



IGNITE!

EMPOWERMENT GRANT

for youth-led LGBTI organizations in Asia-Pacific



introduction

This report presents a summary of the overall outcome of the First Round of Youth Voices Count (YVC)’s IGNITE! LGBTIQ Youth Empowerment Grants. In the course of nine months from April to December 2020 and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, five youth-led and LGBTIQ-led organizations from five countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam have been approved with seed funding of up to USD 2,100 to carry out their proposed activities.

This report is divided into three areas that examine the grant design, implementation, and successes of IGNITE!:

- a. Uniqueness of the program. This will identify aspects of IGNITE! that YVC and grantees consider as unique to the grant, not only in terms of how the grant was envisioned and designed, but also how it supported its grantees throughout the project and contributed towards the success of the grant implementation.
- b. Showcase of grantees’ successes. True to its intent as a seed funding program that caters towards young LGBTIQ communities, this is where the efforts of the grantees will be presented along with their contribution to youth-led LGBTIQ community mobilization, movements, and activism in their respective countries. Given that IGNITE! was implemented during the height of the COVID-19 related lockdowns, relevant pandemic responses of the grantees will also be shared.
- c. Sustainability and moving forward. This report will conclude with a summary of how the grantees are planning to carry on with their IGNITE!-initiated projects. Under this section, specific recommendations will also be put forward on how funders, YVC Secretariat, and partners can support the continuation of this groundbreaking grant mechanism initiative.

This report is based on desk review from secondary sources including mid-term and final reports that the grantees submitted as part of their project deliverables along with other project-related documents from YVC. Nine interviews have also been conducted from December 2020 to January 2021 with YVC Secretariat, grantees, and COC Netherlands (see [Annex](#)).

IGNITE! Empowerment Grant: Round 1 Regional Report

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The cover features members from IGNITE! Round 1 grantee Equite Sri Lanka during a consultation workshop with youth, one of their key activities in implementing “Eliminating Stigma and Discrimination faced by Key Population due to their Status of HIV, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation”.

about **IGNITE!**

The IGNITE! Empowerment Grant is a financial granting program created by Youth Voices Count (YVC) to support youth-led initiatives that cater to LGBTIQ youth communities in Asia and the Pacific. This program is aligned with Youth Voices Count’s commitment to supporting LGBTIQ youth-led initiatives in Asia and the Pacific in order to achieve its vision of “a society where young people of all sexual and gender diversity including those who identify as LGBTIQ lead safe and free lives with equal opportunity to achieve their full potential and well-being”¹.

The name was inspired by YVC’s previous mentorship program, “IGNITE! Mentorship Programme”, which aimed to build a new cadre of young men who have sex with men and transgender leaders by providing workshops about HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and project management skills building courses to help build the capacity of the youth participants². The program

envisioned a stronger movement of men who have sex with men and transgender populations by building solidarity across these populations groups in the region³. It brought young people together through skills-building sessions on youth-friendly health services. Called “IGNITE! Mentorship Program”, the program. The network appealed to the idea of using the same name that reflects the granting program’s mission to support initiatives led by young LGBTIQ.

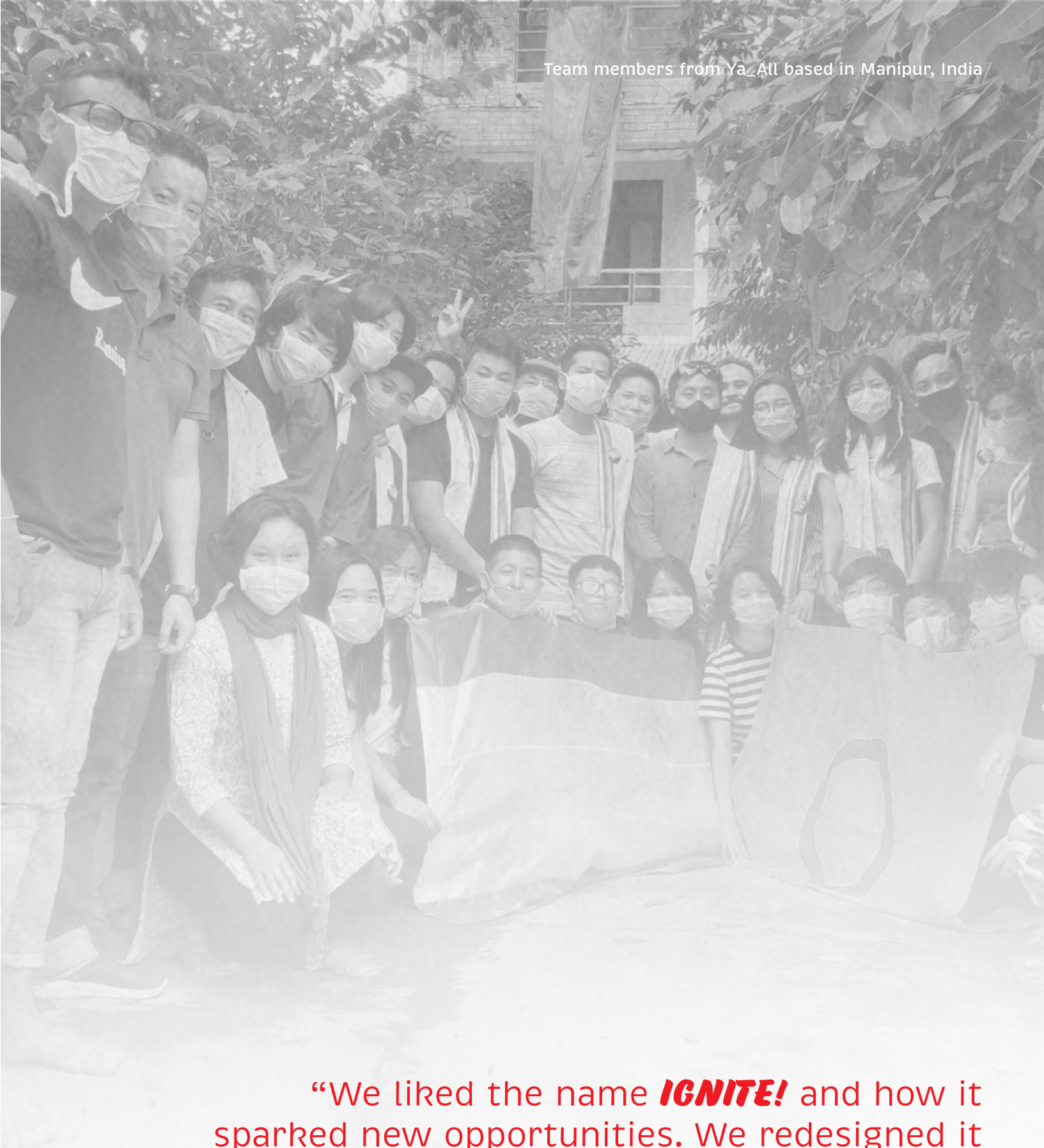
The initiatives that IGNITE! supported are in accordance with the five focus areas of YVC. For the First Round of the program, five LGBTIQ youth-led or LGBTIQ-serving organizations in five countries in Asia have been awarded with grants amounting to approximately USD 2,000 (Table 1).

