



Creative Education and Empowerment Zanzibar (CEEZ Africa)

Mid-term Evaluation of the Hivos Project: "R.O.O.M - Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century"

Final Report

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ACRONYMS

AV	Audio Visual
CfP	Call for Proposals
CfSC	Communication for Social Change
CITE	The Centre for Innovation and Technology
COVID	'CO' stands for 'corona,' 'VI' for 'virus,' and 'D' for 'disease' (WHO creation ¹) ²
CS	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DE	Digital Earth
EA	East Africa
FEX	Freedom of Expression
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
Hivos	(Dutch: Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking) Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LGBT/QI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RBM	Results Based Management
R.O.O.M	Resource of Open Minds
SA	Southern Africa
SEK	Swedish Kronor
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
USD	United States' Dollars
ZW	Zimbabwe

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cdcresponse/about-COVID-19.html>

PREFACE

This Mid-term Evaluation of the “R.O.O.M – Freedom of Expression in the 21st century” project implemented by Hivos and funded by Swedish Sida within its global programmes’ portfolio, was commissioned by Hivos Netherlands.

The aim of the evaluation is to evaluate the extent to which the R.O.O.M programme² has achieved its’ objective and to map which strategies worked, and which did not. The overall objective of the project is defined as:

New and counter-hegemonic narratives by a young generation of makers contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in societies where public space is shrinking.

The results of the evaluation will be used for future programme design and for ongoing activities by Hivos, Sida and other donors in the field of freedom of expression and specifically involving content creators³ in this regard.

We would like to credit the team made up of three specialist within the area of freedom of expression, each with their focus specialisation within the range of project engagement spanning from advancement of creative expression and creatives’ professional development, freedom of expression, of human rights and freedom of the press, as well as the facilitation of giving voices to the voiceless. We would also like to acknowledge the NIRAS’ facilitation of the process through effective and efficient procedures and a competent ever-present programme manager/programme management.

The evaluation team consisted of:

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Team Leader

Tamara Guhrs
Team Member

Heba El-Cheikh
Team Member

Quality assurance was conducted by Raphaëlle Bisiaux. NIRAS Evaluation Manager, Emelie Pellby, was responsible for ensuring compliance with NIRAS’ Quality Assurance system throughout the process, as well as for providing backstopping and coordination.

The evaluation team would like to thank Hivos and Sida for their steadfast support and responsiveness throughout the evaluation. We also want to thank all of the content creators and partners that participated in the evaluation and who openly shared their experiences of and reflections about the R.O.O.M programme.

² Hivos calls it interchangeably programme and project. We see the R.O.O.M intervention as a programme with a number of sub-projects. We follow, however, Hivos’ own terminology where we can, i.e., using the two terms interchangeably.

³ The core actors-partners and beneficiaries of the Hivos programme are young content creators and makers, all being young creatives. Again, these designations are used interchangeably where there is no obvious reason to use one over the other.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Mid-term Evaluation of the “R.O.O.M – Freedom of Expression in the 21st century” project implemented by Hivos and funded by Swedish Sida within its global programmes’ portfolio, was commissioned by Hivos Netherlands. The aim of the evaluation is to evaluate the extent to which the R.O.O.M programme⁴ has achieved its’ objective and to map which strategies worked, and which did not. The overall objective of the project is defined as:

New and counter-hegemonic narratives by a young generation of makers contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in societies where public space is shrinking.

The mid-term evaluation has been implemented through a participatory approach, working to overcome the obvious limitations imposed by the ongoing global pandemic. Through regular meetings with the global programme manager and ad hoc meetings with the regional managers, the evaluation team has done its utmost to avoid moving in unproductive directions and to use the time available as effectively as possible, keeping the vastness of the R.O.O.M programme in mind.

Funneling to understand the breath and depth through a manageable sample: Moving from 104 to 33 and finally 15 cases.

The R.O.O.M programme had identified the following programme components as the focus for our mid-term evaluation: the 104 grantees primarily coming from eight focus countries in Southern and Eastern Africa as well as from Middle East and North Africa; along with three sub programmes: African Crossroads, Digital Earth and Collaboration Grants; as well as three exemplaric capacity building activities taking place in each of the three sub-regions. To limit the number of grantees to evaluate, a funneling exercise helped to, systematically, extract the final sample of grantees for our in-depth analysis.

MAIN FINDINGS

The “Resources of Open Minds (R.O.O.M)- Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century” is an ambitious project – or programme, with many projects within – engaging dynamically with the reality in which it unfolds and continually addressing emerging challenges. Striving to be the ‘hands-off-facilitator’, allowing the young creatives form and shape their own way forward, Hivos has a wide range of roles to perform, including building of capacity in the many areas where needs arise, forming new and inspiring partnerships and connections – along with the important grant-giving mechanism.

Aside from this, an unanticipated role of support played by Hivos to some of the most marginalised makers was strongly expressed by the sentiment “Hivos has our backs”. To a number of the creatives

⁴ Hivos calls it interchangeably programme and project. We see the R.O.O.M intervention as a programme with a number of sub-projects. We follow, however, Hivos’ own terminology where we can, i.e., using the two terms interchangeably.

interviewed, being a Hivos partner made a huge difference for their space of operation and significantly reduced likelihood of official harassment – or worse.

While the findings are presented in great detail in the report along with an extensive collection of quotes from the many partners and stakeholders interviewed ([see Annex 1](#)), the following are highlights providing an initial feel of R.O.O.M.

The programme is implemented in three regions which are socio-politically and culturally significantly different, as presented below at the opening of chapter 3. One general factor, however, is represented by COVID-19, which has further aggravated the shrinking space for freedom of expression everywhere. COVID-19 has exacerbated the underlying societal and economic inequities, and while governments have responded differently to the crisis, there are growing concerns that the pandemic presents opportunity for critical expression to be policed and surveilled alongside issues such as fake news policing. Controls around COVID-19-related information dissemination coincides with other measures to curtail social media usage in places such as, for example, Zimbabwe. Alongside this, the flip side is that some makers have been able to reach much wider audiences than ever before as they pivot to online publishing.

Despite this, we have found a team doing what no-one else does. Through interviews with other arts and freedom of expression organisations, we have found that most others focus on the creative economy perspective in supporting (young) artists and creators with a strong focus on financial sustainability. Hivos, providing the multitude of facilitation mechanisms and strategies, was regarded by all makers that the team met, to be unique and important.

Furthermore, we found that the root of the programme supports critical voices to do what they want, while providing handholding where needed. The programme multiplies effects by facilitating collaboration across borders and disciplines, including through the matching of arts and culture with technology, Communication for Social Change (CfSC) and Freedom of Expression (FEX), as well as academic reflection. The R.O.O.M programme was found to have facilitated – as it intended – a space for dissent among other through new, traditionally unheard voices. As a part of the efforts to add a space of reflection to the ‘doing’, the programme was found to have provided space to re-appropriate the past while building on this for the future, including through community ownership, advancing empowerment.

In terms of empowered sustainability, the programme is found to balance well between, on the one hand, the need by Hivos and Sida to have full documentation of expenses and (implicitly) nurture a culture of transparency and accountability, and on the other, the special features of the group of partners with 30% ‘first time’ recipients of donor funding. While a few grantees are struggling with the requirements, more report about the empowering experience of having been trained and, for the first time, finding themselves in a position to manage their funding, and to even apply for more.

All this unfolds in a programme context, where each of the three regions and each of the major projects within, have their own project managers with a high level of delegated authority and space to secure that the programme continually adapts its ways to meet emerging needs. This naturally calls for both a flexible global management, strong leadership, and coordination, and also having a funder who agrees that to generate results it is important to adapt a programme as reality changes.

EVALUATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The R.O.O.M programme has through this mid-term evaluation been found to be **relevant** in all ways: first and foremost through its unique contribution to urgently needed dissenting voices and debate in democracy and freedom of expression constrained realities; by supporting new, young makers uplift underrepresented voices; by having a flexible and adaptable approach to programming in a reality where frequent re-orientations are needed; and, in general, in view of its understanding and way of operating within the highly complex, tense and risky environment. Finally, the way the R.O.O.M programme is conceived and implemented matches perfectly both the objectives and ambitions of Hivos International and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

The R.O.O.M programme fits **coherently** into the given reality and adds unique value to the environments as compared to other arts and culture funders in the regions. Furthermore, the programme, with Hivos behind it, operates in a very conducive and collegial spirit of collaboration, co-creation and co-funding with other like-minded artists and creative funders in the area. The programme is found to be coherent also through its decentralised operation, leaving major policy and process decisions to the team of highly capable regional managers as the programme presently prepares for a 'hand-over' of the global coordination from The Hague to the region.

Without a clear financial mandate or scope of this mid-term evaluation, no detailed assessment of **efficiency** can be shared here. *The R.O.O.M budget provided by Sida* totalled 2017-22 90 M SEK (~ USD 10,659,700).

For the benefit of this evaluative conclusion, we will say that the programme is **effective**. With an exceptionally clear focus on the overall objective, the programme managers – and even a major part of the grantees – make reference to the objective regularly. The R.O.O.M programme can only be seen as a clearly and cleverly result-driven programme. It works holistically to address the erosion of informed conversation and the core principles of the Declaration of Human Rights along with human decency, among marginalised makers living in poverty, and cutting-edge creative frontrunners, tech-specialists and academics doing better. The evaluation has found that the programme adds significant value to the context, and aside from practical suggestions and recommendations, we consider the programme effective.

Conscientisation is generally considered an irreversible process: once you have 'seen the light', understood the context you operate within, your position in it, your past, your present and the future, and you have good people around you with the same understanding. This intervention is **sustainable**. The building of capacity of the makers and their collectives and hubs, to run their organisations sustainably, and to generate added partnerships also points to potential sustainability, which we find appropriate and productive - the R.O.O.M project is well managed and could not be any more sustainable than it is.

The impact as formulated in the most recent R.O.O.M result framework is: *"Diversification of dialogue, debate and dissent in society"*. The report discusses some of the challenges in documenting audience-reach by the makers, and resulting impacts, and it highlights a number of the constraints experienced partly due to COVID-related limitations on physical meetings. Many grantee interviews have highlighted the longing for direct interaction with audiences and colleagues. With these reservations in mind, the evaluation team will, however, say the 'diversification of dialogue, debate and dissent in society' has definitely been achieved. By how many, where and with which effects on livelihood choices and quality of life, is, however, hard to assess. But **impactful** dissenting dialogue and debate has certainly been spurred.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After the recommendation to Sida to remain on board, the recommendations to Hivos cover four different focus areas:

- (i) Practical recommendations for the consolidation of collaboration with grantees;
- (ii) Programmatic recommendations for further reach towards desired results;
- (iii) Recommendations on short-term development direction of R.O.O.M; and
- (iv) Recommendations for rooting of the R.O.O.M programme for long-term Africanisation.

But before this, where is the R.O.O.M programme positioned in the eco-sphere of progressive culture and arts organisations? How is it considered by other culture and arts actors and freedom of expression and human rights donors?

The R.O.O.M programme is found to be in its own league⁵ in an environment where most others focus on the creative economy. The R.O.O.M programme is respected by others in the field and a desired collaboration partner for shared cooperation programmes' by, for instance, British Council and PEN Africa. With the focus on "Resources of Open Minds" and working to advance a true civic space, culture and arts organisations like the DOEN foundation and FREEMUSE recognise this space as uniquely important. This is an important preamble to the recommendations in the minds of the evaluation team

Throughout the evaluation we have met requests for advancing 'creative economy' recommendations, but we resolve to encourage the R.O.O.M programme to further deepen and consolidate what is already being done in the programme, as it is found that it is very important not to squeeze *the unique other* into *the mould of most*.

Recommendations to Sida

1. **A continued funding of the R.O.O.M programme is a firm recommendation** based on the mid-term evaluation of the R.O.O.M programme – for at least another two 3-year cycles - allowing for a further consolidation of the ongoing work. This is especially pertinent as there are no indications that the contextual situation justifying the 'freedom of expression' focus of R.O.O.M will change for the better in a near future.
2. It is recommended for Sida to engage actively in pursuit of the longer-term identified **need for a powerful Africa-based and Africa-owned 'heir' to the R.O.O.M programme**. See section IV* below.
3. **Let a thousand R.O.O.Ms bloom** – or at least another one? It is not recommended to Hivos and the R.O.O.M programme, below, to expand the geographic reach to other African countries and regions, nor to steer towards being a real global programme. Advancing work in Francophone Africa has been one recommendation frequently heard during this evaluation. Based on the insights achieved, the team cannot see additional value in this. The team, instead, fear that this would detract value from the existing programme/projects. It is, however, recommended for Sida (and Hivos?) to consider building 'R.O.O.M-like' programmes' elsewhere in the world.

5 The US funded 'Africa no Filter' programme appears to have been inspired by the R.O.O.M programme.

Recommendations to Hivos

I* Practical recommendations for the consolidation of collaboration with grantees

4. Consider **starting grantee-periods with a 2-week organisational/administrative intensive training**, for grantees to establish appropriate systems and plans from the beginning;
5. **Administrative support-time added to grants:** Consider allowing a percentage in grants for administrative support, to avoid the maker spending too much of the creative grant-time or funds on administration;
6. **Timing of grant cycles:** Consider adjusting the timing of funding cycles. Six months is very short for producing content. Production takes time. Makers need to plan and allow for flexibility;
7. **Depth vs Breadth/Reach:** The evaluation noted a tension between on the one hand the wish to spread the net widely and allocate many smaller grants, and on the other, to invest more deeply in projects that have a successful impact. We cannot recommend one over the other, but appreciate the attention given to such balances. One recommendation is to consider further specifying criteria for amplification grants to allow for desired depth?
8. **Invest in the collaborations and linkages** within the existing family of R.O.O.M grantees, perhaps between the recipients of the AV grants and the Digital Earth community, to make visible the possible cross-collaborations between digital makers and the more discourse-based research work that is happening in Digital Earth.
9. **Follow-up after conclusion of grant:** find a way to strengthen exit strategies when partnerships end. This could include network engagement or alumni network type activities. The evaluation team understands the challenge this represents with the level of activity in the R.O.O.M programme and the very slim staffing but it would be important to find a sound way forward here, also.
10. **Conducive on-line environment needed:** As long as COVID-19 measures are in place and the on-site events of the past take place on-line, events need to be re-thought to maintain the friendly, collegial, productive atmosphere celebrated on-site: (i) participants need thorough introduction and unstructured time for getting to know each other and networking; (ii) ways need to be identified to remedy the loss of content for participants with weak connectivity. (see below, #9.)
11. **One major R.O.O.M online platform:** with rooms for separate events, and with access options to recorded presentations/capacity building sessions at times of day when connectivity is better. This, as most programme activities take place in realities with very irregular network coverage, for which reason online events are rarely experienced fully in real time.
12. **A hybrid model of online and offline meetings for the future:** a benefit from the COVID-19 period is the new familiarity with people geographically distant joining at no cost. Especially if the above recommended online platform is established, accommodating the network challenges, new opportunities will arise.

