global population lacks real access to justice, particularly affecting women, children, the impoverished, disabled individuals, and ethnic minorities. This widespread justice gap highlights and exacerbates deep-seated inequalities and exclusion.¹ In this sense, the justice gap is both a reflection of structural inequalities and a contributor to inequality and exclusion.

In 2023, the Fund conducted a survey of its grantee partners. The results of that survey—in conjunction with other consultation exercises including with the LEF core implementation team and the review of grantee partner application data—indicated two key thematic areas for learning: building power for justice and legal empowerment strategies for climate justice. On this basis, the LEF designed a participatory learning agenda around building power for justice.

¹ The Task Force on Justice (2019) Justice for All. Retrieved from: https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/english_task_force_report_27jun19-min_compressed.pdf

Fifteen current LEF grantee partners designed the learning agenda using a participatory approach. The organizations came together in three virtual spaces to share their work and experiences around building more accessible justice institutions and building community power for justice in their respective contexts.



Each workshop was conducted with two cohorts of participants, grouped according to time zones and languages. Sessions with Cohort 1 were conducted in English and French with organizations from multiple regions, including LEF grantees in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Gambia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, and Uganda. Sessions with Cohort 2 were implemented in Spanish and English and included organizations from Latin America, including LEF grantees in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

During the three workshops, participants engaged in activities to reflect on and deepen their work around two main learning questions:

- How are LEF grantee partners contributing to more accessible justice institutions?
- How are LEF grantee partners building power for themselves and others? What are common successes or barriers they face in building power?

Kicking off this collective learning journey, the cohorts defined two crucial concepts: accessible justice institutions and community power for justice. From there, they examined their daily operations, discussing the justice institutions involved, collaboration partners, strategies employed at various levels, and their challenges and successes.

These discussions fostered stronger bonds and solidarity among legal empowerment activists, guiding LEF grantee partners and the Fund in crafting a shared learning agenda. This document will detail the experiences from the workshops and the components of the learning agenda. Through shared learning, the learning agenda is crucial in building a deeper understanding of how justice institutions can be made more accessible and how communities can be empowered to seek justice. By examining grantee partner experiences, collaboration partners, strategies and challenges, this learning can lead to more effective and equitable justice systems.

I. BUILDING POWER FOR JUSTICE UNDER THE LEF

The LEF's work around building power for justice is based on three programmatic pillars: Grantmaking; learning and field building; and amplifying grantee partner voices.

Its work under the first pillar is executed through a participatory Grantmaking mechanism rooted in peer decision-making and collaboration, aimed at resourcing grassroots legal empowerment groups with unrestricted, long-term financial support. Its learning and field-building strategy consists of online and in-person learning opportunities provided in collaboration with Namati—convened by the Grassroots Justice Network (GJN). The second pillar aims to close the justice gap by fostering a trusted community that enhances peer learning. The third pillar elevates grassroots voices internationally, facilitating their participation in global events and policy discussions through travel grants, financial support, and strategic mentorship.

The LEF views legal empowerment as a strategy that puts the law back into the hands of communities facing injustice, allowing them to use it to drive significant reforms in laws and societal systems.

Legal empowerment presents a powerful opportunity to counter these injustices by addressing the power imbalances that perpetuate inequality. Likewise, the LEF champions a direct approach, empowering marginalized and oppressed communities to harness the law in their fight for justice, ensuring they lead their own advocacy efforts.

Legal empowerment aims to increase people's participation in, and control over, public processes that can otherwise be alienating by building the knowledge and skills of those directly affected by injustice to take action. This approach calls for rethinking the role of the law, its potential, and whom it serves, aiming to direct the law toward justice rather than oppression. Empowering those confronted with injustice is crucial for driving transformative change, ensuring that legal empowerment leads to substantial improvements in community resilience and equity.

LEF grantee partners employ various strategies to empower communities, such as strategic litigation, legal aid, community mobilization, educational programs on legal and human rights, and advocacy for policy reforms. We will review these in more detail in sections IV. and V.

II. WHAT IS A LEARNING AGENDA?

A learning agenda is a tool for strategic learning and action that brings value for stakeholders through both the process and the results. The learning agenda serves as a vital resource for the LEF, guiding strategic decisions and enhancing continual development among our grantee partners by effectively bridging knowledge gaps.

It is a valuable tool, created in a participatory manner, with multiple uses:

- **As an exploratory tool** to build a shared language with their partners around legal empowerment.
- **As a field-building tool** to identify and fill knowledge gaps to improve the effectiveness of their work and surface experiences.
- **As a strategic tool** to strengthen their resource mobilization strategy by better demonstrating their understanding and the results of their work.
- **As a learning tool** to learn, connect, and enhance solidarity with similar organizations and individuals.
- **As an assessment tool** to evaluate their efforts, strategies, and outcomes.

It is also a living and evolving tool that must be adjusted and complemented by the people who make use of it.

The learning agenda identifies specific thematic areas for learning; sets learning questions and sub-questions; and details the activities to gather, analyze, and use knowledge. (Refer to [Annex 2](#))

III. TWO THEMATIC AREAS FOR LEARNING

A. Accessible justice institutions

LEF grantee partners embarked on the task of defining accessible justice institutions. Despite the diversity of contexts in which they work, they identified the common elements that make a justice institution accessible.





