

Dear Friends,

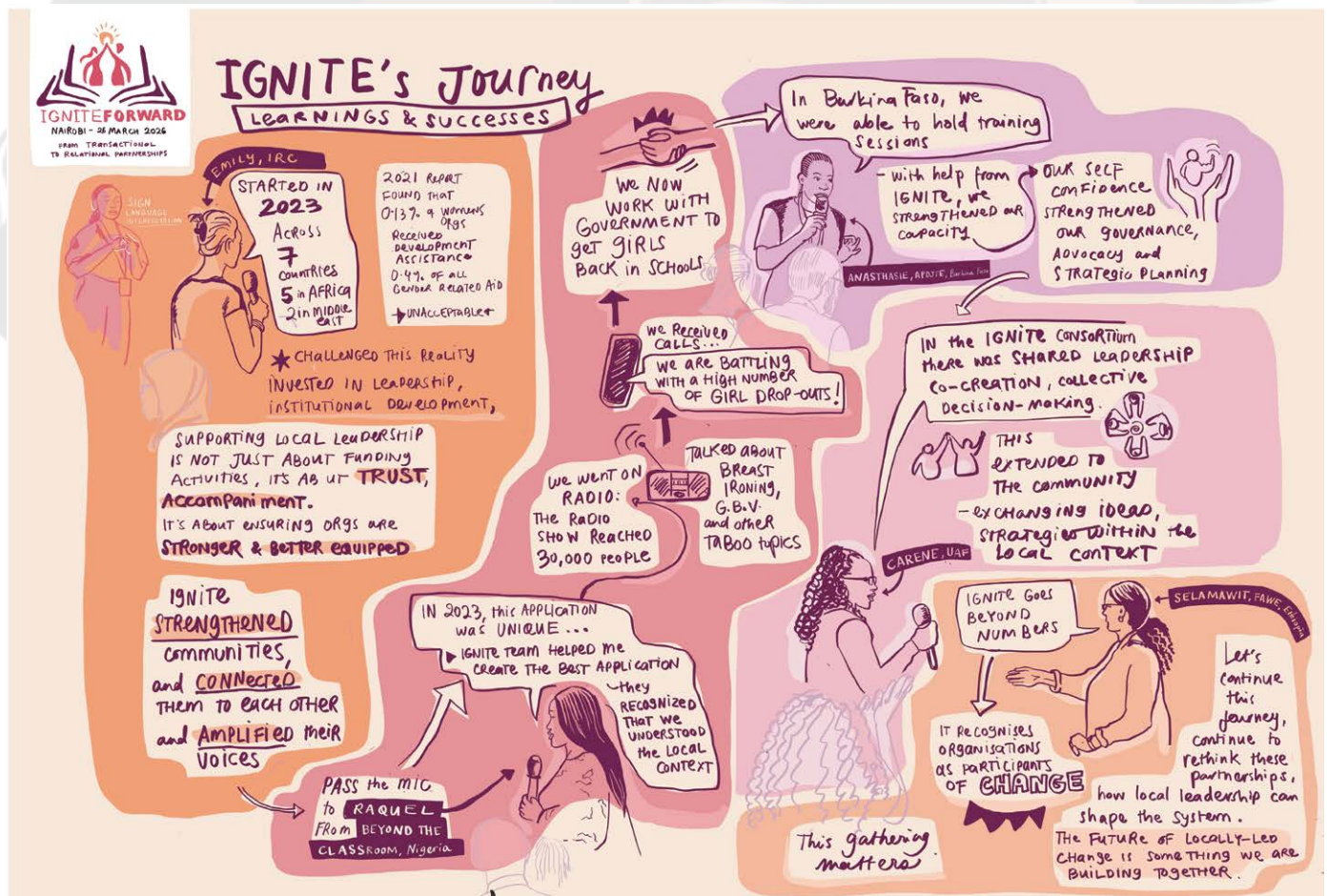
As IGNITE is entering its completion phase after more than three years, this edition reflects on its achievements, lessons, and lasting impact across Africa and the Middle East.

At its heart is [IGNITE Forward](#), the culminating convening held in Nairobi in March, which brought together grassroots organizations, donors, humanitarian actors, and the private sector to celebrate progress and explore the future of community led action. The event amplified the voices, expertise, and leadership of women- and youth-led organizations that have been driving change in their communities.

Over the last 3 years, IGNITE partners advanced girls' education, strengthened locally driven advocacy efforts, challenged harmful gender norms, and expanded opportunities for women and girls. Our achievements demonstrate the power of trust-based partnerships and locally led solutions.

As IGNITE closes, we are proud to celebrate the recognition of IGNITE-supported research as four Ignitees have been selected to attend the upcoming [SVRI Forum 2026](#) among more than 2,200 submissions to present their research findings at the largest conference on research and practice to end violence driven by gender inequality.