II* Programmatic recommendations for further reach towards desired results

- 13. Bridging the digital divide:** While publishing on digital media is considered democratic and helps makers to retain editorial ownership over their content, as well as reach more people, a strategy is needed for how makers include audiences for whom digital content is inaccessible due to data costs e.g., YouTube. One example of such strategy is to incorporate public screenings in rural or small towns.
- 14. Expanding the reach** towards rural and marginalised makers and unheard voices is recommended. Focus on outreach to smaller and slightly bigger towns. The R.O.O.M programme could consider in-country representatives in the countries presently underserved?
- 15. Community radios are trusted** and listened to in rural areas and marginalised urban centres: Explore ways to engage this under-utilised resource, reaching many. At the same time, radio is not literacy dependent.
- 16. Gender and inclusivity of young women makers:** There is still a lot of work to do to access women makers and audiences. Successes stand out, but more understanding, surveys, baseline, and needs analysis are still needed.
- 17. Audience analysis:** while the process nature of the R.O.O.M programme is well appreciated, it is recommended for the programme management to identify a way, through selected representative components, to document impact of the programme with audiences, including the generation of understanding of how the programme can best facilitate desired empowerment of makers and audiences and their communities alike.
- 18. Audience mapping, tracking:** to monitor and evaluate the levels of dialogue, debate, dissent and engagement in relation to the productions, capacity-building should facilitate makers to include more work around audience development, tracking actual levels of dialogue, debate - also off-line. How do we know if productions are turning into dissent? Cultural norms that dictate respect for elders might inhibit public criticality, as might fear of being profiled on social media. This kind of engagement might be happening privately or in closed WhatsApp channels, but how do makers monitor that? Providing makers and hubs with tools could be a step towards added depth.
- 19. Protecting the safety of makers** is recommended advanced through partnerships with organisations with safe houses and placement programmes. Consider carrying out safety training with makers, ensuring that they have strategies to protect themselves and their spaces against cyber offenses and physical attacks.

III* Recommendations on short-term development direction of R.O.O.M

- 20. Focus on existing R.O.O.M regions and consolidate** rather than reaching out to more regions of Africa.
- 21. Focus on ways of engaging rural platforms** to advance reach and depth, voices and more people living in poverty (see also #14 and #15 above).
- 22. Partnership with progressive media** to further deepen and strengthen the push for freedom of expression at national and regional levels.

IV* Recommendations for rooting of the R.O.O.M work in a programme for long-term Africanisation

23. Find ways to root the work carried out by Hivos in existing, African organisation(s).

As such arts and culture organisations, according to the preliminary research carried out by the evaluation team, do not seem to exist presently, apart from in the MENA region through Etijihat and Al Mawred, it is recommended to consider creating one, based on all that R.O.O.M has been, is, and when following recommendations above (including rural focus) will become. Building a new organisation, a cooperative structure – ‘a being’ - seems contrary to the intent of R.O.O.M just like such an act in principle is to the convictions of the evaluators. However, a ‘home’ is needed to root the ongoing, continued facilitation and coordination presently held by Hivos through the R.O.O.M programme. To us, this is found to be the most desirable way forward for a longer-term vision.

24. Exploratory roundtable to begin planning the above (start 2022?). The round table should not be too small and not too large. About 15-20 persons including extraordinary R.O.O.M partners from the Digital Earth programme along with extraordinary international experts The shape of the entity will grow from such conversations and the long and deep experience by R.O.O.M.

25. Digital Earth and African Crossroads should be elements of such a ‘being’, working with artists who are mid-career and more specialised and with a larger international network. Providing a space for both the cutting-edge inspiration and outreach to integration of underrepresented voices and people living in poverty, much like ‘a people’s university’, including special gender work; grant-provision; capacity building; African Crossroads.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Evaluation purpose, rational and intended users

The evaluation covers the Hivos implemented programme: “Resource of Open Minds (R.O.O.M) - Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century”, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The evaluation is carried out by NIRAS based on a successful response to the Call for Proposals, serving as this evaluation’s Terms of Reference (ToR). NIRAS implements this evaluation with its team of three evaluators and in close coordination with the Hivos R.O.O.M team ([See Hivos organigram Annex 2](#)).

Operating in countries and realities where the space for free expression is shrinking, the programme seeks to find appropriate and effective ways of supporting creatives, makers, and their role in expanding the space for other dissenting voices.

The core evaluation objective highlighted by Hivos, – after 3½ years of programme implementation – is to document how the content and collaborations supported by the programme, have created new contemporary narratives that have the potential to shift existing hegemonic narratives.

The R.O.O.M programme is built on the premise that free expression is vital to humanity and is the foundation of a free society. Globally, the space for free expression is dwindling. Resistance to this development is being led by young frontrunners: artists, musicians, filmmakers, and writers who are primarily using digital channels to spread their work. Through their audio-visual productions, these young makers question and critically examine dominant narratives in their societies, propose alternatives, and, thereby, create space for more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent, as Hivos highlights in the framework for this mid-term evaluation, and as this report reviews, discusses and analyses.

The programme supports individual producers of critical and non-conformist content as well as communities and networks of makers, designated as *creative hubs*. These hubs have been instrumental within the programme to generate collective spaces of growth. Within the R.O.O.M programme, particular attention is given to young female makers as their voices are often absent from the public sphere, as well as to less privileged and marginalised groups of makers in provincial cities, urban peripheries, and low-income areas. The evaluation has focused on this area and recognise how the R.O.O.M programme has consistently worked to ensure that the stories shared by underrepresented or unheard voices are also uplifted.

The R.O.O.M programme is focused on East Africa, Southern Africa and the Middle East and North Africa with a specific focus on the following countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Lebanon.

With the overall goal of R.O.O.M to build a movement of makers who rethink and rebuild the space for free expression in the 21st Century, the overall objective of the R.O.O.M programme is to contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate, and dissent in society, generated by new and counter-hegemonic narratives.

The results of the evaluation will be used for future programme design and for ongoing activities by Hivos, Sida and other donors in the field of freedom of expression and specifically involving content creators in this regard.

1.2 Evaluation approach and questions

The Terms of Reference underscore that the main purpose of this evaluation is to evaluate to what extent the R.O.O.M programme has achieved its main objective, which strategies worked, and which ones did not work in achieving this.

The overall objective of this project is defined as:

New and counter-hegemonic narratives by a young generation of makers contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in societies where public space is shrinking.

To achieve this purpose, the evaluation's main focus is to examine two parts of the programme, as highlighted by Hivos, formulated as questions for the evaluation to engage with:

1: Evaluation of the critical audio-visual initiatives



How have the funded initiatives (documentaries, fiction films, podcast series, art-works, animations, games, graphic novels, music, street art, and spoken word) managed to disrupt prevailing narratives in their specific context by changing these, and which strategies by the makers have proven to be effective (or not) in confronting structural issues such as police corruption, neoliberalism, and gender inequality?

In addition, the team is asked to assess whether the intended audiences were reached and how? Furthermore, the evaluation team is asked to evaluate how the productions have lifted underrepresented or unheard voices. Which strategies have proven to be effective or not in amplifying the voices of women, as well as less privileged and marginalised groups of makers in provincial cities, urban peripheries and low-income areas? What was the role and position of R.O.O.M in the outcomes that these productions achieved and what lessons can be learned in order to increase the effectiveness of the programme going forward?

2: Evaluation of the (trans)-national collaborations



To what extent did the project succeed in establishing consequential collaborations between creatives and civil society organisations, technologists, and social enterprises, particularly through regional workshops, collaboration grants, and transnational initiatives such as African Crossroads and Digital Earth? The team was asked to specifically evaluate the effectiveness in creating (trans)-national networks of collaboration between creatives and other actors such as activists, academics, entrepreneurs, and policy makers, etc. Strategies of the project are also evaluated to determine which ones have proven to be more effective than others in stimulating collaboration and learning among makers.

1.3 Main findings

The “Resources of Open Minds - Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century” is an ambitious project – or programme, with many projects within – engaging dynamically with the reality in which it unfolds and continually addressing emerging challenges. Striving to be the ‘hands-off-facilitator’, allowing the young creatives form and shape their own way forward, Hivos has a wide range of roles to perform, including building of capacity in the many areas where needs arise, forming new and inspiring partnerships and connections – along with the important grant-giving mechanism.