An accessible justice institution is:

 Responsive	by effectively addressing the needs and expectations of society and the individuals it serves. A responsive justice institution is user-focused, flexible, and able to adjust to changes in the social, political, and legal environment.
Efficient	by performing its functions quickly, making proper use of resources, minimizing costs and errors, and facilitating access and understanding of procedures for all people.
Objective and impartial	to the extent that decisions are made in a fair and equitable manner, based solely on the law and the facts, without outside influence or bias.
Affordable	as the costs associated with accessing justice are manageable and do not represent a barrier for any person, thus ensuring that everyone can exercise their legal rights in an equitable manner.
Within reach	because it addresses geographic, time, cultural, and other barriers, ensuring that all people can exercise their rights effectively and equitably.
Tech-savvy	as it adopts modern technologies and integrates them to improve accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and security in the administration of justice.
Non-discriminatory	in that it treats all people equally and without prejudice, ensuring that no person is disadvantaged or excluded because of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, or any other personal characteristic.
Educational	as it is committed to education and training, both for the public and its officials, to strengthen the understanding and functioning of the judicial system and improving access to justice.



In practice, an accessible justice institution incorporates:

 Support services	that complement the judicial process, helping individuals navigate the legal system and address needs that may arise during their interaction with the justice system.
Agile processes	that are flexible, collaborative, and user-oriented to manage cases and institutional operations.
Transparent operations	to ensure that its processes and decisions are clear, accessible, and understandable to citizens, thereby promoting accountability, integrity, and trust in the judicial system.
Inclusive language	by adopting communication practices that ensure that all people feel respected and represented, promote equality and social justice, and improve the accessibility and understanding of judicial processes.
Differential approaches	that adapt procedures and services to recognize and address the specific needs of diverse groups of people, considering their individual characteristics in their respective context.
Citizen participation	through spaces for citizens to actively influence the functioning of the judicial system, from policy formulation to monitoring and evaluation.

Accessible justice institutions are characterized by these qualities and practices. They remove barriers and provide multiple entry points to ensure that all people—regardless of their personal characteristics and circumstances—can effectively and equitably access justice services and procedures. Per the Open Government Partnership, investing in transparent and accessible justice institutions allows citizens to more effectively defend their rights, demand access to public services, and safeguard their participation in democratic processes.²

² Open Government Partnership (2024) Justice. Retrieved from: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/policy-area/justice/>

LEF grantee partners also identified the justice institutions they refer to when they think of achieving more accessible justice institutions. A wide range of institutions stand out:



The judiciary

At the national level:

- The supreme court, high courts, and constitutional courts (e.g., Consejo Nacional de la Judicatura and Tribunales)
- legal aid centers

At the international level:

- Supranational justice bodies [e.g., the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)]
- the International Criminal Court (ICC)
- the International Court of Justice (ICJ)



Security bodies linked to the judicial system

(e.g., police, prison department)



Administrative control entities

(e.g., *Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos*, *Defensoría del Pueblo*)



Community-based or alternative dispute resolution entities

(e.g., Dispute Resolution Councils, local leadership)

B. Building power

The LEF grantee partners identified different elements that converge in their strategies to build power in the context of legal empowerment. Bringing all these elements together led to the following common definition:



This definition is consistent with the challenges and needs faced by communities in their dialogue and interaction with the law and justice institutions.

Building power for justice seeks to address important challenges such as:



Communities' lack of legal knowledge that hinders their understanding and effective use of the law.



Mistrust in institutions due to corruption and impunity.



Lack of concordance between laws and local realities and needs.



Violence and intimidation against defenders of justice.