	Inclusive Bangladesh	Ya_All	Bahaghari Center	Equite Sri Lanka	UniGEN
Inclusive and youth-friendly health services; mental and physical health and well-being	x	x	x	x	x
Creating inclusive educational spaces	x	x			x
Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)	x		x	x	
Digital rights, online safety and security, and open technology	x				
Promoting human rights through culture, arts, and sports	x	x	x	x	x

Table 1. Alignment of IGNITE! grantees’ initiatives with YVC’s focus areas

1 Youth Voices Count, “Stepping Stone: YVC Strategic Plan 2017-2020,” Youth Voices Count, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/13UdRTKqswWnogvGiMCQbhrEDO8GUDcx9/view>
2 APCOM, “Building Leadership: What We Do,” 2020, <https://www.apcom.org/building-leadership/>
3 Youth Voices Count, “Mentorship Program for Young Men who have Sex with Men and Young Transgender Persons in Asia and the Pacific, 2015, https://www.apcom.org/sites/default/files/yvc-ignite-application-concept_note.pdf

Team members from Ya_All based in Manipur, India



“We liked the name **IGNITE!** and how it sparked new opportunities. We redesigned it to focus on LGBT-youth-led organizations or initiatives and carried the thought process.”

– JUSTIN FRANCIS BIONAT, YVC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

what makes **IGNITE!** unique?

The IGNITE! Empowerment Grant sets itself to be different from other existing granting mechanisms. This can be exemplified by these three facets when it comes to its management of funds and its relationship with its grantees.

FLEXIBILITY OF FUNDING

The granting design and coverage of the IGNITE! Empowerment Grants have been overall identified by the grantees as 'flexible'. This was made to ensure that the needs and contexts of the organizational grantees are met with minimal restrictions in the eligibility, disbursement of funds, and reporting.

An eligibility requirement considered as an obstacle by IGNITE! was that organizations applying for grants may or may not be legally registered in their country of operations. Allowing nonregistered organizations expanded the pool of applicants that could apply for the grant given that legal registration was not identified as a hindrance with regards to receiving the funds, especially that funds would come from external foreign sources. LGBTIQ-

led organizations in some countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, find it difficult to apply for a grant if there are restrictions in place at the country level wherein civil society organizations are being surveilled by the government and are not recognised mainly because of their work around social justice, which is seen as a form of "antagonizing" the government. This is especially true for organizations and individuals working in countries that continue to criminalize LGBTIQ identities and any form of human rights activism. Since it was in the interest of IGNITE! to support organizations that are working even in these restrictive environments and constricting spaces for civil society, YVC identified alternatives to transferring these funds either through personal accounts or through fund conduits.

"Specifically, with grassroots youth initiatives, small flexible grants can provide a great opportunity to learn rather quickly on methods initiatives groups like to organize. A necessary and basic step in youth empowerment and capacity building."

— ALEXANDER HAMMELBURG, COC NETHERLANDS

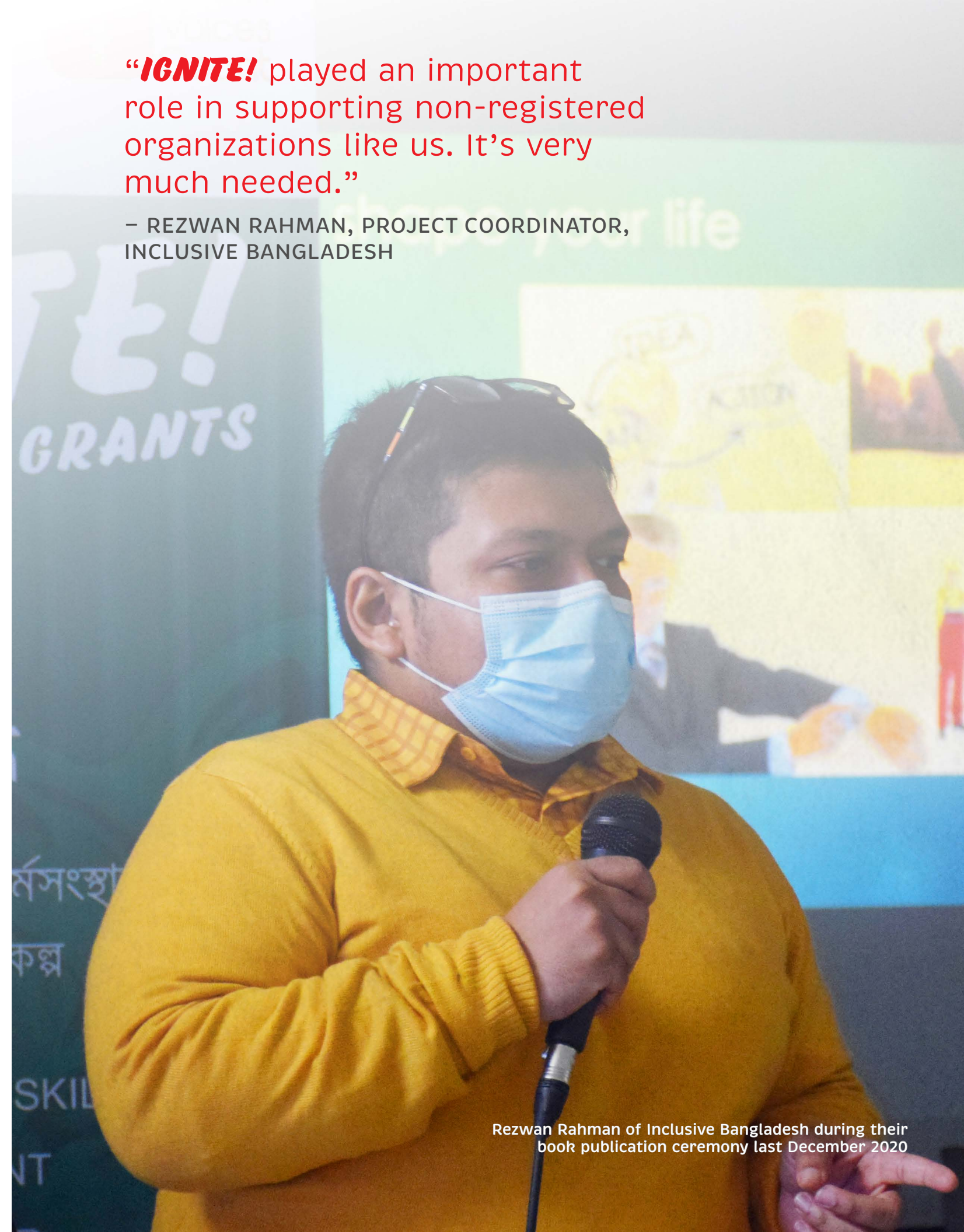
YVC also made it intentional that the funds will be treated as lump sum to allow grantees to work flexibly with the budget and address the unique needs of the beneficiaries of the grant. This flexibility ensured that there would be no constraints in the utilization of the funds, particularly when it applied to programmatic funds.