Aside from this, an unanticipated role of support played by Hivos to some of the most marginalised makers was strongly expressed by the sentiment “Hivos has our backs”. To a number of the creatives interviewed, being a Hivos partner made a huge difference for their space of operation and significantly reduced likelihood of official harassment.

While we go through the findings in great detail below, the following are highlights relating to the interview questions mentioned above:

The programme is implemented in three regions which are socio-politically and culturally significantly different, as presented below at the opening of chapter 3 and referred to when the regional difference is important in our presentation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. One general factor, however, is presented by COVID-19, which has further aggravated the shrinking space for freedom of expression everywhere. COVID-19 has exacerbated the underlying societal and economic inequities, and while governments have responded differently to the crisis, there are growing concerns that the pandemic presents opportunity for critical expression to be policed and surveilled alongside issues such as fake news policing. Controls around COVID-19-related information dissemination coincides with other measures to curtail social media usage in places such as, for example, Zimbabwe. Alongside this, the flip side is that some makers have been able to reach much wider audiences than ever before as they pivot to online publishing.

Despite this we have found a team doing what no-one else does. Through interviews with other arts and freedom of expression organisations, we have found that most focus on the creative economy perspective in supporting (young) artists and creators with a strong focus on financial sustainability. Hivos providing the multitude of facilitation mechanisms and strategies was regarded by all makers that the team met to be unique and important.

Furthermore, we found that the root of the programme supports critical voices to do what they want, while providing handholding where needed. The programme multiply effects by facilitating collaboration across borders and disciplines, including through the matching of arts and culture with technology, Communication for Social Change (CfSC) and Freedom of Expression (FEX), as well as academic reflection. The R.O.O.M programme was found to have facilitated – as it intended – a space for dissent among other through new, traditionally unheard voices. As a part of the efforts to add space of reflection to the ‘doing’, the programme was found to have provided space to re-appropriate the past while building on this for the future, including through community ownership, advancing empowerment.

All this unfolds in a programme context, where each of the three regions and each of the major projects-within-the-programme have their own project managers with a high level of delegated authority and space for securing that the programme continually adapts its ways to meet emerging needs. This

naturally calls for both a flexible global management, strong leadership and coordination, and also having a funder who agrees that to generate results it is important to adapt a programme as reality changes. The R.O.O.M programme has all of this – as presented in more detail below.

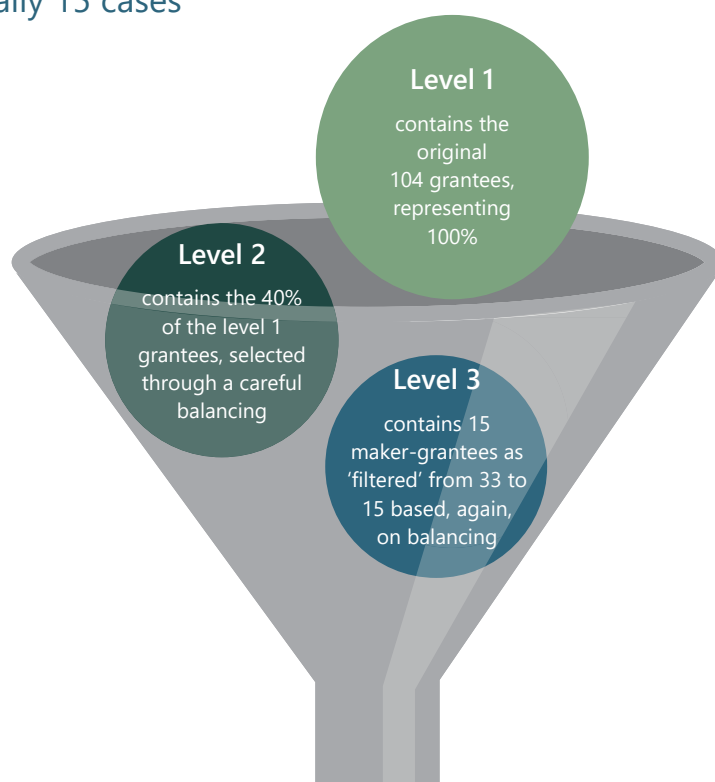
1.4 Summary of methods, process (including COVID-19 measures) and limitations

The mid-term evaluation has been implemented through a participatory approach, working to overcome the obvious limitations imposed by the ongoing global pandemic. Through regular meetings with the global programme manager and ad hoc meetings with the regional managers, the evaluation team has done its utmost to avoid moving in unproductive directions and to use the time available as effectively as possible, keeping the vastness of the R.O.O.M programme in mind.

This mid-term evaluation is the R.O.O.M programme's first external eye. The team has worked using in-depth qualitative methods, aiming to understand the scope and the *soul* of the programme, so as to present our understanding, our findings, conclusions and recommendations as usefully as possible.

1.4.1 Funneling to understand ROOM through a manageable sample: Moving from 104 to 33 and finally 15 cases

The R.O.O.M programme had identified the following programme components as the focus for our mid-term Evaluation: the 104 grantees primarily coming from eight focus countries in Southern and Eastern Africa as well as from MENA; along with three sub programmes: African CrossRoads, Digital Earth and Collaboration Grants; as well as three exemplaric capacity building activities taking place in each of the three sub-regions. To limit the number of grantees to evaluate, a funneling exercise helped to, systematically, extract the final sample of grantees for our in-depth analysis.



Level 1 – mapping the 104 grantees

With a total of 104 grants provided⁶, of which 78 grants were to individual creatives or hubs and 26 additional resilience and collaboration grants, we selected 40% of the makers for the next stage through our *Level 1* assessment.

Level 1 filtering – narrowing 104 grantees down to 33

Based upon a selection process identifying diversity in location (including urban/rural), means of artistic expression, organisation (individual/collective/hub) etc., the selection process had the following outcome, resulting in 33 fairly representative creatives:

Programme countries	Totals in portfolio
MENA	32
SA	22
EA	24
Country grants total	78
Resilience and collaboration grants	26
All grants:	104

	Totals in portfolio	Selected for level 2 scrutiny	Total from each sub-portfolio
MENA	32	12,8	12
EA	24	9,6	11
SA	22	8,8	10
	78	31.2	33

Total makers Level 1 (left) narrowed down to 40% for Level 2 (above)

Level 2 filtering – narrowing 33 down to 15

The team narrowed down the 33 *Level 2* creatives to 15, based upon an outcome-based scoring, resulting in 5 creatives selected from each region. Dependent on the scoring, the way in which we selected a balanced representation for our final in-depth scrutiny by country and by region was based on the following logic:

- **Countries with > 20 makers-partners** **4 cases each**
- **Countries with between 10 and 20 makers-partners** **3 cases each**
- **Countries with < 10 makers-partners** **1 case each**

Level 3 – the final selection of partners and strategies for in-depth analysis

	Totals in portfolio - level 1	Selected 40% for level 2 scrutiny	Total for level 3 in-depth analysis
MENA	32	12,8	5
EA	24	9,6	5
SA	22	8,8	5
	78	31,2	15

⁶ Hivos has prepared a 105 page compilation with profiles of all 104 grantees. This can be requested from the R.O.O.M programme management.

Besides the 15 grantees selected through the above process (all being part of the evaluation's 'Component 1', see table on right)⁷, it was decided, in close cooperation between the evaluation team and the Hivos team, to select six representative sub-projects or engagements (*strategies*) from the lot making up 'Component 2' representing the diverse range of collaboration strategies. These were:

- African Crossroads
- Collaboration Grants
- Digital Earth
- Three different strategies to generate collaboration, co-creation and development: Archiving workshop, Maker Summit and Partner Meetings. These took place in all three regions at appropriate times.

1.4.2 The data collection process

Each of the three evaluation team members covered one region with its five selected grantees. Each team member carried out a series of 10-12 in-depth interviews with partners and facilitators, based on streamlined evaluation question-focused interview guides⁸.