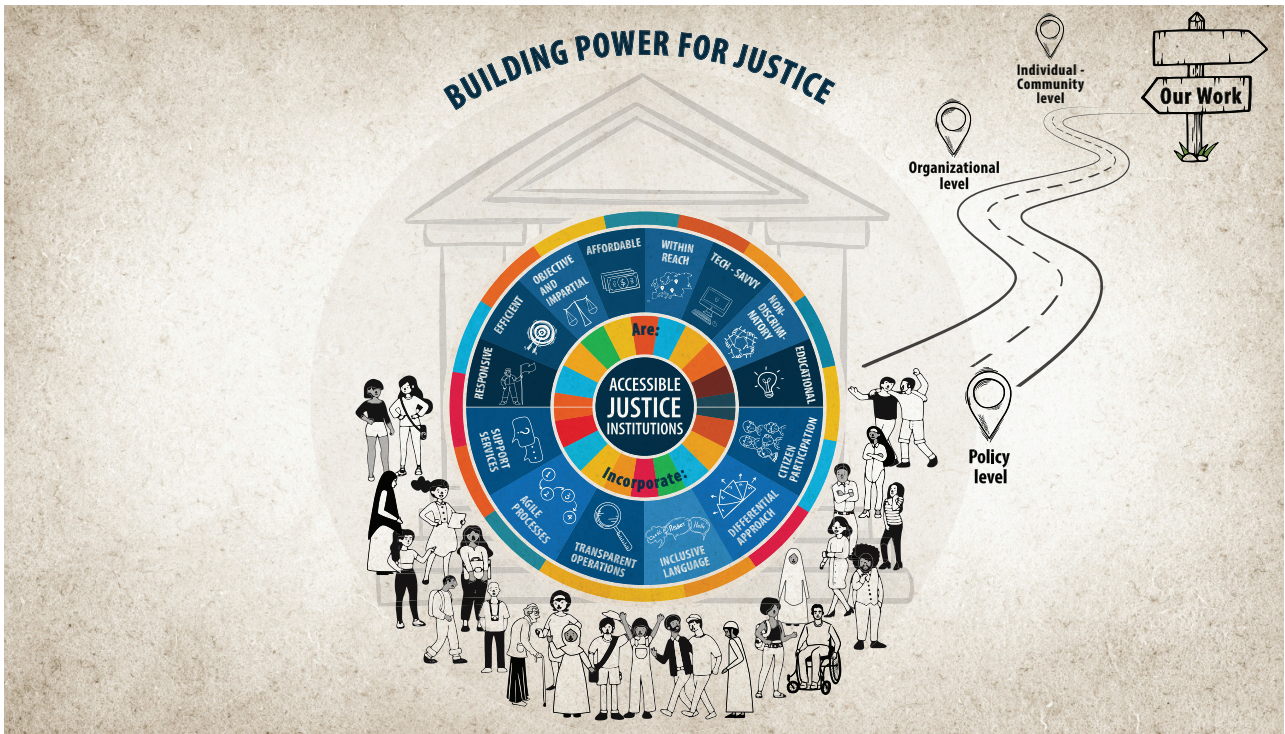


Discrimination and exclusion in the judicial systems, which most marginalized and vulnerable communities experience.

IV. LEF GRANTEE PARTNERS ON THE JOURNEY TO CONTRIBUTING TO MORE ACCESSIBLE JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS

LEF grantee partner contribute to more accessible justice institutions from different angles. Despite the diversity of contexts in which they work, the strategies are very similar, aligned, and complementary. The process of building this learning agenda was also a space in which LEF grantee partners shared some examples of strategies they use to increase the accessibility of justice institutions at the individual-community, organizational, and public policy levels.

MAIN LEARNING QUESTION: How are LEF grantee partners contributing to more accessible justice institutions?



Collectively and with the LEF, LEF grantee partners are pursuing a journey with actions at the individual and community, organizational, and policy levels that contribute to achieving more accessible institutions.

A. At the individual-community level

1. Providing legal and human rights education

LEF grantee partners facilitate various initiatives to advance legal and human rights education. They organize educational sessions that cover laws, rights, and advocacy mechanisms. These sessions are supported by clear, user-friendly materials tailored to address local challenges and needs.

In the DRC, **Action des Volontaires d'Innovation pour le Développement (AVID)** organizes mass education and awareness-raising activities on free access to justice through their Radio program "Radio Voix de la Femme."

2. Campaigning, mobilizing the community, and organizing collective action

LEF grantee partners organize community awareness-raising campaigns in person and through social media and use artistic demonstrations to sensitize communities and institutions on specific issues. In terms of community mobilization, they support communities in the organization of sit-ins to reject laws that violate rights and accompany communities in group protests to demand the guarantee of their rights. Likewise, LEF grantee partners support communities in organizing collective action through the implementation of collective discussion scenarios such as neighbourhood council meetings to plan defense actions.

In Argentina, **Foundation for the Development of Sustainable Policies (FUNDEPS)** has developed two web pages with information on the Escazú Agreement and about cases of agrochemical spraying. The information contained in the websites allows communities to learn about environmental problems (e.g., the agrochemical emergency), environmental rights, and the channels to demand their fulfillment. The web pages represent an advance toward the democratization of knowledge on environmental rights.

Working in alliance with the media through journalism, radio spots, press conferences, statements, and social media content is crucial to raise community awareness, file complaints, and demand the protection and guarantee of rights.

3. Making customary justice systems visible

Indigenous, customary, and religious legal systems, along with community justice forums, often provide critical access to justice for vulnerable populations, offering culturally relevant and accessible legal solutions. Some LEF grantee partners implement activities to help make customary justice systems more visible and raise awareness of issues of equal access or fair treatment in some of these systems. Activities they implement include community spaces to analyze Indigenous justice and ordinary justice; systematization of knowledge, culture, and Indigenous justice; accompaniment to improve the capacity of local leaders who mediate disputes; and meetings with government and administration bodies of the judicial function to discuss integrating customary justice practices with formal legal systems.

4. Supporting alternative dispute resolution

Alternative dispute resolution encompasses a variety of dispute resolution techniques and mechanisms that are alternatives to full-scale court processes. They can be an efficient means to deliver cost-effective and timely justice services in appropriate circumstances, utilizing restorative or other non-adversarial techniques as alternatives to litigation.³ To ensure greater flexibility and efficiency than traditional court proceedings, LEF grantee partners support communities in mediation, arbitration, and negotiation processes. This allows individuals and vulnerable groups, with the leadership of community organizations and community advocates, to resolve disputes outside traditional court systems.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

LEF grantee partners identified sub-questions that will allow them to share and learn from their work on achieving more accessible justice institutions at the individual and community levels:

1.
What practices have you found promising to mitigate the risks faced by human rights defenders?

2.
What practices are you using to invite community participation in your efforts?

3.
What practices have you found promising to elevate the voices of marginalized or vulnerable groups in your work?

³ International Commission of Jurists (2020) Customary and Informal Justice and Alternative Dispute Resolution in the East, Southern and Horn of Africa. 10th “Geneva” Forum of Judges and Lawyers, Nairobi, Kenya. Retrieved from: <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Universal-GvaForum-Kenya-Publications-Reports-Seminar-or-conference-reports-2020-ENG.pdf>

B. At the organizational level

1. Legal aid and case representation:

Legal aid consists of providing legal advice, assistance, and/or representation by a legal aid provider at either no cost or low cost.⁴ LEF grantee partners help and accompany their communities in navigating administrative and legal procedures through legal advice, support, assistance, representation, and carrying out referrals. They work hand in hand with networks of lawyers from civil society organizations and engage paralegals to assist with the preparation of documents, provide legal information, and help individuals understand the procedures.

