



A MODEL FOR LOCALLY LED, TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

WHAT IS IGNITE?

The IGNITE Model: Invest Locally for Durable Impact



IGNITE is a 10-million-euro initiative led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), in partnership with Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) and the René Moawad Foundation (RMF) and funded by the French Development Agency (AFD).

Since March 2023, the IGNITE Consortium has been supporting 86 local feminist and youth-led civil society organisations (CSOs) to address the gender norms that hinder adolescent girls' access to education in 7 countries in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The IGNITE Consortium provided support through a 5-million-euro grant-making portfolio and collaborative capacity-sharing - across programmatic, organizational, technical, research, and advocacy domains - all aimed at advancing safe and inclusive education for girls. This support was grounded in sustainable, locally driven approaches that strengthen the leadership and impact of grassroots CSOs.



86 CSOs



AFRICA
60 CSOs
5 countries



MIDDLE EAST
26 CSOs
2 countries



7 Countries

THE IGNITE CONSORTIUM



The IRC is a humanitarian organization founded in 1933 which seeks to help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster, including the climate crisis, to survive, recover and gain control of their future.



UAF-Africa is a feminist, Pan-African, rapid response fund committed to transforming power relations through resourcing African feminists and women human rights defenders and their formations as an act of solidarity.



The René Moawad Foundation's mission is to promote social, economic and rural development in Lebanon and the MENA region and to contribute in building a responsible civil society that promotes democratic values, justice, pluralism and moderation.

IGNITE: ONE MODEL, THREE PILLARS

Our structure: IRC oversees overall consortium coordination and leads institutional, capacity-sharing, and advocacy-strengthening components, while regional partners bring deep contextual expertise and lead the grant-making strategy.

Guided by **six core feminist principles**, our community-led response model brings those on the margins to the center by prioritizing the most vulnerable and strengthens the institutional and technical capacities of CSOs that deliver services in their communities. Demonstrating this commitment, **50% of the total project budget is allocated directly to CSOs.**

Our Feminist Principles



Care



Power-sharing



Intersectionality



Community-centered



Sustainability



Collective voices

Our community-led response model centers a **partnership approach grounded in power-sharing**, co-creation, co-implementation, and cross-learning. These ways of working foster trust-based and equitable relationships among consortium partners.

Our CSO grantees: We partner with civil society organizations working with local communities. Our model centers **women-led expertise and community-driven** responses in both humanitarian and development contexts.

Why our Model Work?



Our approach rests on three foundational pillars that have transformed how partners respond to their community's needs:

Flexible funding: Our model provides flexible funding through three layered grants types: Seed grants for grassroots organizations; Scale-up grants for established CSOs; and Research and Advocacy grants. Pre-identified CSOs are invited to apply through a closed call for proposals combined with tailored accompaniment during the design phase, increasing their chances of accessing funding.

Capacity-sharing and peer-learning: IGNITE emphasizes mutual and horizontal learning, recognizing the expertise of local CSOs. Our model is context- and needs-driven, facilitating a two-way transfer of knowledge and skills through both online and onsite sessions.

Advocacy and networking: The project design, through 1-1 accompaniment on advocacy strategy and campaigning, strengthens CSOs' advocacy skills and enhances their engagement in advocacy platforms and networking spaces, amplifying their voices, visibility, influence, and connections with key change-makers.

THE IMPACT OF IGNITE MODEL

Over the course of three years, IGNITE has demonstrated the effectiveness of a **locally-led, flexible, and trust-based approach** to advancing girls' education and gender equality in both emergency and development contexts.

IGNITE invested in long-term capacity strengthening, with **over 800 capacity-sharing activities** delivered through workshops, coaching, and communities of practice. This holistic approach enabled partners to advance girls' access to education while strengthening their organizational resilience, advocacy capacity, and sustainability. This approach also allowed for IGNITE partners to directly reach over 110,000 individuals with programming designed by and delivered by CSOs they trust.

Redefining Power Dynamics

IGNITE intentionally challenges the traditional donor-recipient model. At the Consortium level, all three partners served as genuine co-creators of strategies and knowledge. Consortium partners reported in endline reviews and anonymous questionnaires feeling seen, heard, and valued in a way that is rare in internationally funded programme. By working with a Project Management Committee combined with thematic working groups, IRC was able to act as a facilitator to a shared leadership model, where **all** partners collectively make strategic decisions.

This power shifting extended to the relationships with the CSOs. Rather than imposing rigid requirements, IGNITE offers flexible funding windows matched to organizational capacity and individualized accompaniment.

“We didn't know how much we needed trust while doing this work: trust in our expertise, our lived experiences, our capacity as young frontliners. IGNITE gave us that trust, and it transformed how we deliver.”