The team remained in close contact by participating in weekly status meetings and ad hoc meetings with the regional programme managers. The team leader had weekly meetings with the Hivos Global programme manager and carried out six additional KIs with central stakeholders within the arts and freedom of expression realm for gaining a better understanding of R.O.O.M's ecosystem.

The team, furthermore, collaborated closely with the pro-active NIRAS evaluation manager, who provided support where needed, including with establishment of safe Share Point, summing up findings, and being the keeper of the official work plan.

Finally, the Sida programme manager made herself available for any information needs, which the team benefited from on a couple of occasions.

Not being able to travel and engage in-person with the project partners, the evaluation team was initially alert to the potential risk of contact with informants being facilitated and 'gate-kept' by the managers. This worry, however, proved unnecessary as the team created all the contacts and did not have any sense that information provided was in any way prepped or influenced by Hivos.

1.4.3 Moving from findings to debriefing, data analysis and extraction of final report components

While the team leader naturally lead this process, the team members met regularly and provided both input in analysis meetings and input in the form of written contributions to the findings-debriefing and to the final report. This was important as each team member, through the above-described process, was the holder of special in-depth information focused on one of the three regions and 'component 2' strategies.

⁷ One additional hub was introduced by the Evaluation team's MENA expert, making the final total for MENA: 6.

⁸ Please find 'Persons and organisations consulted for this evaluation' as [Annex 1](#).

1.5 Hivos, the implementer

Hivos' core values and raison d'être is inspired by humanist values; belief in self-determination; local ownership and the website background information highlights the continuity. A quote from the first Hivos brochure in 1968 states: "necessary changes should spring from communities themselves". Furthermore, they point to the title of one of the organisation's most important strategy papers highlighting that "Full Participation or the Access to Power."



Based on these cornerstones Hivos has, from the start, promoted access to all forms of power for all citizens so they can actively participate in a truly democratic society. They stress that 'We consider local ownership not only a right' but also the key to achieving long-lasting impact'.

Hivos' five strategies for change have, during the duration of the R.O.O.M programme's lifetime, been: (i) supporting frontrunners; (ii) forging multi-actor initiatives; (iii) influencing policies and practices; (iv) moving the middle; and (v) boosting local ownership. It is in the mission of R.O.O.M to change the narrative among the wider public and influence the perception of large parts of society through audio-visual productions. In that sense R.O.O.M contributes to (i) supporting frontrunners; (iv) moving the middle; (ii) and; (v) boosting local ownership. To a lesser extent it contributes to: (iii) influencing policies and practices; and forging multi-actor initiatives.

Supporting frontrunners and **forging multi-actor initiatives** is what African Crossroads primarily does; **influencing practice** happens through networking, capacity building and via different partner meetings, summits, and Digital Earth mentorships.

Hivos has, however, started implementing a new *strategic compass* at the beginning of 2021⁹. Hivos describes the motivation and orientation as follows:

■ ■ ■

In a nutshell, Hivos will bring more focus to its programmes', deepen its commitment to local leadership and decentralisation, and redesign its organisation. Our Strategic Compass 2021 – 2024 explains the choices we have made to continue to fulfil our mission: strengthening, amplifying and connecting rightsholders' voices that call for just, inclusive and life-sustaining societies.

We have decided to write a compass rather than a detailed strategic plan because the pace with which the world is changing requires our strategy to adapt quickly to new realities. Another reason is that local ownership demands that local priorities and activities determine larger programmes' and funding. This is not possible if Hivos has very specific or strict strategic and programme plans that partner organisations must adjust to.

■ ■ ■

One crucial change is that Hivos will focus on three impact areas: (i) gender equality, diversity and inclusion; (ii) climate justice; and (iii) civic rights in a digital age. They believe that it is in these areas that major social and political transitions take place and, it is where they expect to be able to achieve real

⁹ <https://hivos.org/document/strategic-compass-2021-2024/>

impact with their partners. As all three areas are at the core of the R.O.O.M programme already, this will just – if anything – further emphasise the programme’s good match with Hivos overall priorities.

Furthermore, Hivos plans to put real action and change behind the notion of advancing local leadership and ownership and is presently aligning Hivos’ organisational structure to ensure that implementation and management of new programmes’ will be decentralised to their regional hubs. With the introduction of two new departments (i) Strategy & Impact and (ii) Business Development, the Hivos Global Office in The Hague will function primarily as a strategic tool supporting the regional offices.

Whereas the R.O.O.M organisation and management has already, to a certain degree, advanced this future plan, this new strategy – or compass – is foreseen to further decentralise the global coordination from The Hague to the region.

1.6 Sida, the funding cooperation partner

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has been a lead international cooperation partner in the fields of democracy, human rights and freedom of expression¹⁰ since its beginning. Where other cooperation-cum-funding organisations have downsized or changed priorities, Sida has kept the focus.



The overall objective of the Strategy for human rights, democracy and the rule of law is to contribute to secure, just and inclusive democratic societies that protect and respect the equal rights of all.

Also, Sida’s support to the R.O.O.M programme falls primarily within democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression areas, where Sida has a very strong strategic focus and track record. Focusing on advancing expressions both online and offline through a strengthened basis for diversity in cultural expressions and an independent cultural life, Sida’s support to the R.O.O.M programme seems right.

The support is provided for protection/safety, networking and platforms for culture actors and change actors in the field of human rights.

Poverty is not just about a lack of food, water or a roof over your head. Being poor also implies suffering from lack of power and choice.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.government.se/country-and-regional-strategies/2017/12/strategy-for-swedens-development-cooperation-in-the-areas-of-human-rights-democracy-and-the-rule-of-law-20182022/>

¹¹ <https://www.sida.se/English/how-we-work/our-fields-of-work/democracy-human-rights-and-freedom-of-expression/>

According to Sida, access to and practicing culture is regarded as a right, with the same dignity and value as other rights. In Sida's perspective, support to culture can even be a tool to achieve other development objectives, such as human rights, development and peaceful development. Sida also sees free cultural expressions that represent diversity as a key part of a democratic society.

Sida's poverty reduction strategy, with its four dimensions of poverty, points in the same direction. Poverty to Sida is not only a question of **resources**, but also one of **opportunities and choice, power and voice**, and **human security**.

The R.O.O.M programme operates equally within the democracy, human rights and freedom of expression strategy area, and the areas of poverty focused priorities¹² through its support to resources, to opportunities and choice opening room for empowerment and to uplifting unheard voices.

The Sida Programme Officer Elsa Helin, responsible for the Sida support to the R.O.O.M programme, in a Key Informant Interview (KII) on March 12, 2021, shared her own assessment:

I really think HIVOS R.O.O.M is one of the most interesting of the culture projects supported by Sida; that it is the contribution that fits almost the best, with its strong focus on democracy, freedom of expression, culture... and my impression is that they are very skilled, very apt to find the most interesting voices: they work with women, youth, LGBT people, and in some very sensitive contexts they are present and support. Both fit in the democracy and gender equality agenda. My impression is that they are very analytical, capable and do this grassroots work with an ability to lift from that perspective to draw conclusions. It is interesting to be a part of, inspiring!

¹² <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/democracy-human-rights-and-freedom-of-expression>

2. THE EVALUATED INTERVENTION

2.1 The R.O.O.M programme

As mentioned above, the “Resources of Open Minds - Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century” is an ambitious programme, engaging dynamically with the reality in which it unfolds, continually addressing emerging challenges.

The Design of the Programme - approach

The R.O.O.M is, in principle, a global programme, operating in three of five subregions of Africa¹³. While still managed from The Hague, the operation is decentralised with extended regional autonomy. The programme’s regional programme managers nurture local talent when needed and are open to all creatives – advancing the creation of alternative, counter-narrative content, where possible new, young talent and prioritising new expressions.