In Pakistan, **Girls United for Human Rights (GUHR)** established the GUHR Legal Aid Centre. It is their contribution to more accessible justice institutions as it provides assistance and knowledge of the laws to women and girls through study circles. These activities aim to help tribal women and girls demand the guarantee of their rights and build their faith in the justice system, since they are highly discriminated within their traditional Jirga system.

2. Strategic litigation:

Strategic litigation involves selecting and bringing a case to the courtroom to create broader changes in society. Those who bring strategic litigation want to use the law to leave a lasting mark beyond just winning the matter at hand.⁵ LEF grantee partners support communities in strategic litigation processes by making lawyers and paralegals available for representation, conducting research and documenting evidence, generating public support, and giving visibility to cases through various means (e.g., through media allies).

In El Salvador, **COMCAVIS Trans** (pictured below) has used strategic litigation to push for the establishment of the Gender Identity Law to contribute to the recognition and dignification of trans people to build a more just and egalitarian society. Their battle for legal recognition of gender identity includes a landmark Supreme Court of Justice win and a proposed law to eliminate obstacles to name and gender changes on identity documents.



3. Research:

LEF grantee partners use research as a tool to achieve more accessible institutions. Research exercises are useful to generate evidence on communities' interactions with justice systems and identify barriers in doing so. Research is also useful to obtain key evidence to advocate for legal and policy reforms that guarantee access to justice, and as a way to review the performance of justice institutions. Some organizations work hand in hand with academia; others may conduct research on normative frameworks to push for the implementation of court rulings or conduct research and assessments to contribute to the available evidence base.

4. Monitoring and documenting human rights violations for claiming rights:

Some LEF grantee partners carry out activities to monitor and document human rights violations. These activities, conducted in collaboration with other partner organizations, include collecting reliable data on human rights abuses; developing contextual analysis with findings and recommendations by thematic sectors; and identifying cases of interest for follow-up through community promoters.

In Uganda, **Witness Radio** introduced an online portal with a chatbot feature to report and gather data on land evictions, drawing the attention of justice institutions and aiding the most marginalized communities in accessing justice.

5. Training/sensitization work with justice institutions:

Some LEF grantee partners offer training sessions to institutions to enable them to better respond to the emerging and changing needs of the general population or segments of the population.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

At the organizational level, LEF grantee partners identified the following learning questions:

1.

What practices have you found promising to develop/strengthen a movement that contributes to accessible justice?

2.

What innovative mechanisms or practices have been integrated in justice institutions as a result of your work?

3.

What efforts have you made to use technology in your work to make justice institutions more accessible?

C. At the policy level

1. Advocacy for policy change:

Some LEF grantee partners are engaged in advocacy actions to achieve changes in regulatory and public policy frameworks. They carry out a variety of activities with different stakeholder groups. Some grantee partners described analytic activities to support advocacy efforts, such as developing conflict analyses. Other groups described efforts to accompany community groups in their advocacy actions or to advocate before legislative bodies directly to influence regulatory frameworks. They also described a range of multi-stakeholder efforts, such as holding dialogue tables with representatives of government institutions at different levels and civil society organizations.

In India, **Samata** has been instrumental in advocating for the land rights of Indigenous and tribal communities in the Eastern Ghats. Their landmark success came with the so-called Samata judgment in 1997, where the Supreme Court of India ruled that tribal lands in scheduled areas could not be leased to non-tribal entities for mining or industrial purposes. This judgment has had far-reaching implications for protecting tribal lands across India.

In Ecuador, the **Association of Relatives and Friends of Missing Persons (ASFADEC)** influenced the 2020 Law of Action for Missing and Disappeared Persons, leading to the establishment of dedicated public institutions for missing persons.

2. Improving governance, accountability, and transparency:

LEF grantee partners also support accountability, transparency, and governance initiatives. Their actions in this regard range from discussions with justice administrators (e.g., judges) on concrete cases; enforcement routes to demand that institutions fulfill their commitments and exercise their obligations; the use of accountability systems of national and international level instruments; and the participation in discussions on budget allocation with lawmaking institutions to improve access to justice and to audit the resources that have been allocated.

The **Kenya Alliance for Rural Empowerment (KARE)** organized the Justice Sector Stakeholder Forum, uniting court and police officials, civil society, and local government representatives to tackle trends and challenges in justice access and human rights enforcement.

In Uganda, **Witness Radio** has built the capacity of communities impacted by environmental and social harm perpetrated by multinational companies to identify and use mechanisms to monitor and hold the justice institutions accountable. It has trained communities to champion international accountability initiatives for communities affected by agri-business operations in Kiryandongo and Mubende districts. For example, the community was accompanied to file environmental and social complaints with the International Finance Corporation Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman and the USAID Office of the Inspector General.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

LEF grantee partners identified the following sub-learning questions to foster cross-learning at the public policy level:

1. What advocacy strategies have you found promising to create an enabling policy environment for accessible justice institutions?	2. What practices have you found promising to hold legal institutions and other duty bearers accountable?	3. What practices have you found promising to build support for more accessible legal institutions (e.g., media, academia, lawyers, or others)?	4. How does the generation of evidence feed into your other strategies to achieve an enabling environment for accessible justice?
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Barriers LEF grantee partners face in contributing to more accessible justice institutions