This flexibility has been helpful as the grantees tackle the challenges in implementing their grants during the height of the COVID-19

related lockdowns. Interviews from grantees have noted that this helped them adjust their activities in response to COVID-19, while some re-purposed their funds to aid their beneficiaries who have been affected by COVID-19. The informal and open communication with YVC have also eased in leveraging this flexible approach in the utilization of funding, coupled with the understanding from the funder, which was COC Netherlands, with regards to how grantees would be utilizing the funds.

"IGNITE! played an important role in supporting non-registered organizations like us. It's very much needed."

— REZWAN RAHMAN, PROJECT COORDINATOR,
INCLUSIVE BANGLADESH



Rezwan Rahman of Inclusive Bangladesh during their book publication ceremony last December 2020

MENTORSHIP SUPPORT

The mentorship scheme of IGNITE! Empowerment Grant is another aspect that was unique to the granting program. Building from the inspiration of a previous YVC program, the mentorship scheme was designed on two levels: (a) Direct YVC support to grantees in the administrative and management aspect of the grant implementation, and (b) technical support mentorship during the implementation phase of the grant.

The first level involved an inception training among the grantees. At this training, grantees were provided with an orientation of the project administration and financial management procedures and were also provided with narrative and financial management reporting templates that will be used. Given that some of the grantees were first-time recipients of international grants, such form of management support was expected by YVC.

The second level of mentorship involved holding regular check-in calls with the grantees as a whole. This became a platform for the grantees to share programmatic updates and to raise any issues or challenges in relation to

the implementation of their intended activities. It was also a chance for the grantees to learn from each other's work, and to pick up lessons in the implementation of their respective grants. The open communication between YVC and the IGNITE! Round One grantees took place through Facebook chat and email, depending on the comfortability of the grantee. At any point, a grantee could send an inquiry or YVC can send regular reminders of the grantees' submission dates. This was identified by the grantees to be very helpful in support of their implementation.

YVC has also introduced an option wherein they could reach out to any YVC Regional Governance Body members or Focal Points to further support the programmatic implementation of the grantees. While no grantee has asked for any further technical support through the implementation of their grants, all grantees mentioned that the guidance that they receive from YVC Secretariat was sufficient due to the close collaboration that the grantees have received from them.

“We were anticipating that they lacked the capacity to understand things for the implementation of the project. Justin coined the idea that we do not just give support or grant but also educate or mentor them: the basics of accounting, the finance forms, and some of the financial reports were discussed during the implementation.”

— JOHN MEL ESTIMAR, FINANCE MANAGER, YVC

FOCUS ON YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES

Youth-led organizations, such as YVC, serving youth-led initiatives through IGNITE! Empowerment Grant has been an approach that has been exercised during its First Round of implementation. Grantees have this approach to have helped them throughout the granting period.

IGNITE! Empowerment Grant's focus on youth-led initiatives provides an opportunity to overall support youth-led organizations who have otherwise been unable to neither operate nor receive funds to implement their activities due to their non-registered status or other legal registration restrictions. One grantee, Inclusive Bangladesh, revealed that IGNITE! played an important role in the continuation of their grant despite not being registered and mostly reliant

on their member volunteers.

Grantees have also emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer support as an added value of the IGNITE! Empowerment Grant.

Having a regional youth-led network such as YVC implementing a granting mechanism that focuses on youth-led initiatives and supporting youth-led organizations enables sharing of ideas translating the passion of the grantees into activities that can be implemented and in which immediate outcomes can be measured. In addition, given YVC's track record in supporting and collaborating with LGBTIQ youth-led organizations, a peer-to-peer approach has extended various forms of support and mentorship to the overall management of the

“The support that we received were really helpful especially which helped me gain more experience in international funding and grants. The support we received has helped us to do the project and to do it professionally, and we improved a lot.”

— MI TRIEU, PROJECT COLLABORATOR, UNIGEN

grants and in the programmatic directions and focus of the activities. This includes steps in adjusting some of the activities of the grantees in relation to the COVID-19 related lockdowns.

This peer-to-peer approach has also opened and strengthened the relationship between YVC and the grantees. One grantee noted that this relationship that YVC facilitated from the inception of the granting period has created a friendly atmosphere, which has invited the

grantees to be more open from the onset up until the grants have ended. This has allowed easier communication between YVC and the grantees, wherein grantees could raise questions and clarifications at any point of the implementation of their respective grants. This strong partnership was sustained beyond the lifespan of the grants. Similarly, some of the grantees were referred to and linked to YVC's network partners for potential collaboration in relation to the future of their IGNITE-supported projects.

IGNITE! GRANTEE PROFILES

INCLUSIVE BANGLADESH — Bangladesh

Employability Skill Development Project for Bangladesh Grassroots Queer Community (April to October 2020)

Inclusive Bangladesh is a non-registered, non-profit, volunteer-based, youth-led organization based in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Their vision is “to promote an egalitarian society where local youths will be in the leading function to empower each other and become future leaders by ensuring human rights and actively playing role in constructing a sustainable, just, equitable, and peaceful society”¹.

The mission of Inclusive Bangladesh is to construct an inclusive culture through ensuring quality education, addressing hate speech and violent extremism, promoting interfaith dialogue, and gender diversity with the active participation of youth across Bangladesh. One of Inclusive Bangladesh’s strategies is focused on young key populations living in rural and remote areas, wherein they do outreach to other organizations working on the same goal and create a platform that would enable in supporting other organizations in reaching similar goals.