To stay connected and learn more about IGNITE's achievements and resources, visit our [website](#) or email us at igniteproject@rescue.org



TOGETHER WITH IGNITE

IGNITE FORWARD: FROM TRANSACTIONAL TO RELATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

In March 2026, at a time when shrinking civic space, growing humanitarian needs, and declining resources are forcing the aid sector to rethink its models, IGNITE Forward gathered about 100 participants in Nairobi. Grassroots actors, donors, policymakers, and private sector representatives amplified a clear message: locally led women's organizations are not merely implementers but essential drivers of sustainable change. As the actors closest to communities, they are at the forefront of responding to local needs and priorities.

Participants emphasized that international support must move beyond transactional funding relationships toward partnerships that are rooted in trust, mutual accountability, and long-term collaboration.



As one participant noted during the event, *"The local organizations are ready and are underutilized."* Throughout the convening, discussions highlighted the fact that organizations rooted locally often possess communities' trust, contextual understanding, and long-term presence needed to address challenges that external actors often struggle to reach.

From Service Delivery to Influence

IGNITE Forward also highlighted another critical dimension of locally led action: advocacy.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, grassroots feminist organizations are frequently excluded from the spaces where policies and decisions affecting their communities are made.

Over the past 36 months, more than 90 advocacy products were developed, enabling partners to engage decision-makers, challenge harmful norms, and successfully influence policies affecting girls and women.

The results have been tangible. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, advocacy efforts contributed to pass a circular preventing schools from expelling

pregnant adolescents. In Cameroon, advocacy efforts secured commitments from local authorities to facilitate school re-entry for girls affected by early and unintended pregnancy.

These examples demonstrate how some of the IGNITEes became recognized and legitimate actors capable of shaping systems and influencing change. As one CSO stated: *"Before we used to be part of the game, now we influence the game."*



A Model Built on Trust

Too often, local organizations are expected to deliver transformative outcomes while operating with limited resources, tightly earmarked funding, and little influence over programme design or strategic decision-making.

IGNITE was intentionally designed differently. With flexible grant-making combined with organizational strengthening, capacity sharing, and advocacy support the IGNITE model enabled 86 women led organizations to identify their own priorities.

"IGNITE told us that our experience mattered. Our perspectives



mattered. Our leadership mattered," reflected Raquel Kasham, one of the programme's partners. This philosophy extends beyond relationships with grantees. Within the consortium itself, decision-making was grounded in collaboration and shared leadership.

As Carene Siri of UAF-Africa explained during the event, *"Partners worked through a model that emphasized shared leadership, co-creation, co-construction, and collective decision-making."*

Building Networks That Last

A key objective of IGNITE Forward was to foster relationships that continue long after the event itself. For many participating organizations, it was the first opportunity to engage directly with donors, foundations, private sector actors, and peer organizations from other countries. Conversations that began in Nairobi created opportunities for future collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective advocacy. These connections are especially important in a context where local organizations often work in isolation despite facing similar challenges.

Looking Ahead

The conversations at IGNITE Forward ultimately pointed toward a shared conclusion: sustainable change requires shifting power, better visibility on funding, and decision-making closer to communities. As global humanitarian and development actors continue to adapt to a changing landscape, the IGNITE experience offers a practical example of what this can look like in practice.

SPOTLIGHT ON CHANGE-MAKERS

FROM BREAKING SILENCE TO BUILDING SYSTEMS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN LEBANON

In Northern Lebanon, with support from IGNITE, ABAAD worked with over 250 girls and caregivers to address barriers to education, from poverty and early marriage to deeply rooted social norms.

Through life skills sessions, girls gained confidence, while families began to shift perspectives. One mother, once convinced early marriage was her daughter's only protection, now sees education as “*a lifelong weapon for independence*” and took action to keep her daughter in school.



Check the [full story](#) to discover how ABAAD is helping building systems that respond to today's challenges and shape a more equitable future.

TURNING DATA INTO ACTION TO PROTECT GIRLS IN SCHOOLS IN BURKINA FASO



In Burkina Faso's Nakambé region, gender-based violence (GBV) had long been suspected as a driver of girls dropping out of school, but lacked the evidence needed to act. With IGNITE accompaniment, FEMIN-IN conducted rigorous research, revealing that nearly 78% of the 1,184 schoolgirls interviewed had experienced GBV.

The findings were a turning point. “*We felt both outrage and shock... it forced us to question whether our strategies are really working,*” says FEMIN-IN's chairwoman. The research

exposed how violence is embedded in daily school life, prompting a shift toward stronger school-based prevention and advocacy. Ministries have since requested the findings to inform their own action plans, marking a move from evidence to policy influence.