Favour Abatang, Her Voice Foundation, Nigeria



Co-creation and Co-implementation

During the inception phase, all three partners co-designed core project documents, from the grant-making manual to the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) manual, ensuring strong collective ownership and adjusted approaches across regions. This collaborative approach extended to implementation, with partners sharing experiences and co-chairing working groups on key implementation topics.

“IGNITE stands out for its partnerships based on trust, mutual respect, and listening to CSO partners. The approach is participatory, inclusive, and focused on sustainable organizational and programmatic capacity building.”

Yvette Risasi Ndiyo, Centre de Formation et d'Action pour le Développement, DR Congo

Power-sharing



Tailored Capacity Strengthening and Cross-Learning

The project embedded learning and adaptation into its DNA. At grantee level, through organisational capacity assessments, the 60 Africa-based CSOs developed their own action plans to address self-identified gaps, ranging from financial management to digital communications.

Building on this, IRC and its consortium partners designed a 'menu' of both on-site and online workshops led by IGNITE's team of experts, allowing CSOs to freely choose the sessions that best matched their needs. At consortium level, retreats, coordination meetings, and digital platforms create spaces for partners to share experiences and collectively problem-solve.

“Instead of a one-way transfer of knowledge and skills, we aim to work together to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for growth, and developing solutions that are contextually appropriate and sustainable.”

Emily Jacquard, IGNITE Consortium Director, IRC

Sustainability



Transformative, Durable, and Scalable Support



Education and Livelihoods: Building Independence and Breaking Norms

Education within IGNITE-supported projects responds to diverse needs with a focus on social norms that hinder adolescent girls access to education. In Burkina Faso, Association de Protection des Droits de la Jeune Femme et de l'Enfant's (APD-JFE) vocational program offers vulnerable young women, including those internally displaced, training in fields that challenge gender norms: plumbing, the green economy, or graphic design. For many, this is their first real opportunity to learn a trade, earn income, and imagine futures beyond precarious dependence. Despite social pressure and logistical challenges, the program adapted to support participants through graduation and secured

internships with public institutions. Today, these young women are economically independent and shifting community perceptions about what women can do.

Community-Led Prevention: Transforming Norms to Protect Girls' Futures

Findings from surveys conducted by IGNITE-supported CSOs were consistent at pointing out early marriage, gender-based violence, gaps in infrastructure, and cultural norms operating together as the main obstacles faced by girls and adolescents. By combining advocacy, community engagement, and practical support to girls and families, CSOs worked to prevent harmful practices before they occur while strengthening safer and more supportive environments for adolescent girls.

In Wadi Khaled, Lebanon, ABAAD's Basic Life Skills programmes reached over 250 girls and caregivers to address some of the root causes driving early marriage. One mother's experience illustrates this transformation: initially convinced that early marriage would protect her daughter from hardship, she began to see education as "a lifelong weapon for independence" after her daughter completed the Basic Life Skills programme and she herself participated in ABAAD's talking groups. Her perspective shift led her to replace control with dialogue and trust, while also mobilizing community support to help girls remain in school.

IGNITE-supported organizations help shift attitudes, strengthen protective family relationships, and create alternatives that reduce the appeal of harmful coping mechanisms such as early marriage.

Data, Findings, and Research: Evidence for What Actually Works

IGNITE's research generates rigorous evidence on what transforms girls' lives in crisis contexts. A mixed-methods study in Bogo, Cameroon, surveyed 527 girls across 392 households amid Boko Haram insecurity and climate crisis. The research examined how gender-transformative practices in water, hygiene, sanitation, and violence prevention sustain empowerment. One key finding was that only 13% of sexual violence victims report incidents, revealing persistent barriers to both reporting and care. This evidence will inform how partners need to adjust approaches and provides local organizations with data to advocate for policy change based on their communities' actual realities.