¹ Inclusive Bangladesh, “Inclusive Bangladesh,” Inclusive Bangladesh, 2020, <https://inclusivebangladesh.weebly.com/>

EMPLOYABILITY SKILL
DEVELOPMENT
PROJECT FOR
BANGLADESHI MARGINALIZED
COMMUNITY

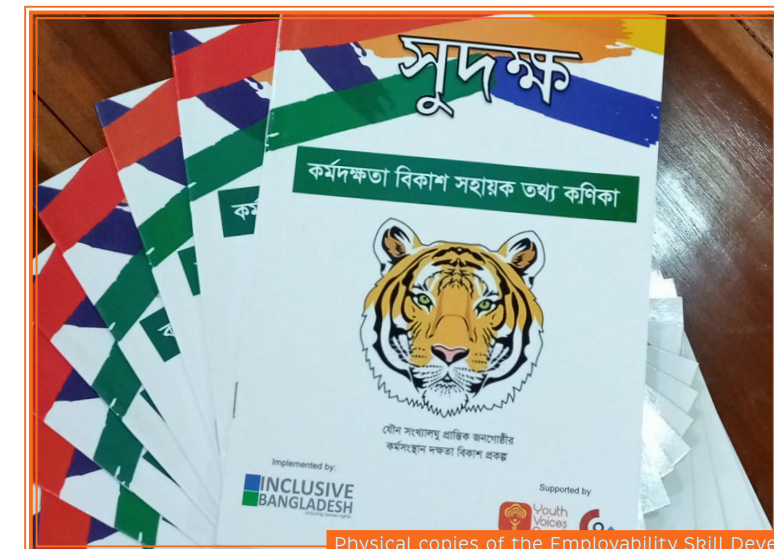
Rezwan Rahman of Inclusive Bangladesh during their book publication ceremony last December 2020

Their project titled “Shudokkho: Employability Skill Development for Bangladesh Grassroots Queer Community” focuses on empowering young Bangladeshi LGBTIQ, especially those living in the rural and remote areas and those who do not have access to basic educational services. It aimed to increase their employability by building their employability and entrepreneurship skills.

Employability of LGBTIQ is a major challenge in Bangladesh, as they are perceived as a potential threat to businesses due to

homophobia and transphobia. In one study, it was identified that social prejudices, and cultural and religious factors have institutionalized stigma and discrimination among *hijras* that it was impossible for them to be employed because of their gender identity². The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns and the consequent economic recession in the country furthered this difficulty among LGBTIQ community. Shudokkho intends to respond to this challenge. As part of an ambitious project to strengthen knowledge and skills on gender equality and empower Bangladeshi grassroots LGBTIQ community

² Litton Hossen, “Challenges of Right to Employment Faced by Transgender Hijra in Bangladesh,” (Thailand, 2020), 79, <https://asiapacific.gchumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Liton-Hossen-thesis.pdf>



Physical copies of the Employability Skill Development Handbook developed by Inclusive Bangladesh

members that started in 2016, this specific part of the project that was supported by IGNITE Empowerment Grant program had two objectives:

1. To increase the employability skills of LGBTIQ community members of Bangladesh, especially who are living in the rural and remote areas of the country; and
2. To make themselves aware of their right to work and coach them to get a suitable employment from competitive job market, including building capacity in entrepreneurship

The project initially intended to conduct a month-long vocational training for LGBTIQ individuals to support their work placement afterwards or develop their entrepreneurial skills. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, all in-person training sessions have been cancelled, which limited Inclusive Bangladesh in implementing their planned activity. In light of

this, they started working on an “Employability Skill Development Handbook”. This handbook aimed to support the learning process of the participants remotely. It contains modules initially aimed to be facilitated in-person; however, as the project activities shifted online, Shuddokkho Project members from Inclusive Bangladesh identified around 50 participants to undergo this remote training, wherein participants are reached out every week to discuss the modules from the handbook. Participants received communication allowance to support communication and internet expenses. The remote training was conducted from July to October 2020.

“As person training wasn’t possible in this COVID-19 situation, we have made booklets that contain all the necessary topics that were projected to teach our beneficiaries. We printed the booklets and the beneficiaries got access to both online & offline copies. We have given them a one-time call and whenever every weekend they are allowed to call us and if they find any



Inclusive Bangladesh and their participants during their book publication ceremony last December 2020

“It is important to focus on income-generating issues. If you do not have money, you probably will not get that mental strength to raise your voice and raise your rights and fight for your community. When you are financially stable, you are able to support yourself and support the community.”

— REZWAN RAHMAN, PROJECT COORDINATOR

problem to understand the topics in the booklet, there are 4-5 members who can be reached out to talk about the issues. We also reached out to them and received the book and received the topic. It was initially made in Bengali but we also translated it to English,” shared Rezwon Rahman, the project coordinator for Inclusive Bangladesh.

As this remote training was ongoing, other members of Inclusive Bangladesh has identified potential employers who could receive the participants upon graduating from the remote training.

As a result, around 50 young LGBTIQ community members from six districts of Bangladesh completed the remote training sessions using the Employability Handbook. Of the 50, 24% or around 12 participants have been successfully placed for an interview, with 3 having secured employment. Apart from providing the Employability Handbook, Inclusive Bangladesh also distributed a number of tools to around 20 participants to support their entrepreneurial startup plans. This includes 10 participants receiving bicycles, 5 participants receiving mobile phones to support their online food delivery work, and 5 participants receiving sewing machines for their sewing business.

For Inclusive Bangladesh, Shudokkho's greatest success was making people employable when everyone else was losing jobs especially at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IGNITE Empowerment Grant was able to provide the necessary support to help materialize this plan especially during the height of COVID-19 lockdown and its impacts.

Through this support, Inclusive Bangladesh provided education and capacity-building and linked the participants to potential jobs so that they can already begin earning. Some participants also received capacity building to either make themselves employable or improve their entrepreneurial capacity.

Inclusive Bangladesh plans to continue utilizing the Employability Skill Development Handbook and expanding their target participants to also include other marginalized young people who are currently unemployed or have stopped schooling. They envision the handbook to be a bridge between young people who needed support from earning money by building their technical and economic prowess and ideas, while linking some of them to the businesses who needed them.

Ya_All (pronounced as Yawol, which means “revolution” in Manipur), is the first queer youth-led and youth-focused network based in North East India. Their vision is “to restore and recreate an inclusive society, which will provide equitable information, service, and opportunities to every individual through meaningful youth engagement thereby working towards achieving sustainable development goals¹”. They aim to achieve this vision by equipping and empowering adolescents, youth, and queer community through life skills, advocacy, research, and capacity building on health, education, livelihood, and overall well-being.