Beyond the successes and concrete experiences reported, throughout the implementation of activities to achieve more accessible justice institutions, LEF grantee partners face various barriers:

A. At the institutional level:

- **Fragile justice institutions and inadequate resources:** insufficient resources and gaps in training and empathy of justice system officials affect the care and services the system provides to the community.
- **Delays in justice provision and legal and bureaucratic hurdles:** delays and bureaucratic barriers can have serious consequences, such as prolonging the suffering of victims, loss of confidence in the judicial system, and impunity for perpetrators.
- **Judicial reluctance in environmental law training:** the reluctance of the judiciary officials to receive training in environmental matters and to consider the specific needs of communities affected by socio-environmental problems translates into a limited interpretation of the law and difficulties in effectively applying justice in these cases.
- **Challenges in implementing judicial orders:** budgeting and administrative planning hinder the implementation of complex judicial orders.
- **Corruption in justice institutions:** corruption contributes to delays and backlogs in cases while many court decisions jeopardize the legal requirements and users' expectations.

B. At the community and civic level:

- **Lack of legal awareness and limited knowledge of the judicial system among communities:** the lack of knowledge about the judicial system in the community is a problem that prevents people from understanding how to access justice, how legal processes work, and what their rights are.
- **Threats and intimidation to justice advocates and human rights defenders:** activists and community leaders, particularly those that challenge powerful corporate interests, often face harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention, and criminalization. Retaliations and reprisals increase human rights abuses against communities and those who stand on their behalf.
- **High costs of accessing justice for communities:** the fees to cover professionals and individuals able to support throughout the judicial processes (e.g., court fees, legal fees, collegiality, payment of expert witnesses and environmental experts) interfere with communities' access to justice.
- **Geographical barriers to accessing justice institutions:** the institutions are located in distant places, making physical access difficult for population groups outside the urban centers.
- **Resource constraints in non-governmental organizations:** many non-governmental organizations operate in adverse contexts with very limited financial and human resources.

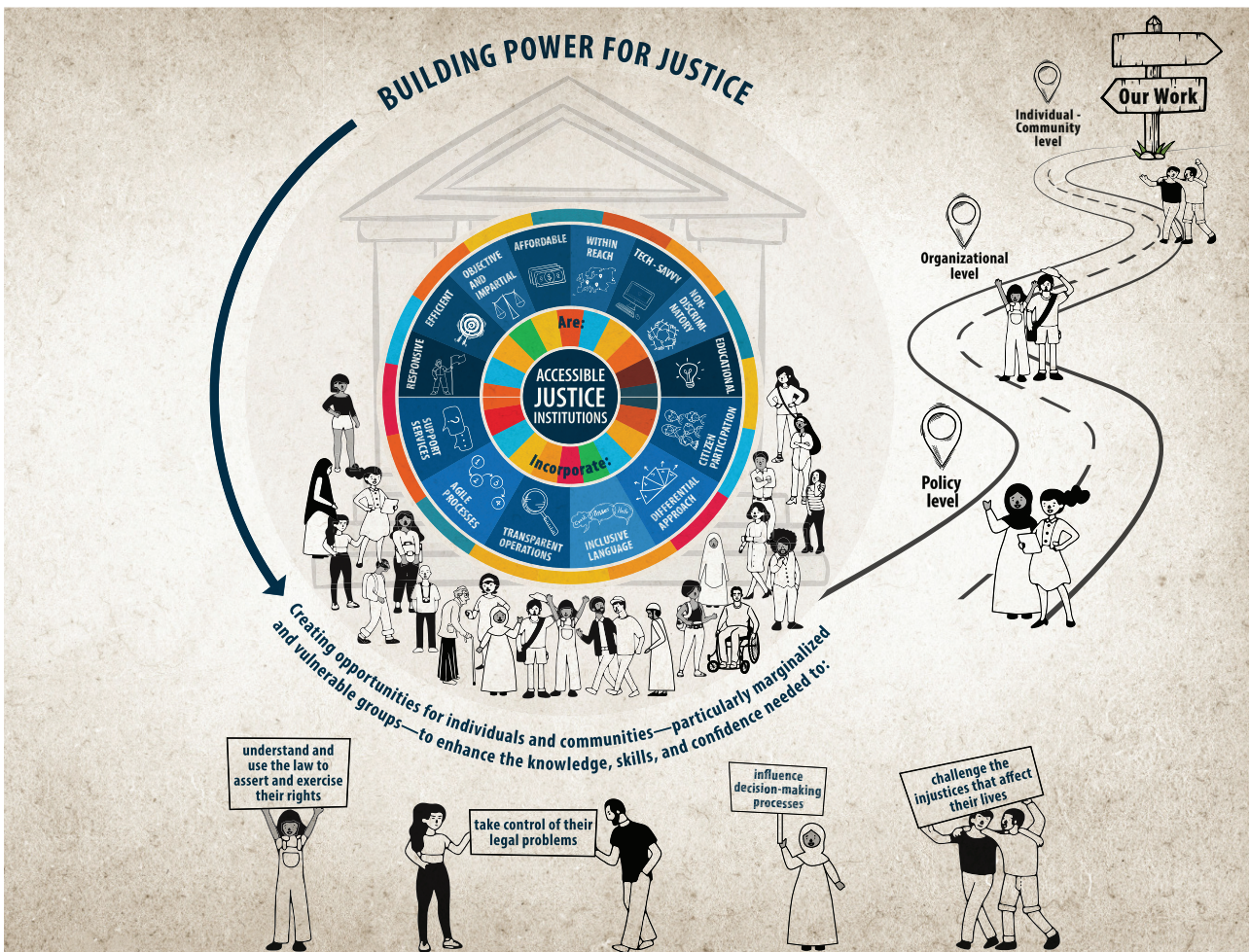
C. At the policy level:

- **Political apathy:** the lack of political will to address cases, in certain contexts, in relation to specific issues (e.g., environmental crisis, missing persons, LGBTQ+) has prevented the dismantling of the root causes of injustice and hindered measures of prevention, socialization, and attention to rights violations.
- **Government and corporate resistance in legal cases:** resistance by these actors can lead to prolonged legal proceedings, lack of access to justice for affected communities, and the consolidation of corporate interests at the expense of community rights.
- **Inadequate legal frameworks for socio-environmental issues:** the legal frameworks do not adequately respond to the socio-environmental issues that ethnic and rural communities experience, nor do they make it possible to determine the responsibility of all actors involved. Furthermore, binding mechanisms for community participation do not always exist.

V. LEF GRANTEE PARTNERS ON THE JOURNEY TO BUILDING POWER FOR THEMSELVES AND OTHERS

To complement the strategies identified for contributing to more accessible institutions, LEF grantee identified other strategies that contribute to building power for justice. This section includes some of the successes they have achieved through the use of these strategies at the individual-community, organizational, and policy levels.

MAIN LEARNING QUESTION: How are LEF grantee partners building power for themselves and others?



As LEF grantee partners contribute to achieving more accessible justice institutions, their journey also leads to building power for justice.

A. At the individual-community level

1. Legal empowerment and leadership training

Some LEF grantee partners host training in leadership schools to empower communities. This approach helps individuals independently seek justice by equipping them with the necessary knowledge to handle human rights cases without relying on external support.

In Colombia, **Siembra** has strengthened rural individuals in Cajamarca and El Carmen de Atrato as subjects of rights through the School for Rural Communities. This school has become the main space for legal empowerment and has strengthened the organizational processes in Cajamarca to defend the rights of its population.

In Kenya, the **Kenya Alliance for Rural Empowerment (KARE)** has observed that as community members become more confident and empowered to seek justice, there is a rise in reported cases and in the cases handled well. Training activities have guaranteed that efforts to gather and preserve evidence improved, ensuring that important evidence is not lost and is used strategically.

2. Making rights violations visible with the support of the media:

Some LEF grantee partners find that the media is an important ally in depicting and denouncing violations of the rights of their communities. Through the media, the organizations amplify their messages and proposals for action, exert public pressure, and strengthen support networks around specific causes to obtain faster and more effective responses in favor of the affected communities.

In Guatemala, to help publicize what women workers face on a daily basis in the workplace, **Maquila Cambridge** has organized press conferences to expose the issues related to the protection of labour rights and strategies used by employers to continue violating them.

In Ecuador, through the socialization of the problem of missing persons, the **Association of Relatives and Friends of Missing Persons in Ecuador (ASFADEC)** has ensured that people know and empathize with this reality and understand the legal and social tools to demand their rights.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

The LEF grantee partners identified the following sub-learning questions:

1.

What tools and methods are you offering to put the power of the law in the hands of people, especially marginalized and vulnerable communities?

2.

What practices have you found promising to level the playing field where communities engage with the state and powerful private actors?

3.

What practices have you found promising to cultivate grassroots leadership that can lead to direct action and drive community efforts?

B. At the organizational level

1. Training community paralegals:

Some LEF grantee partners work hand in hand with community paralegals who act as intermediaries between communities and the legal system, helping people understand their rights, navigate legal procedures, and resolve disputes more efficiently. To get the most out of the paralegals' work, the organizations offer them training in different topics such as local languages, cultural sensitivity, and gender-informed approaches to better support different population groups.

In Uganda, **Rwebisengo Widows Cultural Association (RWCA)** trained and engaged community paralegals to identify land-related acts of violence against women and to raise community awareness about women's land rights. This training helped community paralegals to understand the intersection between gender and social issues when dealing with land matters and the actions that need to be adopted to ensure that women pastoralists can equally participate and benefit from land.

2. Training volunteers and staff

In addition to providing training to the community, some LEF grantee partners provide training to their staff and volunteers to equip them with knowledge and skills to provide appropriate services to the community responding to injustice.

In Uganda, the efforts of **Rwebisengo Widows Cultural Association (RWCA)** toward building power enabled staff and volunteers to gain the confidence required to fight injustices in the communities with which they work. Moreover, power-building efforts have facilitated and equipped RWCA staff with the necessary skills to influence duty bearers and hold them accountable.

3. Networking, exchange, and movement building

LEF grantee partners participate in building national and international coalitions to gather support for specific cases; engage with organizations that already work with specific populations or that are led by them; and share new developments and strategies that are working to achieve their objectives.

In Argentina, **Foundation for the Development of Sustainable Policies (FUNDEPS)** works on creating and strengthening alliances to collaborate in developing amicus curiae briefs, joint strategies, and situational analyses.

In India, **Samata** mobilized tribal communities to assert their rights and engage with justice institutions. They have organized grassroots movements that have brought attention to the injustices that tribal communities face, resulting in more powerful demands.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

At the organizational level, the LEF grantee partners identified some learning sub-questions that can contribute to individual and collective learning:

1. What practices have you found promising to engage different stakeholders and strategies to secure and expand rights?	2. How are you and other legal empowerment organizations mitigating risks to protect justice defenders as they take action?	3. What successes and barriers have you faced in building power?
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C. At the policy level

1. Promoting civic participation

Some LEF grantee partners help establish local committees and participatory bodies that enable community members to engage with governance processes, influencing local government decisions and policies.