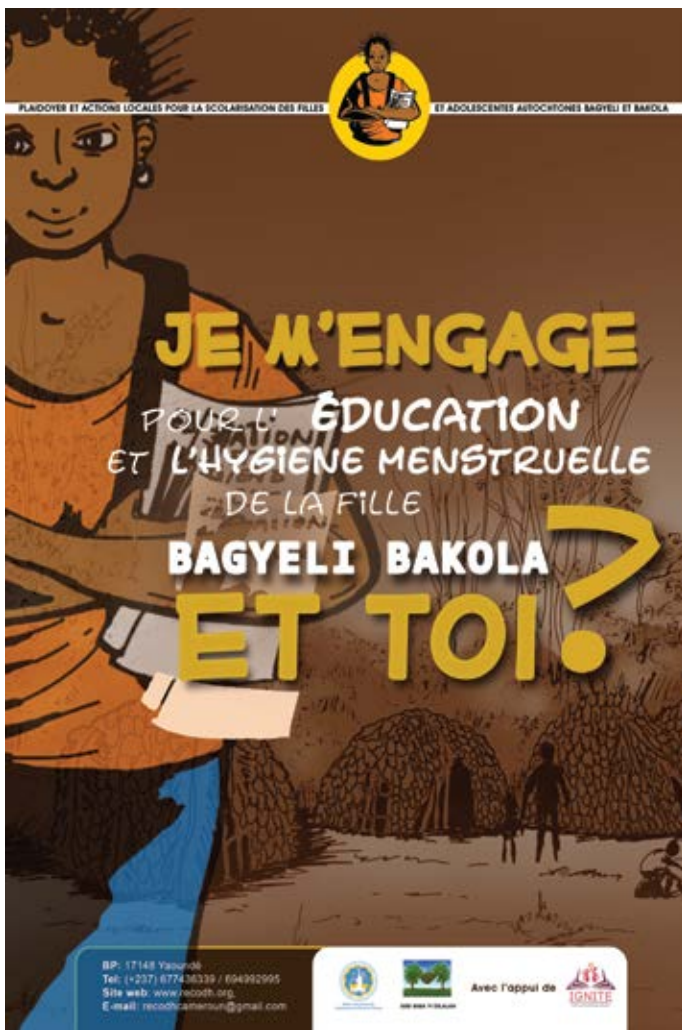


Strengthening Grassroots Organizations for Lasting Impact

Grassroots feminist organizations were already delivering meaningful change in their communities, but often operating with fragile systems, limited staff, limited infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support. IGNITE recognized that sustainable impact requires more than giving grants: it requires investing in organizational resilience. Through more than 55 organizational capacity assessments and tailored action plans, **IGNITE provided 400+ one-on-one accompaniment sessions** to strengthen CSOs' internal governance, financial systems, institutional learning, and operational sustainability.

As a result, **96% of grantees reported having developed or revised internal policies** thanks to the organisational capacity support.

Like many others, Her Voice Foundation in Nigeria transitioned from "survival mode" to strong institutional confidence by formalizing governance structures, improving donor readiness, digitizing operations, and investing in renewable energy to maintain continuity in a low-electricity context. As a result the CSO's credibility, staff retention, and engagement with national-level stakeholders grew substantially. Today, IGNITE-supported organizations are increasingly recognized as credible institutional actors capable of sustaining long-term impact. A second phase would build on these foundations by expanding peer-led organizational development models, strengthening locally led ecosystems, and supporting stronger national civil society leadership.



Advocacy: Amplifying Local Voices as Primary Agents of Change

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, feminist civil society organizations are often the closest actors to girls and vulnerable communities yet remain largely excluded from the policy spaces where decisions affecting their lives are made.

IGNITE was designed to help shift this imbalance. Through technical advocacy support, including stakeholder analysis, power mapping, and ecosystem understanding, IGNITE enabled partners to move beyond awareness-raising toward more strategic and influential advocacy. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Education secured a circular allowing pregnant adolescents to remain in school, while in Cameroon, local authorities committed to supporting school re-entry for pregnant girls, demonstrating how prevention works best when combining community dialogue with policy change.

During IGNITE's implementation, **93% of surveyed IGNITEes joined new networks and coalitions, and more than 15 advocacy campaigns were launched**, helping communities challenge harmful gender norms and enabling CSOs to access policy spaces for the first time.

A second phase of IGNITE would build on this momentum by scaling up advocacy efforts, strengthening peer-led networks, and equipping CSOs to lead national campaigns for systemic reforms in girls' education and protection through a scalable feminist model grounded in local leadership and community ownership.

IGNITE FORWARD: SHOWCASING THE POWER OF LOCALLY-LED ACTION



In March 2026, the IGNITE Consortium hosted IGNITE Forward, an event which **brought together about 100 local partners, donors, and international actors** to collectively reflect on shifting from transactional relationships to trust based partnership. Conversations and stories from all over Africa illustrated how grassroots organizations have strengthened their leadership and expanded education opportunities for adolescent girls while influencing decision-makers.

IGNITE Forward demonstrated the impact of multi-sector responses on transformative education and safer learning spaces. 96% of participants reported their voices were amplified, while 84% established or strengthened meaningful professional connections, building professional networks essential for sustained momentum.