¹ Ya_All, “Our Vision,” 2020, <http://www.yaall.org/aboutus-page#our-vision>



The members of Ya_All during their distribution of food packs and medical & hygiene kits for 150 members of the transgender community across Manipur

Ya_All was officially created in 2017 during the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia to create visibility and provide a support system for queer youth who have been facing stigma and violence in Manipur. Their work has further been established through these four areas²:

1. Advocacy
2. Capacity Building
3. Safe Space and Livelihood
4. Research

One of Ya_All's well-known programs is their “Meitram”, a co-working and networking space that acts as a free resource hub for queer youth in Manipur. This safe space also provides free peer counselling, free peer-to-peer training, and capacity building. It also serves as an advocacy space wherein educational seminars and learning sessions were being conducted, and activities that sought to equip and empower queer youth and young people on certain issues, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, mental health and well-being, and substance abuse and harm reduction strategies.

Their project titled “Project Quest” was initially aimed to provide a platform to queer individuals and allies to mainstream issues faced by the queer community and create an enabling environment in Manipur. Project Quest was meant to utilize Meitram as a physical space wherein the activities proposed by Ya_All would be conducted in their hub. However, due to COVID-19 and the closure of their office and hub, Ya_All had to reprogram their project to focus on reaching out to the young LGBTQ community and provide support to help sustain them during COVID-19 pandemic.

Three activities were conducted under this reprogrammed project: (a) provision of hygiene and medical kits, otherwise known as

the “Khudol Initiative”, (b) provision of remote psychological support, and (c) case study documentation.

Through the “Khudol Initiative”, hygiene and medical kits have been provided to almost 200 young LGBTIQ from August to October 2020. Almost half of their beneficiaries were LGBTIQ adolescents. Volunteers also went out to provide these kits that contained sanitary napkins, condoms, cotton, bandage, mask, sanitizers, band aid, antiseptic liquid, iodine ointment, and basic medicines. In addition, around 200 young people have also been provided with remote psychological support and tele-counseling through their helpline. Some of those who reached out to Ya_All through their helpline to seek counseling were young teens.

Among the common issues that Ya_All received included stress and anxiety over their COVID-19 result, physical health complaints, concerns towards their return to their neighborhood and the attitude that they would receive upon return, the stigma related to being queer, de-motivation and feelings of hopelessness due to uncertainty, and complaints of poor sanitation in community quarantine centers. Ya_All responded by providing COVID-19 education, supportive counseling, teaching clients about relaxation therapy, and motivational conversation and referrals.

Ya_All also conducted case studies documenting the trials and tribulations of young LGBTIQ in Manipur. These case studies captured the experiences of 10 LGBTIQ aged 19-23 from diverse gender and sexual identities, how they have come to understand and embrace their identities, their relationships with their family members and friends, and their hopes for the future.

CASE 5- L S (TRANS MAN, 23YRS, HE/HIS)

“I grew up disliking girly things and during my 6th-7th standard, I came to know that I am different from other female friends. I am also an introvert. At some point, I even tried to change my behavior, to like girly things, but all in vain. The term ‘transgender’ was known just few years back only. For a transgender, they needn’t be open as people easily recognized them. I didn’t get much discrimination from anyone, but seeing the unhappiness of my parents due to my identity hurts me more. I find difficulties at certain security check post and standing in line as there is no place for transgender.

A separate toilet for each gender is a much. Uniform needs to be gender-neutral. Due to the usual teasing by colleagues, sometimes I used to cry silently. So, many changes needs to take place at schools and colleges. We need to generate our own employment by engaging in entrepreneurship and innovation. In public and private sectors also, we need to join in jobs that support and recognize the LGBTIQ+ community. People have misconceptions that by transgender it represents trans woman only.

This, as I think, is the root cause of the patriarchal norms and trans woman, as they didn’t fit in this norms became more visible. I would like to support and assist my community in applying for jobs and in near future, if I could establish my own company, I would like to give employment to my community fellow.”

One of Ya_All's future plans is to continue their peer counseling program to include their mental health tele-counseling initiative as part of the programs that they regularly offer. This would serve as a gatekeeper in enhancing mental health support systems, particularly among young LGBTIQ and young adults, in

general. They also plan to increase their social media presence and advocacy on mental health in the coming months so that more young and adolescent LGBTIQ would be aware that these services are available for them.

2 Ya_All, “Our Services,” 2020, <http://www.yaall.org/ourservices-page>



Distribution of ration and hygiene kit to Children Home, Chandel last May 2020

**BAHAGHARI CENTER FOR SOGIE
RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND
ADVOCACY, INC. — Philippines**

*Rainbow Community in Muslim Mindanao: Community Organising
in Southern Philippines - Pagkaila sa Pagkatawo (Knowing Your
Identity) (August to November 2020)*



Disney Agulla (2nd) and Aaron Bonete (4th) of Bahaghari Center with colleagues from Oxfam Asia during #SayEnough Asia Skillshop / Falana Films

Bahaghari Center is an LGBTQIA-led nongovernment organization that contributes towards eradicating discrimination within and against the LGBTIQ community. Established in 2010, they envision a society that not only embraces but celebrates diversity including – if not particularly – those of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and expressions.

Their strategy revolves around four areas:

1. creating a virtual and physical space for LGBTIQ community in the Philippines and facilitating efforts to work together in programs and activities for the LGBTIQ community
2. education and lobbying against harmful stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors towards LGBTIQ
3. building visibility and providing relevant and defined services such as through research (i.e. conduct of LGBTIQ-related studies and journalistic stylebook for media practitioners); and
4. organizing trainings and workshops to LGBTQIA communities on SOGIESC and HIV, including provision of community-based HIV screening to deaf Filipinos¹.

Their project titled “Pagkaila sa Pagkatawo (Knowing Your Identity)” aims to change the public perception and attitude towards LGBTQIA especially in the southern Philippines where anti-LGBTIQ sentiments are still most defined and few LGBTIQ-led organizations exist and work with the communities. This would be done by equipping young LGBTIQ leaders themselves with a better understanding of who they are and break negative notions of themselves that have been delimited by conservative and religious perceptions. This was initially thought to be a two-day seminar in the southern Philippines among 15 LGBTIQ leaders covering the following topics: (1) community organizing, (2) SOGIESC, and (3) HIV.