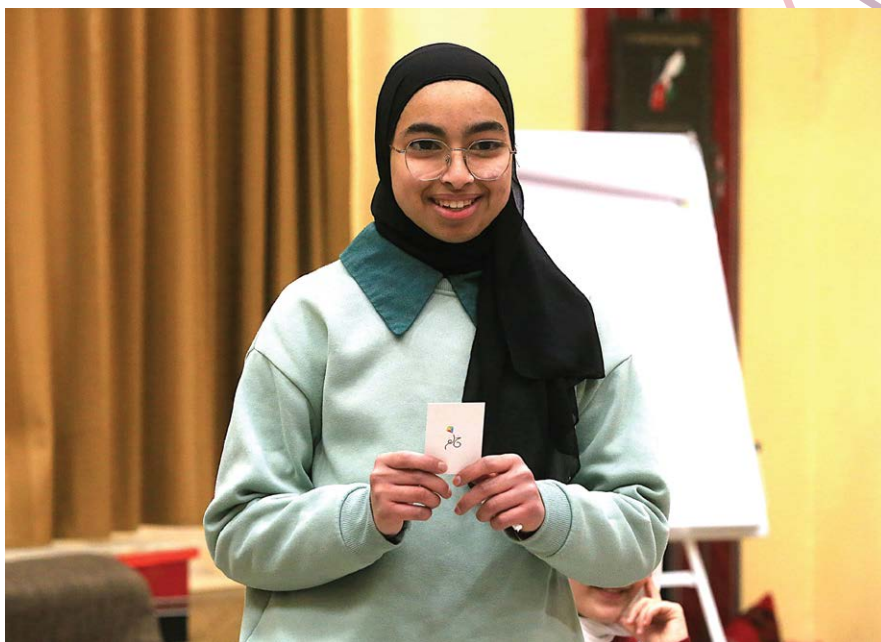
Read the [full story](#) to explore how evidence is driving systemic change.

BOARDGAMES TO CHALLENGE HARMFUL SOCIAL NORMS

Thanks to IGNITE, Madrasati introduced “Holm,” an interactive classroom game that helps students in Jordan explore their ambitions, challenge stereotypes, and speak openly about their futures.

A total of about 1,900 participants, including hundreds of parents, participated in Holm’s sessions, contributing to a gradual shift in attitudes around education, gender roles, and career choices, creating more supportive environments where young people feel confident to express their aspirations and pursue paths aligned with their interests and abilities.

Read the [full story](#) to discover how one simple idea is transforming how students imagine their futures.



KEEPING GIRLS IN SCHOOL IN ETHIOPIA: SMALL SOLUTIONS, LASTING CHANGE

In Hawassa City, Ethiopia, many girls face multiple barriers to staying in school but one issue stood out: menstrual hygiene and its impact on absenteeism.

With contribution from IGNITE, Joy Development Organization (JDO) designed an holistic approach combining tutoring, menstrual health support, and teacher training. “*Girls’ education challenges are interconnected, and addressing only one barrier would not create lasting change,*” says JDO’s Executive Director Meaza Woubishet.

The results have been immediate. 300 girls who once missed school regularly are now attending consistently and participating more actively. Teachers are also adopting more supportive, inclusive practices.

A key breakthrough came when local education authorities adopted the production of reusable sanitary pads in nine schools, enabling the scale-up of a practical solution into a sustainable, institutionalized system.

Read the [full story](#) to see how local innovation is transforming education for girls.



WHAT IS IGNITE?

IGNITE is a 36-month project, led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in consortium with Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa) and René Moawad Foundation (RMF).

IGNITE is funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) through the Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (FSOF).

The IGNITE Consortium supports 86 local feminist and youth-led CSOs to address the gender norms that hinder adolescent girls in and through education. The IGNITE Consortium provides support through grant-making and collaborative capacity-sharing — programmatic, organizational, technical, research, and advocacy — all aimed at advancing safe and inclusive education for girls. This support is grounded in sustainable, locally driven approaches that strengthen the leadership and impact of grassroots women-led organizations.

IGNITE runs from March 2023 to May 2026 and covers 7 countries within two regions (Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa).








€10 million

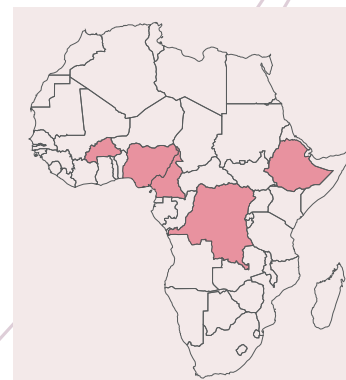


72 grants

AFRICA

60 CSOs in 5 countries:

-  Burkina Faso
-  Cameroon
-  DR Congo
-  Ethiopia
-  Nigeria



MIDDLE EAST

26 CSOs in 2 countries:

-  Jordan
-  Lebanon



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.

FUNDED BY



Launched in 2019, the [Feminist Organizations Support Fund \(FSOF\)](#), managed by the French Development Agency (AFD) is France's flagship feminist diplomacy initiative, providing long-term support to feminist civil society organizations around the world.