

CENTRING SURVIVORS' VOICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY

October 2025



A catalyst for survivor-led change

The Freedom Fund recognises that those with lived experience are the most powerful leaders in the fight against modern slavery. Survivors bring unique insights, resilience and solutions that are critical to driving sustainable change. Acknowledging this, the Freedom Fund launched the Survivor Leadership Fund (SLF) in 2021, a pioneering initiative to shift power and resources to survivor-led organisations (SLOs). By providing unrestricted, flexible funding, SLF supports SLOs to lead transformative, community-driven solutions to modern slavery.

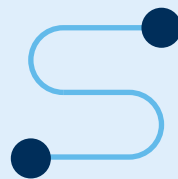
We are no longer just participants; we are leading the movement against slavery in our communities.

Nepal

Receiving funding from SLF is not just about financial support; it is also about empowerment. The application process itself was affirming, as it validated our work and reinforced our belief in the importance of our mission.

Brazil

Survivor Leadership Fund at a glance



Launched in 2021 by the Freedom Fund



Flexible, unrestricted funding (up to USD 20,000) supporting SLOs



USD 2.32 million disbursed through December 2024



118 SLOs supported in 15 countries



Funds disbursed in Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda

Key findings from Survivor Leadership Fund's evaluation

Between March 2024 and January 2025, the Freedom Fund undertook a comprehensive evaluation of SLF to assess its effectiveness, impact and future strategic direction. Through a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, interviews and field assessments, this collective learning exercise generated robust evidence on the role of SLF in advancing survivor-led anti-slavery initiatives and highlighted areas for growth to enhance its sustainability and alignment with the Freedom Fund's broader mission. At the time of the evaluation, SLF had supported 77 SLOs across 13 countries:

- 75% of SLOs are women-led.
- 70% of SLOs were small, volunteer-run groups led by survivors (often women), focusing on immediate survivor support, awareness and local community advocacy and addressing root causes of modern slavery, such as poverty and discrimination.
- 66% of SLOs were established by survivors themselves.
- 70% of SLOs include survivors in their boards.
- 60% of SLOs have between 1 and 10 paid staff, often fewer than 5.

SLF also inspired many other survivors to be leaders – just by looking at us, they get inspired and gain the confidence to lead.
Ethiopia

Most significant areas of impact identified by the evaluation

Strengthening organisational capacities

An overwhelming 87% of SLOs reported improvements in their ability to sustain and manage their operations, even in complex contexts.

92% of SLOs reported improvements in their capacity to deliver and expand programmes.

85% indicated that SLF funding supported the development of new solutions and approaches to address unmet community needs.

Centring survivor leadership and agency

The SLF made a decisive contribution to supporting survivor leadership, with 88% of SLOs reporting positive changes in leadership and agency.

66% of SLOs reported that SLF greatly enhanced leadership opportunities for survivor leaders within their communities, with an additional 24% indicating moderate support.

57% stated that SLF significantly strengthened their ability to raise awareness in the anti-slavery sector, with a further 32% noting moderate gains.



By focusing on areas most affected by slavery, SLF ensures real change where it matters most.

Indonesia

Fostering collective action and networking

Beyond the boundaries of individual organisations, SLF contributed to stronger networks and collective action, with 87% of SLOs reporting positive changes.

56% of SLOs reported substantial improvement in their ability to mobilise community-driven responses; an additional 34% noted moderate gains.

49% observed substantial gains in their collective capacity to advocate for policy change through networks and alliances; 39% reported moderate improvements.



Key challenges and areas for improvement identified by evaluation

One-off funding limits long-term impact and sustainability

While SLF funding enabled SLOs to pilot promising initiatives, many, especially smaller or newer ones, lacked the ongoing support needed to continue or scale their work. Many SLOs, particularly nascent organisations, struggled to diversify revenue and funding streams, and financial sustainability became a persistent challenge.

SLF is a very good fund. However, it is a short-term and one-time grant... when the grant period ends, it leaves us in a dilemma about how to continue to support survivors and address emerging issues.

Uganda



Non-financial support beyond funding

Nearly 95% of SLOs stressed the need for capacity-building activities to strengthen organisational effectiveness, and 85% identified mentorship and peer learning as essential to their continued growth.

The training and support we received through SLF were as valuable as the funding itself.

Kenya



Recommendations for the future

1

Strengthen SLF's core mission and strategic alignment with the Freedom Fund's broader programs

Continue to provide unrestricted funding to SLOs, prioritising community-based organisations in Freedom Fund hotspot countries.

Preserve entry-level grants for newer organisations while scaling support for more established SLOs.



2

Enhance non-financial support

Use regional convenings and digital infrastructure to build connections and strengthen networking between SLOs and other Freedom Fund partners.

Provide more structured mentorship and guidance to SLOs, including regular feedback and support by the SLF team.



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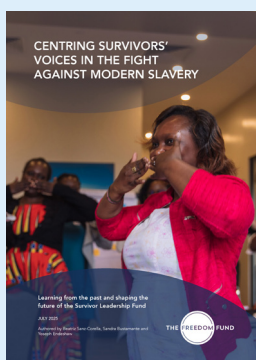
Improve grant making processes and inclusivity

Be even more proactive in reaching out to less-visible SLOs, with increased involvement from the Freedom Fund's hotspot country teams in the selection process.

Provide more timely, constructive feedback to all SLF applicants, and invest in digital infrastructure to streamline grant management and reporting.



For further details,
[read the report](#)



Images: SLF convening in Indonesia.
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