¹ Bahaghari Center, “Our Story,” Bahaghari Center, 2020, <http://bahagharicenter.org/our-story/>

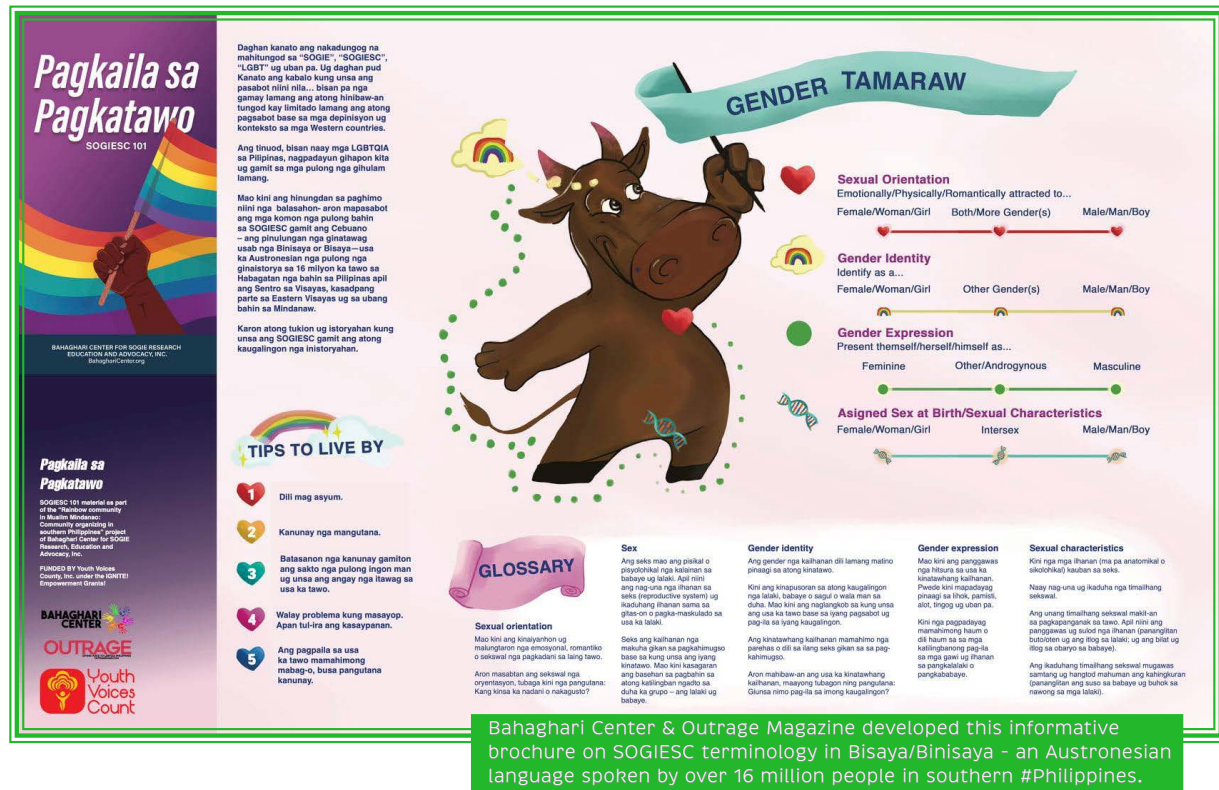
“We made the translation more colloquial and friendly to the readers. It had to go through a number of proofreading and layout because there were some languages and dialects that do not have any direct translation.”
— AARON BONETE, PROGRAM MANAGER FOR SOGIE RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions that hindered them from flying to southern Philippines to conduct these activities, they shifted their project to the production of a SOGIESC/LGBTQIA 101 flyer specific for Bisaya-speaking communities, including those living in the southern Philippines.

This re-programd project is grounded on the need to localise concepts of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), and issues of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and ally (LGBTQIA) into local contexts and definitions. Through the use of Bisaya/Binisaya language, these concepts that are thought to be Western and borrowed can be integrated colloquially by the LGBTQIA community living in southern Philippines, particularly in Cagayan de Oro City, Cotabato City, Davao City, and Zamboanga City.

The production of the material began with a series of online interviews of LGBTIQ leaders in the areas selected to disseminate the brochure. This was helpful to ensure that the terminologies that would be used were easily understood and adaptive to the daily conversations of the LGBTIQ community. The team also underwent a review of existing and available literature to ensure the accuracy of the translations.

As a result, Bahaghari Center printed 3,000 copies of the brochure, which they distributed to six LGBTIQ-led and PLHIV-led organizations that are based in the four cities identified. They also disseminated some of the copies of the brochures in the Visayas region where Binisaya language is the dominant tongue.



“While the distribution of the brochure is only a part of raising the awareness of the LGBTQIA community of concepts on SOGIESC, the fact that we are able to provide this information, especially the indigenous terms that are not borrowed and that they can understand, we are already grateful.”

— AARON BONETE

The distribution of the brochure, as Bahaghari Center noted, would be an ongoing activity as they plan to expand their distribution to other Binisaya/Bisaya-speaking cities and provinces in both Visayas and in Mindanao.

Bahaghari Center expressed their gratitude to the IGNITE! Empowerment Grant for the support that they received both as an organization whose operations have been impacted by COVID-19, but also in particular to the underserved populations, such as the young LGBTIQ community, who have received the brochures.

They plan on doing the same process to conduct another round of translation for a different language group to be able to target other parts of the Philippines. They were also considering to re-design their intended physical workshop so that it could be adapted to an online workshop to reach out to the recipients of the brochure as a follow through activity in building their capacity on LGBTIQ rights and HIV.

“It is important [for us] to go back to those who received the brochure because our work does not end at distributing IEC materials. It’s a continuous raising of awareness so that eventually, they themselves will be the ones who will stand up and voice their issues.”

— AARON BONETE



Aaron Bonete with activists from Taiwan during the 1st Trans March held last Oct 25, 2019 in Taipei, Taiwan

EQUITE SRI LANKA — Sri Lanka

Eliminating Stigma and Discrimination faced by Key Population due to their Status of HIV, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation (May to October 2020)

Equite Sri Lanka is an organization established in May 2017 composed of a closely knit team of multi-disciplinary experts and human rights activists experienced in research and advocacy in a range of development and humanitarian specialties. Working with its broad network of volunteers, Equite Sri Lanka aims to ensure fulfilment and respect of LGBTIQ rights in Sri Lanka through community involvement and partnership with the national human rights commission and legal aid commission. They do this by working through their strong network of young volunteers, and through other LGBTIQ NGOs in the country.



Equite Sri Lanka during their consultation workshop in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka last September 2020

This project aims to change public perception and attitude towards the LGBTIQ community in Sri Lanka. This involved understanding the prevailing stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTIQ in various settings, namely family, neighborhood, workplace, and facilities where health services are accessed, and identifying existing mechanisms on how these cases of discrimination are addressed. This was a response to their observations based on previous reports that many members of the LGBTIQ community who live in rural areas face similar issues of discrimination in the area of employment and access to services. Despite this, there is an obvious lack of state-level interventions in order to address discrimination.

During the course of the consultation meetings, it was noted from Equite that discrimination, especially due to the individual's HIV status, occurs not only in society but, in many cases, also within the LGBTIQ community itself. It is, therefore, recommended that additional capacity building and information is needed for the LGBTIQ community on countering stigma and discrimination. Also, the activities, workshops and training programs conducted by many institutions are centered in Colombo and those living in rural areas who are unable to participate or have access to these learning opportunities.