3 Days



100 Participants



30 Organizations represented



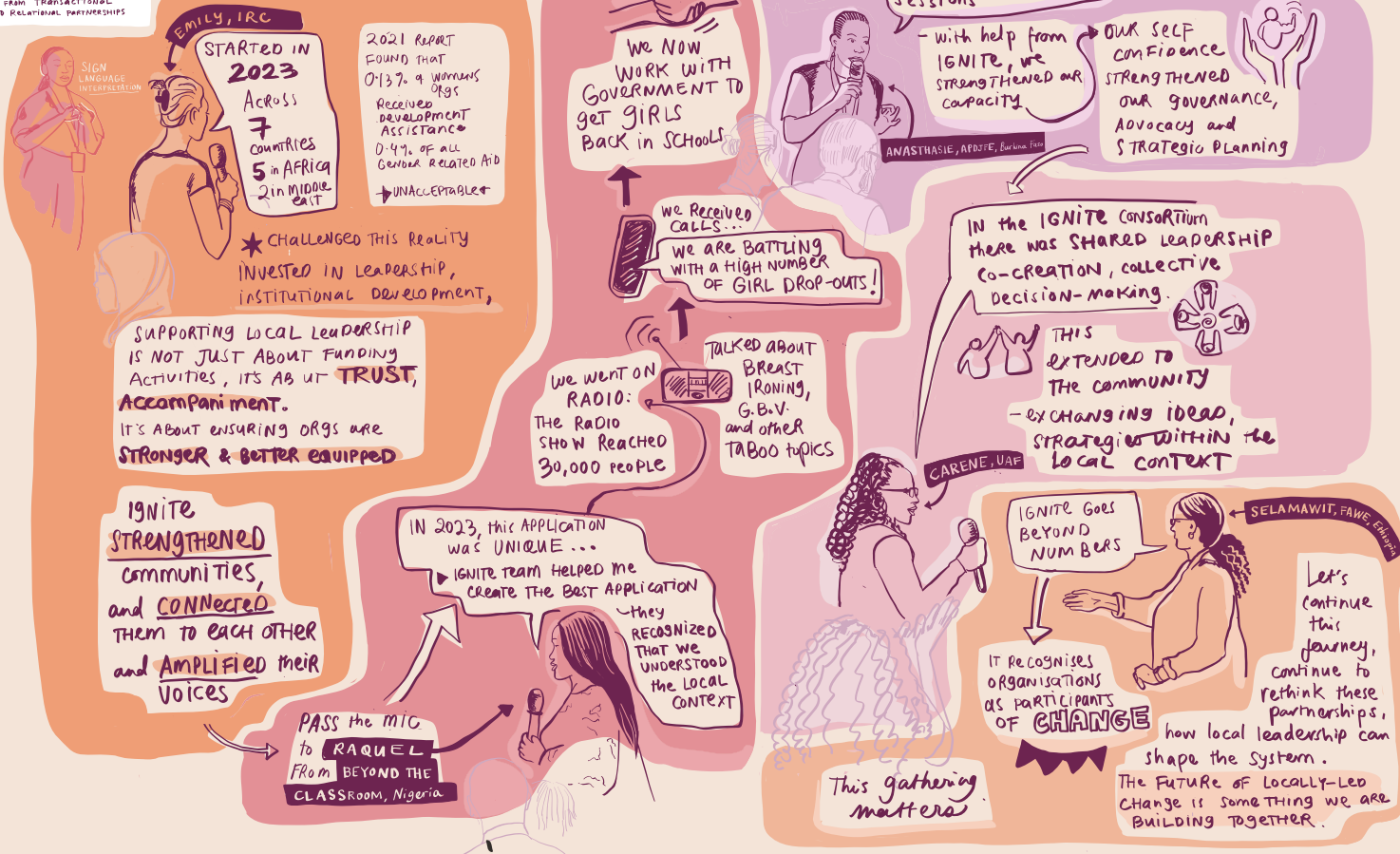
45 IGNITEes



These results validate IGNITE's model: trust-based partnerships grounded in accompaniment, capacity strengthening, and flexible grant-making enable women-led organizations to innovate and adapt to their contexts. When international actors genuinely share power, listen to local expertise, and amplify marginalized voices, women and girls become architects of social change.

IGNITE's Journey

LEARNINGS & successes



LOOKING AHEAD

As social norms continue to restrict girls' access to education, protection, and economic opportunities, IGNITE has demonstrated the value of a tested and replicable model for community-led, multisectoral approach.

Building on these achievements, a **24-month second phase of IGNITE would support a cohort of 60 civil society organizations** (including current IGNITEes and newly selected ones). This would maintain and strengthen a network of experienced CSOs that are able to mentor others, enabling peer support and knowledge transfer between IGNITEes to enhance strong locally-rooted leadership. By supporting these networks and expanding collective influence, IGNITE aims to contribute to a broader movement that transforms norms around girls' education and is capable of reaching critical mass to drive lasting social change across Africa and Middle East.

Make sure to stay connected to and informed about IGNITE's work

- ♀ For more information, contact [Emily Jacquard, IGNITE Consortium Director](#)
- ♀ Visit our website ignite.rescue.org
- ♀ Subscribe to the IGNITE newsletter by writing to igniteproject@rescue.org