The programme operates with a flexible and experimental approach, providing space not only to the regional programme managers to steer their region, but also to the individual grantee or project manager in charge of African Crossroads, for instance. R.O.O.M is process-driven with time to develop, generate a sense of community and focusing on a co-creation and partnership approach, along with securing exposure and networking. As one user stressed:

African Crossroads’ is one of a kind

The Design of the Programme - components

The R.O.O.M programme consists of a complex set-up of components in order to, on the one hand, provide needy creatives with a wish to create counter-narratives with funding to do what they want; and on the other hand, to provide them with a window into the world including capacity building, matching up with kindred spirits in neighbouring countries and inspiration – so as to not only be able to do what they want, but to grow while doing it.

The elements of the complex set-up include: funding individual makers, collectives, hubs, and creative spaces through a series of audio-visual grants; building capacity institutionally and creatively for those grantees; and funding collaboration transnationally. The latter takes place through the high-end festival-cum-meeting place of cutting-edge African arts and culture producers: African Crossroads. Additionally, Digital Earth, a unique research fellowship where accomplished mentors of African arts, culture and thinking are carefully matched with creative researchers, who have been spotted by the

¹³ The reference here is geographic, counting: Southern Africa, Eastern Africa, Western Africa, Central Africa and North Africa. Traditionally ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ is distinguished from North Africa (and the Middle East) for language, cultural and historical reasons.

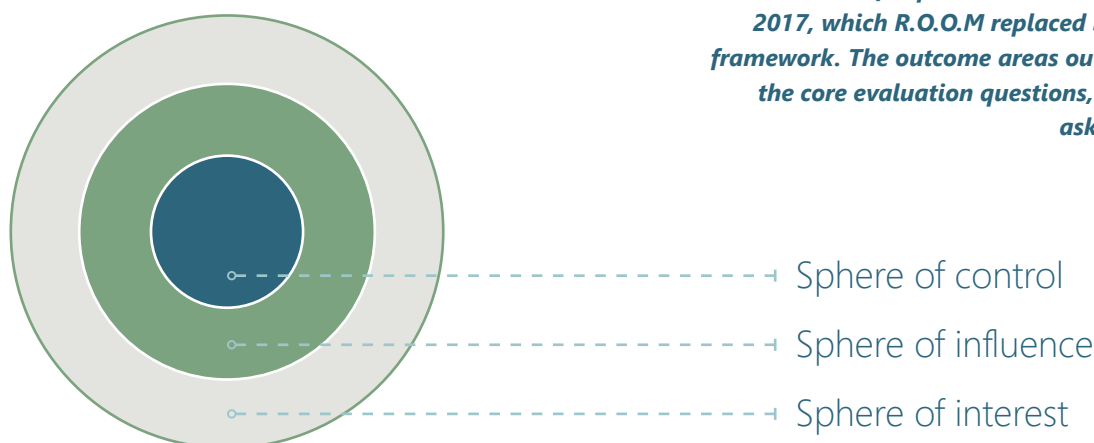
Hivos programme to engage in a deeper reflective and discursive component. Finally, a wide array of regional events for partners builds capacity, offers exposure, and networking opportunity.

2.2 The R.O.O.M results framework – working for results

The R.O.O.M programme's original Theory of Change (ToC) below, provides the flow from activities over outputs and outcomes to impact. Providing a brief and clear overview of the planned and implemented flow, the Hivos team, however, have the ongoing results documented in their results framework.

Sphere of control		Sphere of influence	Sphere of interest
Key activities	Key outputs	Key outcomes	Impact
R.O.O.M implements the following activities:	R.O.O.M provides its target group with access to:	R.O.O.M expects to see target group use:	R.O.O.M hopes to contribute to:
Providing grants and other funding	Makers have access to an increased number of tools, services and equipment for the development of cultural and media productions.	Makers become more self-sufficient.	Diversification of dialogue, debate, and dissent in society
Capacity building	A diverse group of makers completes the training by Hivos and its partners.	Makers become more independent.	
Collaboration, knowledge sharing	Makers that completed the training have improved skills.	Makers create more critical cultural and media productions.	
Experimentation and learning	Coordinators and staff of a diverse group of creative hubs complete training by Hivos and its partners.	Makers reach a wider and more diverse audience with their cultural and media productions.	
	Coordinators and staff of creative hubs that participated in the training have improved skills.	Creative hubs have an increased capacity to facilitate the cultural and media productions of makers.	

The original R.O.O.M Theory of Change as presented in the first 2017 project document: "Express_Unlimited' Freedom of Expression in the 21st Century". Hivos, 2017, which R.O.O.M replaced by a dynamic results framework. The outcome areas outlined above are still the core evaluation questions, which the team was asked to address below.



2.3 The R.O.O.M Project design and components

The R.O.O.M programme includes quite a different number of components and processes. Most of all, it has been found by the evaluation to be a unique framework and opportunity for creatives. To get a full overview of the activities during the period evaluated, the team asked the global programme manager to provide an overview of when specific core programmatic components and sub-projects took place. The matrix in [Annex 3](#), provides this overview including this evaluation's component 1, the AV grants; and the different elements of component 2, made up of capacity building; African Crossroads - an annual festival and network; as well as *experimentation* including Digital Earth based upon research fellowships, matching creatives and academics. These components are presented in the sections following the matrix.

i AV grants

While the first year of the R.O.O.M programme involved preparatory activities, including mapping and scoping studies in all target countries along with baseline surveys and needs assessments, the grants provided as of 2018 have facilitated the work by the above mentioned 104 different grantees, of which 78 were identified in the eight target countries of the programme.

The AV grants (unlike grants provided to take part in R.O.O.M events such as African Crossroads and Digital Earth fellowships) are generally provided as:

- (i) production grants, with a maximum size of EUR 15,000 adjusted according to the context, the need and the foreseen absorption capacity of the grantee;
- (ii) amplification grants of up to EUR 30,000 for a smaller number of past production grantees (sometimes as an outgrowth especially of African Crossroads);
- (iii) collaboration grants to groups of 2 or more creatives along with tech, media, and academic specialists, to further advance specific situation, such as building capacities; and
- (iv) resilience grants, added as a funding opportunity for selected creative makers due to extraordinary COVID constraints.

The two latter AV grant categories make up 26 within the total portfolio of 104 grants. Initially the grant cycle was foreseen to be of a one-year duration. However, as the Regional Project Managers adjusted the processes to the unfolding of ongoing grants, the three cycles are not the same.

The grant-giving process is decentralised, as are most other R.O.O.M activities. The three Regional Project Managers have the space to adjust the priorities and process to the ever-changing reality in the three programme regions, and they each decide about the composition of their grant review panel. This independence is within a general framework for all, developed by the Hivos team. For both production and amplification grants, the grant committees must identify whether the individual applicant has

- Independent content production: Editorial independence? Financially reliable and collaborative?
- Impact to reach larger audience: Diversity in audience, including marginalised groups? Online presence? Missing in the region? Focused and filling a gap? Diversity in geographic context?
- Challenges (repressive) social norms: Context conscious? Content that is critical? Novel and not rhetoric? There is a clear methodology?

- Ability to measure impact: Audience reach (diversity and size) and audience engagement
- (Potential for) sustainability of content: Financially and strong content;
- Efficiency and alignment between project approach (plans, activities) and budget? Can the proposed idea be implemented within the proposed time?

The grants cycles are clearly regulated in terms of the steps in the application and review procedures, as well as the grantee reporting requirements. As we report below under 'findings', procedures for properly accounting for grants received has been a challenge in this programme. While both Hivos and Sida are organisations requiring strict accountability and transparency in documentation for funds spent, both are also flexible and ready to meet reality. Finding a good balance, however, while securing full reporting as needed, has remained a challenge to many grantees. This has, therefore, been one of the reasons for the R.O.O.M programme building capacity in this area – as reported hereunder.

ii Capacity building

In the most recent Annual Report (2019) the R.O.O.M programme highlights that:

We are proud to say that for 30% of our grantees (26 organisations or individuals) Hivos was the first international organisation to provide financial and capacity-building support.