Under this project, Equite Sri Lanka also aimed to address the needs of the LGBTIQ community during the height of the COVID-19 lockdown. This was specifically requested by Equite Sri Lanka, considering that the project implementation commenced during the height of the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

While COVID-19 has affected the conduct of their in-person workshop, wherein Equite Sri Lanka had to immediately cancel when the lockdowns have started in the country, they had to move this activity online.

The savings that were incurred were repurposed to extend the support on the COVID-19 related needs of the LGBTIQ community, primarily on the essential kits for those affected by COVID-19.

As a result, 20 LGBTIQ people participated through the remote workshop, of which 14 were LGBTIQ youth and 6 were identified as youth leaders. On the other hand, 16 LGBTIQ community members and members of the National Transgender Network who were affected by COVID-19 also received humanitarian assistance, such as food items. Consequently, through the IGNITE Empowerment Grant, Equite Sri Lanka has become an important guiding light to the LGBTIQ community and HIV community who needed immediate assistance during the restrictions brought about by COVID-19.

Moving forward, Equite Sri Lanka developed an advocacy roadmap that aims to consolidate mechanisms that address stigma and discrimination through youth-led initiatives. They also plan on training counselors in order to provide support to fellow young LGBT in the country.

“Because of COVID-19, we were not able to do the community leaders’ workshop so we had to call them and have one-by-one interview. We also have to send them a questionnaire about stigma and discrimination as well as the support that they received, and how they file cases to the human rights commissions. Most of the work was done remotely.”

— THUSHARA MANOJ, EQUITE SRI LANKA CO-FOUNDER

“Through this grant, we posted advertisements through our Facebook page, so if you have any concern about ART, then only they know Equite Sri Lanka and reach them.”

– ADHIL SURAJ, PROJECT COORDINATOR



Photo of Equite Sri Lanka during their youth consultation last July 2020

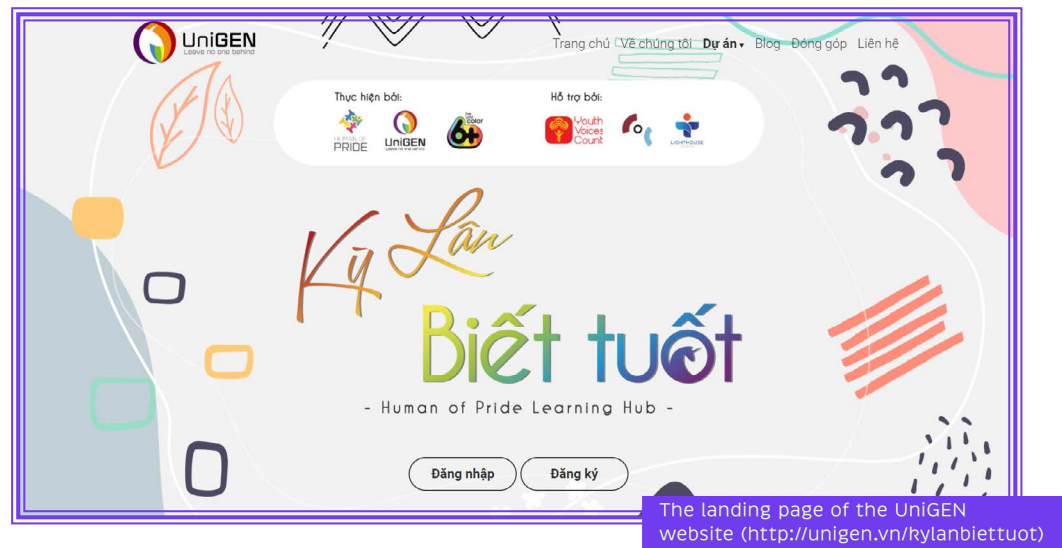
UNIGEN – Viet Nam

Human of Pride Learning Hub (May to December 2020)

UniGEN is a LGBTIQ grassroots organization based in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. Their mission is to promote inclusivity and diversity within and outside of the LGBTIQ community in Viet Nam by empowering the minority within the LGBTIQ community. Since 2015, UniGEN has organized and developed multiple projects to break down stereotypes about the LGBTIQ community, raise visibility and awareness of minority groups within the LGBTIQ community, and promote freedom of love and pride of self. UniGEN works around the values of “Embrace the Diversity, Tolerate & Empathize, and Leave No One Behind”.

The “Main Characters” of the project (from left to right): Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, Sex Characteristics, Gender Expression





The landing page of the UniGEN website (<http://unigen.vn/rylanbiettuot>)

This project titled “Human of Pride Learning Hub” (Kỳ Lân Biết Tuốt- “The Unicorn who knows all” in Vietnamese) intended to create a safe space for young LGBTIQ to accompany and support them as they learn better about themselves in an environment that is self-loving, tolerant, and values inclusivity. This project addresses internal discrimination among LGBTIQ youth generation while having to deal with stereotypes based on SOGIESC. They have done this by raising awareness on mental health and practicing well-being among its community members, and supporting them as they promote and embrace self-love, inclusion, and tolerance within the LGBTIQ community.

However, due to COVID-19, they shifted the implementation of their project online. In lieu of their plans, they decided to create a website where they generated and published two online courses. One consisted of basic knowledge about SOGIESC and the other talks about fundamental mental health care skills & techniques. They managed to partner with “6+ Organization”, a community-based organization that focuses on enhancing mental health care among Vietnamese queer community. UniGEN has also translated these videos to English and have shared these versions to their networks in other countries.

“When we created the website, we had to build online visibility for the website and we are still exploring technical inputs. The online communication activity has been stronger after moving through online space, and by that we also had to learn about the website and marketing term.”

— LINH PHAN, UNIGEN CO-LEADER

Besides, they also published 10 articles and posts about SOGIESC, particularly mental health-related articles that matter to the LGBTIQ community throughout their implementation.

UniGEN also organized two webinars: the first focusing on the importance of SOGIESC and the second on self-love skills development. These webinars have brought awareness to the community about internal discrimination and why learning about SOGIESC and mental health matters to the young queer generation.

Since posting videos, UniGEN has reached up to 2,400 online visitors per post. Their page also had almost 20,000 visits with some visitors as young as 13 years old.

The project has also contributed to the improvement of UniGEN as an organization. According to their interim report, the project helped 18 of their staff to learn more about themselves, understand SOGIESC and mental health more, and improve their skills. This gave them the opportunity to experiment working in social media, specifically with video production. These staff members also learned about stories of acceptance and support from the family members of collaborators regarding their sexuality.