In the DRC, **Action des Volontaires d’Innovation pour le Développement (AVID)** supported the organization of a so-called Court of Popular opinion. In these courts, local populations and their authorities discussed various issues that concern them, including cases of popular injustice committed against older women accused of witchcraft and the barriers women face to accessing justice.

2. Strategic dialogues with duty bearers

Some LEF grantee partners facilitate discussions between communities and policymakers to address emerging issues and human rights violations, fostering constructive engagement and solutions.

In Guatemala, **Maquila Cambridge** supports spaces for dialogue between the women of the community and the state to shed light on bad practices used by employers to intimidate women workers when they file complaints against violations of their rights.

SUB-LEARNING QUESTIONS

The LEF grantee partners identified two key questions to learn about their strategies for building power at the policy level:

1. What practices have you found promising to address the structural causes of injustice and exclusion based on grassroots experience?	2. What practices have you found promising to ensure people understand, use, and participate in creating and reforming public policies, rules, and institutions that affect their daily lives?
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Barriers in building power for justice

LEF grantee partners identified the following barriers when reflecting on their daily work toward building power for themselves and others.

A. At the institutional level:

- **Legal and bureaucratic obstacles:** governmental resistance, legal loopholes, and bureaucratic delays hinder the effective exercise of justice and the guarantee of communities' rights.
- **Corporate pressure and influence:** mining and industrial companies exert influence to weaken or circumvent laws that protect the rights of communities.
- **Lack of training of officials and resistance to power-building initiatives:** many officials do not fully understand legal rulings and frameworks, leading to misinterpretation and delayed implementation.
- **Judicial setbacks:** setbacks in the courts generate frustration and distrust in the justice system, which decreases community participation.

B. At the community and civic level:

- **Lack of legal education:** there is a lack of knowledge about rights in the communities, which hinders collective organization and resistance to exploitative practices.
- **Economic pressures:** the economic vulnerability of communities leads them to accept tempting offers of short-term jobs and compensation, compromising long-term sustainability.
- **Violence and intimidation:** activists and community members face threats, violence, and intimidation, which creates a climate of fear and hinders resistance movements.
- **Reduced civic space:** in certain contexts, movements and organizations face government repression, which restricts dissident voices and the mobilization of activists.
- **Insufficient financial resources:** lack of long-term funding limits the ability to empower more people and build sustainable community power.
- **Focus on meeting basic needs over civic participation:** the situation of vulnerable populations forces communities to focus more on survival than on participating in civic activities.
- **Cultural and gender norms:** cultural norms often hinder power-building efforts.

C. At the policy level:

- **Donor interference:** some funding includes agendas that do not align with the power-building needs of communities.

VI. LEARNING AGENDA

Our learning questions

THEME: BUILDING POWER FOR JUSTICE		
How are LEF grantee partners contributing to more accessible justice institutions?		
Individual/community level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What practices have you found promising to mitigate the risks faced by human rights defenders? What practices are you using to invite community participation in your efforts? What practices have you found promising to elevate the voices of marginalized or vulnerable groups in your work? 	Organizational level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What practices have you found promising to develop/strengthen a movement that contributes to accessible justice? What innovative mechanisms or practices have been integrated in justice institutions as a result of your work? What efforts have you made to use technology in your work to make justice institutions more accessible? 	Policy level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What advocacy strategies have you found promising to create an enabling policy environment for accessible justice institutions? What practices have you found promising to hold legal institutions and other duty bearers accountable? What practices have you found promising to build support for more accessible legal institutions? (e.g., media, academia, lawyers, or others) How does the generation of evidence feed into your other strategies to achieve an enabling environment for accessible justice?
How are LEF grantee partners building power for themselves and others?		
Individual/community level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What tools and methods are you offering to put the power of the law in the hands of people, especially of marginalized and vulnerable communities? What practices have you found promising to level the playing field where communities engage with the state and powerful private actors? What practices have you found promising to cultivate grassroots leadership that can lead to direct action and drive community efforts? 	Organizational level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What practices have you found promising to engage different stakeholders and strategies to secure and expand rights? How are you and other legal empowerment organizations mitigating risks to protect justice defenders as they take action? What successes and barriers have you faced in building power? 	Policy level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What practices have you found promising to address the structural causes of injustice and exclusion based on grassroots experience? What practices have you found promising to ensure people understand, use, and participate in creating and reforming public policies, rules, and institutions that affect their daily lives?