Besides addressing the R.O.O.M programme's desire to identify and work with a new generation of creatives operating outside of the mainstream, the statement also explains why a broad array of capacity building has been important in the programme.

Capacity building has taken many different forms and was partly conceived from the beginning of the programme to meet emerging needs. Some capacity building activities have taken place in the form of workshops, partner meetings, makers summit, or as other events or activities. On a few occasions, handbooks have been developed to further assist capacity, as is the case with the Creative Hub Leaders' Toolkit. This has been produced in a global partnership project of Nesta, Hivos and British Council, that supports creative hub leaders to sustain and grow their hubs¹⁴.

iii African Crossroads, an annual festival and network

African Crossroads – the R.O.O.M programme's Pan-African festival – took place in 2018 in Marrakech, Morocco, in 2019 in Mombasa, Kenya, and in 2020 online. The festival aims to link content creators with activist groups, traditional civil society and social entrepreneurs, in order to create new narratives, metaphors and imaginaries for their social goals.

Through a wealth of workshops, art exhibitions,



Musicians from Atlas Electronics and Nyege Nyege Festival rehearsing on a collaboration during African Crossroads 2018, in Marrakesh. Photo credit: @AfricanCrossroads, 2018

¹⁴ <https://hivos.org/document/creative-hub-leaders-toolkit/>

African Crossroads 2019 attendees improvising music and dance movements between two sessions, in Mombasa. Photo credit: @AfricanCrossroads, 2019



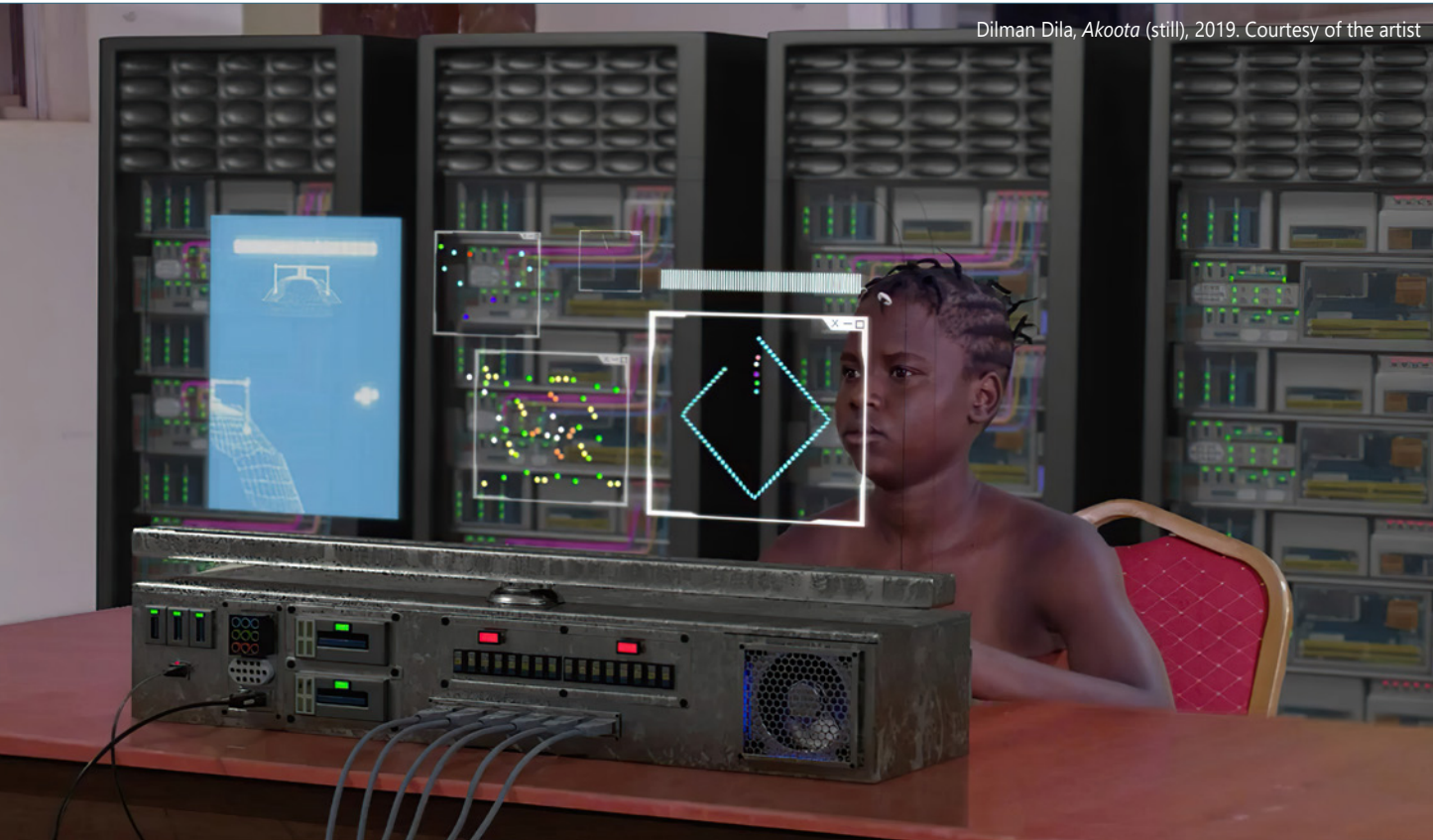
VR experiences, an innovation showcase, as well as an elaborate music programme, new partnerships were forged in 2019 among the 175 participants and curators from over 35 countries across the continent. With African Crossroads Facebook videos reaching on average 95,000 people, the event represents both a meeting place for cutting edge frontrunners in the field and has an online presence.

Most of the collaborations of those who received collaboration grants mentioned above are based on connections made at this event.

iv Experimentation - Digital Earth

At the end of 2018, R.O.O.M and the British Council launched the Roaming Academy, with the research focus of 'Digital Earth'. The programme consists of a 6 to 9-months fellowship for artists, allowing them to research, reflect on and experiment with how technological developments are impacting the African continent, its relationship with Asia and big tech companies like Facebook and Google in Europe and North America. While there are many programmes' that aim to support makers to produce work, attend training and take part in workshops, there are very few programmes' that offer the time, space and financial support to carry out research and reflect on global trends and developments that are impacting their artistic practice.

Dilman Dila, *Akoota* (still), 2019. Courtesy of the artist



Digital Earth aims to do precisely this by fostering linking and learning, and providing partners the opportunity to research important topics on the intersection of technology and arts. Participants are invited not only to reflect on the current situation but also to imagine possible future alternatives, while they are able to focus on this, as the grant provides financial backing.

2.3.1 Summary

Recognising that the R.O.O.M programme contains further activities and engagements, the four categories presented above are the ones selected by Hivos for us to cover in this mid-term evaluation.

Below we will refer back to all of these as we move through our findings organised by the evaluation's core questions, focusing on extracting the impact generated through the programme in the lives and work of the creatives, the impact on their collectives, hubs and communities, and we will consider all of this in the section with evaluative conclusions, along the lines of the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria: relevance; coherence; efficiency; effectiveness; sustainability; and impact.

3. FINDINGS

The R.O.O.M programme is implemented in Africa with – in principle – a global mandate. Most of the AV grants focus on the regions of SA, EA and MENA (see 1.4.1 and 2.3.1 above). While the space for freedom of expression is dwindling in all three regions, they each have very specific conditions and challenges for creative expression. We therefore begin this section with a presentation of each of the three regions.

3.1 Contextual situation analysis: The three core R.O.O.M regions

3.1.1 Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA)

The MENA region, is a very challenging and high-risk region for artists and creatives in general. Freedom of expression is compromised for artists, activists and journalists as many were detained and persecuted in the last decade by the military regime.