“The people who created this project are part of the community and have struggled with the same problems and we came together. This project has brought the space and empowered us as collaborators for this project.”

— MI TRIEU, PROJECT COORDINATOR



The production team of UniGEN during their shoot last August 2020

conclusion

“We want to focus on mental health of queer community, especially with the sexual minority community because of how society wants them to behave. As the result, they have internal discrimination and hate themselves for being queer. We want to let them know that they are valid and show them how to take care of their mental health.”

— LINH PHAN, UNIGEN CO-LEADER

Throughout this project implementation period, with the high outreach to both the webinars that were conducted and their website, UniGEN is eager to continue their work especially around mental health awareness. Since their target communities are the sexual minorities within the LGBTIQ community, the internal discrimination that they experience within the community remains high.

This 2021, UniGEN plans to focus on improving the website and continue some of their planned activities such as the physical workshop. They also plan on making the website a useful platform to promote and initiate conversations in relation to their other activities.



UniGEN holding one of their weekly pre-production meetings last July 2020 where they discuss the script and their shooting process.

This report has shared the uniqueness that the IGNITE! Empowerment Grant can offer to its grantees as it supports innovative approaches towards contributing to the needs of the LGBTIQ youth community in the five countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam. The five youth-led and youth-serving organizational grantees who received grants through IGNITE! have implemented initiatives that are not only aligned with YVC's Strategic Focus Areas but have also largely implemented them to ensure that LGBTIQ youth continue to have the opportunity to address the issues that matter to them and continue building their capacities despite the challenging situations that they are situated, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report outlined that all the grantees had to adjust some of the activities in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows that despite being largely youth-led, organizational grantees of IGNITE! continued to show resilience in making the necessary adjustments so that they can continue to implement some of their intended activities or transform these activities to be able to respond quickly and adaptively, such as in translating workshops to handbooks that can support remote learning or bringing a physical space where communities can openly discuss their issues online. But the continuation of support to the LGBTIQ youth communities were made possible through the support from IGNITE!. The path towards empowering LGBTIQ youth communities have continued throughout the grant implementation of IGNITE! through the work of its grantees despite COVID-19.

Some of the grantees have also addressed the most urgent COVID-19 related needs of their target communities head on. This was understandable given that the massive impact of COVID-19 has entirely disrupted not only the sources of income of their peers, but also the social connections and state of health of their community members. Grantees responded through the preparation and delivery of hygiene kits (such as in the case of Ya_All) and essential needs kits that would include medicines (such as in the case of Equite Sri Lanka).

What was glaring throughout these activities that the grantees implemented was the inclusion of initiatives related to mental health issues, through the provision of mental health services. While some grantees tapped into existing platforms, such as Ya_All's hotline, other grantees, such as UniGEN, have noted the increasing need to focus on mental health as a result of the stresses that their communities experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Some grantees have indicated that they would be expanding into this area of work.

Documenting LGBTIQ youth's experiences amid COVID-19 also continued and have been implemented during this Round One of IGNITE!. This important aspect of the work of LGBTIQ communities continue to be necessary for grantees, especially those who are working on addressing homophobia, transphobia, and stigma and discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns have restricted LGBTIQ communities' movement and existence as organizations, and documentation of these challenges would help them in identifying the most pressing needs of their community members. At the same time, these narratives are important in the continued empowerment-building of the communities that they serve, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The support that IGNITE! provided to its Round One grantees has sustained the work of these organizations at a time of a “once-in-a-century” pandemic. With its funding flexibility, mentorship and close collaboration between the YVC Secretariat with its grantees, and focus towards supporting youth-led initiatives, IGNITE! has enabled its grantees to implement out-of-the-box initiatives that are otherwise not considered to be funded by other funding mechanisms or organizations due to the organization's registration status that can pose as hindrance, or that proposed activities are difficult to measure when it comes to its immediate outcomes. IGNITE!

made it possible for these grantees to propose activities that are identified by their communities to be of much importance, without the constraint of what the donors dictate. These funds have also been dispersed as “seed funds”, which cultivated the grantees to think of these funds as a breakthrough for their organizations to take full ownership and sustain these activities beyond the life of the grant.

Moving forward, grantees have noted that there is still a huge amount of work that needs to be done to reach out to sexual and gender minorities who usually fall within the gaps in other existing initiatives that cater to LGBTIQ communities. Due to the diversity of intersectionalities and experiences of LGBTIQ community, it is likely that those who are most marginalized are not being included in their activities. In light of this, some grantees have committed to ensure that as they continue their activities beyond the project’s timeline, that they adapt to the needs of their communities and continuously engage with them to make sure that the evolution of their activities remain relevant to their community’s needs. Grantees appreciated the support that they received from YVC in linking them with other networks and hoped that this bridging would help in extending and expanding their work. They also look forward to the succeeding rounds of IGNITE! to be able to secure further funding, and to also allow other LGBTIQ youth-led initiatives to be supported beyond the five countries.

“Thanks to these grants it helps organizations like us at the grassroots level to reach out and get more experience and become more independent until they can register and advocate for their own.”

— LINH PHAN, UNIGEN CO-LEADER

This makes it necessary for funders to continue supporting the IGNITE! Empowerment Grant.

recommendations

This report recommends the following in the hope of sustaining the innovations that the IGNITE! Empowerment Grant has supported:

- a. Funders and donors to continue supporting community-led sub-grant mechanisms such as IGNITE! Empowerment Grant that provides flexibilities for its grantees that usually constrains grantees from implementing innovative work
- b. IGNITE! to increase its grantees per Round and, if allowed, continue providing support funding to previous grantees
- c. IGNITE! to establish guidance that will enable intersectional issues to be prioritized and that those most affected LGBTIQ youth are primarily reached and supported, including additional support on emerging issues such as mental health of LGBTIQ communities
- d. IGNITE! to increase its seed funding amount and/or support medium to long-term initiatives in consideration of the available funding
- e. YVC, as the administrator of the IGNITE! to support the development of a sustainability or an exit plan in partnership with the grantees to ensure the continuity of the funding, including the development of a networking and/or resource mobilisation plan to link grantees to potential donors



- Interviews conducted:
- 1. Rezwan Rahman, Inclusive Bangladesh
 - 2. Adhil Suraj, Equite Sri Lanka
 - 3. Thushara Manoj, Equite Sri Lanka
 - 4. Johnmel Estimar, Youth Voices Count
 - 5. Justin Francis Bionat, Youth Voices Count
 - 6. Mi Trieu, UniGEN
 - 7. Linh Phan, UniGEN
 - 8. Aaron Bonete, Bahaghari Center
 - 9. Alexander Hammelburg, COC Netherlands