TABLE 1. LEARNING MATRIX

1	BUILDING POWER FOR JUSTICE					
2	How Are LEF grantees contributing to more accessible justice institutions?			How are LEF grantee partners building power for themselves and others?		
3	Individual – Community Level	Organizational Level	Policy Level	Individual – Community Level	Organizational Level	Policy Level
4	1. What practices have you found promising to mitigate the risks faced by human rights defenders? 2. What practices are you using to invite community participation in your efforts? 3. What practices have you found promising to elevate the voices of marginalized or vulnerable groups in your work?	4. What practices have you found promising to develop/strengthen a movement that contributes to accessible justice? 5. What innovative mechanisms or practices have been integrated in justice institutions as a result of your work? 6. What efforts have you made to use technology in your work to make justice institutions more accessible?	7. What advocacy strategies have you found promising to create an enabling policy environment for accessible justice institutions? 8. What practices have you found promising to hold legal institutions and other duty bearers accountable? 9. What practices have you found promising to build support for more accessible legal institutions? (media, academia, lawyers, other) 10. How does the generation of evidence feed into your other strategies to achieve an enabling environment for accessible justice?	1. What tools and methods are you offering to put the power of the law in the hands of people, especially of marginalized and vulnerable communities? 2. What practices have you found promising to level the playing field where communities engage with the state and powerful private actors? 3. What practices have you found promising to cultivate grassroots leadership that can lead to direct action and drive community efforts?	4. What practices have you found promising to engage different stakeholders and strategies to secure and expand rights? 5. How are you and other legal empowerment organizations mitigating risks to protect justice defenders as they take action? 6. What successes and barriers have you faced in building power?	7. What practices have you found promising to address the structural causes of injustice and exclusion based on grassroots experience? 8. What practices have you found promising to ensure people understand, use, and participate in creating and reforming public policies, rules, and institutions that affect their daily lives?
5	Learning Stakeholders / Who			Learning Stakeholders / Who		
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSOs working on legal empower and/or justice and human rights defenders CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice and community leaders CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice, community leaders, and representatives or marginalized/vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSOs working on legal empower and/or justice CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice, justice institutions at different levels, and community leaders CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSOs working on legal empower and/or justice and community leaders CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice, journalists, lawyers, and researchers CSOs working on legal empowerment and/or justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives of marginalized groups, community leaders, and legal empowerment organizations Members of the community include vulnerable populations, paralegals, community leaders, and legal empowerment organizations Community leaders and legal empowerment organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paralegals, community leaders, journalists, researchers, and legal empowerment organizations. Justice defenders, community leaders, and legal empowerment organizations Legal empowerment organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal empowerment organizations, community leaders, and justice advocates Community leaders, paralegals, and representatives of the community, including marginalized groups.
7	Learning Activities			Learning Activities		
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of past programs and projects Learning workshops Consultations Reflection workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming Interviews Survey or polls 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with the community Reflection workshops Brainstorming sessions Focus group discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Needs assessments Surveys or polls 	
9	Learning Products					
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Papers with policy recommendations Podcast episodes Blogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Webinars Educational videos Online forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compilation of good practices Case studies Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infographics Short video/Reels for social media Consultations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-learning course Learning collective (transnational) spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials for social media campaigns

VII. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. Our learning agenda

The learning matrix details the different elements of the learning agenda collaboratively developed with the LEF grantee partners, namely: theme, main learning questions, sub-learning questions, learning activities/methods, learning stakeholders, and learning products. If necessary, please consult [II. What is a learning agenda](#), which contains the definition of each component of the matrix.

Do not forget that this learning agenda is a LIVE TOOL that you can adapt according to your needs and interests. Help us by including new questions as you use it!

A GUIDE TO USE THE LEARNING AGENDA

PREPARE (see Table 1. Learning Matrix)

- 1. Why:** Reflect on the purpose of initiating this learning journey. What is the reason you are going to answer the questions? For and with whom do you envision answering your learning questions?
- 2. What:** Review the learning questions (Row 2) and sub-questions (Row 4) and identify those you want to use for learning at this time (you do not have to use them all at once!). To make this choice, you may consider the following:
 - Which questions are most relevant in your context?
 - Which questions relate to the work you do or would like to do?
 - Which of these questions will give you information you can use in the present or near future?
- 3. How:** Based on your previous knowledge and experience and taking the suggested learning activities (Row 8) into account, determine which learning activities you can carry out to answer each question (the glossary in [Annex 2](#) can be a guide). Consider the resources and logistics required for each activity to make the decision.
- 4. Who:** Identify the stakeholders who will help you answer each question (Row 6). In making your selection, consider the type and amount of information each stakeholder can provide, the access you have to them, the interest they may have in the exercise/project/program, and the elements you should consider to ensure they actively participate (try to involve a diverse pool of stakeholders in the conversations to have information that brings together different perspectives).
 - a. Organize the learning activities and invite participants. Depending on the type of actors and activities you have chosen, you can group the actors as you see fit.
 - b. You can bring one or several learning sub-questions to each space. Considering the time and the profile of the attendees, make the most of the space!

TABLE 2. DOCUMENTING OUR LEARNINGS

	Reflect			Act
Sub-Learning Questions	What happened? What did we observe?	What factors helped our success or contributed to our setbacks?	What patterns or differences do we notice from this or other similar experiences?	What will we do next?

REFLECT AND ACT (see Table 2 above)

5. Choose the format you want to use to present the findings of your learning exercise. Consider the audience with whom you will share the results. Choose the most attractive formats. Whichever format you choose, the important thing is that you document the learning to ensure that it is available for you and for others to learn from.

For documentation of the learnings and to reflect on them, you can use the questions in the Reflect and Act table. Make sure your answers are clear and include as much detail as possible.

6. Share and socialize the results of the learning exercise within your organization, other organizations working on legal empowerment/justice, and with the movement, as you wish.

We conclude this tool by underscoring that “building power for justice” implies constant learning. Every action and strategy to close the global justice gap is an opportunity to learn, improve, and grow together. Use this tool not only to strengthen your individual and organizational knowledge but also to drive collective learning, turning every success and challenge into lessons that bring us closer to a more equitable and accessible justice for all.



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