The R.O.O.M programme is playing a big role to support its partners in these difficult times where grants for artistic and critical projects are becoming fewer and the operations for international funds are controlled and reduced to a minimum. As in the last three years it is becoming increasingly difficult to operate as an entity in the civil and artistic fields. The scarcity of resources and the legal pursuit made funding and grant-giving organisations flee parts of the region just like many art organisations, spaces and hubs have closed and ceased their operations and programmes.



Waraq's dry point etching course with Roger Feghali, Lebanon.

For these reasons it is difficult to state that in MENA the R.O.O.M programme supported new and counter-hegemonic narratives, or contributed to a more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in the societies where public space is shrinking for three reasons:

First, most of the makers, artists and hubs supported were, per-se, already critical and had been working for a while. They were already creating counter-hegemonic narratives and worked on the margins. As the MENA programme manager states:

It is only due to personal choices and strong resilience that these organisations and artists still work and produce their art.

Hence, in the MENA region the programme did not support any “new” initiatives, but the importance and strength of the programme is obvious, as it supports those who had no space nor chance to receive support in these societies and environments where they risk their own security and freedom. Most of the creatives partnering with and supported by the Hivos programme encounter censorship and risk related to the content of their work.

Secondly, since the makers are individuals who work in a very marginalised sphere, it is difficult to admit that they created a change in the discourse or creating debates in their societies. In addition, large scale dissemination of any work online or offline could cause harm to the makers. Hence, the focus of the regional programme manager was to secure the partners and ensure that they will not compromise their security through their work or promotion of it.



Jana's Lab in a series of preliminary sessions, the group introduced one another to each respective work and questions of interest, followed by a discussions, Lebanon.

Lebanon has faced both financial and social turmoil and difficulties. The 2019–2020 Lebanese protests were a series of civil protests triggered by planned taxes on gasoline and tobacco. They quickly expanded into a country-wide condemnation of sectarian rule, stagnant economy, unemployment, corruption in the public sector, and failures by the government to provide basic services such as electricity, water, and sanitation. Those socio-political conditions limited and reduced the number of supported partners in Lebanon to only 4 artists and hubs.

However, in Lebanon we can clearly see that the R.O.O.M programme contributed to a more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in a society where public space is shrinking. The Design Lab in Beirut is a very good example of this from the beginning of the project, while developing the concept and the partnerships, through regular meetings with different stakeholders and participants. As the founder stated, HIVOS adopted a very flexible and experimental approach as they didn't interfere nor rush this long process of reflection and discussion into production.

This experimental and process-driven approach generated the sense of community and of freedom of expression. The effect of this could be seen when the revolution started in 2019, the same group of partners – who were still into this conceptualisation phase – went to the streets as a united group and shifted the focus of their planned production to document the revolution. They created the Instagram page “Bel-Mersad” where they posted content every day, resulting from discussions in the streets, as well as producing content for other parties needing this assistance.

In summary, in MENA, the R.O.O.M programme has provided the space for makers to produce their work, securing them with an experimental and flexible approach based on co-creation and partnership without compromising their safety and security.

3.1.2 Southern Africa (SA)

A brief analysis of the context in Southern Africa affirms the necessity for a grant-making policy that prioritises criticality, debate, and dissent. In Zimbabwe, where space for critical content and activism was already shrinking, COVID-19 has created a new set of challenging conditions. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, the human rights conversation in Zimbabwe revolved around issues such as police brutality, gender-based violence, lack of service delivery, corruption and cadre deployment, among other pressing concerns. Added to these are the historical marginalisation of Bulawayo and Ndebele-speaking citizens, and a stark rural-urban divide with uneven access to data and digital content.

Freedom of expression remains a big issue for Zimbabwean makers and activists, with arrests of activists, such as journalist Martha O'Donovan, in 2017, for a tweet that was allegedly attempting to overthrow the government, and in 2020, author Tsitsi Dangarembga. The government has put out warnings that “social media abuse” activities will be met with jail terms and is attempting to pass legislation such as the Cyber Crime Law.

COVID has amplified these underlying societal conditions. While the issues that content creators and makers wish to critique have not gone away, indeed have amplified, the space to voice concerns is now further constrained by more stringency around “fake news” policing and attempts to regulate social media usage with ever stricter controls.



Copyright-Alliance for Community Action Zambia workshop participant- Lusaka, Zambia

Internet security, freedom and audience engagement

Globally, there are increasing concerns about the relationship between democracy and information manipulation, fake news and criticality in the age of big data. Debates around this are gaining traction worldwide and are not unique to Southern Africa, but varying levels of digital literacy make the concerns pertinent for Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. How easily dominant hegemonies become entrenched through social media is a matter of continued debate: who owns content; how is content accessed and consumed; and what digital rights do audiences give up unwittingly when they accept terms and conditions without reading or understanding them? How are young makers expressing an African or local identity when Facebook and other platforms curate content according to algorithms that often seem to close rather than open audience choices?

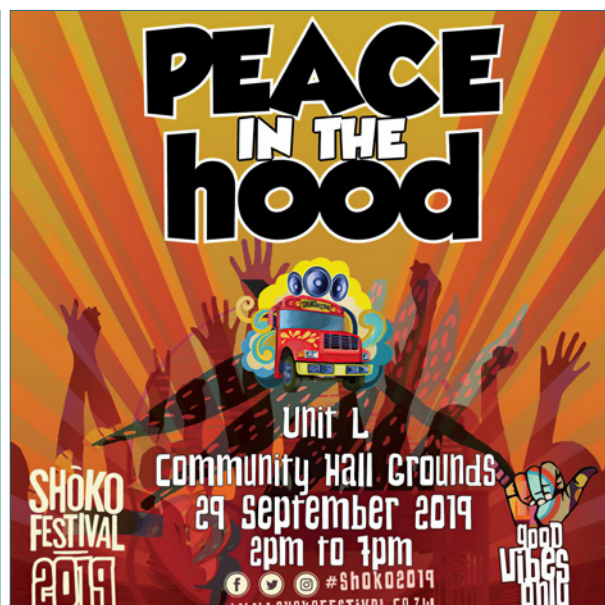
COVID-19 has sharpened these concerns as contradictory and confusing messaging about the pandemic made the rounds on social media, from conspiracy theories about vaccines and government control to misinformation – some unwitting, some possibly deliberate. Facebook is becoming increasingly monolithic and algorithms determine what audiences get access to without them fully understanding how these algorithms affect the way they consume content. Underlying this is the possible silencing of both audience and maker. While some makers are able to retain independence through HIVOS grants, it is difficult to measure levels of debate on social media as audiences may be becoming more wary about exposing their own agreement with controversial posts or content for fear of surveillance.

According to the Magamba Network project report for The FeedZW ¹⁵, the majority of Zimbabweans mainly use WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The biggest online content creators in Zimbabwe, such as Open Parly ZW, Magamba TV, 263Chat, Bustop TV, Cite ZW and The FeedZW have made these platforms home.

However, since the onset of COVID-19, government presence on social media has also increased, according to Larry Kwirirayi, organiser of the R.O.O.M programme SA-Zim Maker's Summit:

In some ways in 2019 it was simpler. Governments were less online. People used to clamour for governments to digitise but now, with mainstreaming comes more regulation and this is muting some voices. COVID-19 actually accelerated space for censorship. Governments are more involved in conversations online. Zimbabwe's biggest publisher online is Government – the 2 most active social media accounts are the Ministry of Health & Ministry of Information. They are very active in creating content, competing for space and becoming smarter about how they do it. Social media is not evolving, but traditional media is transferring to social media. If you do not invent anything new, traditional media will come and occupy that space.

In Zambia for example, the influence of social media is evident, where conversations clash within the context of religion. An internal censorship happens – anything that conflicts with God is not invited to the dialogue. In Zimbabwe, there is no longer a clearly defined space between opposition parties and government. People are not finding content that relates to them, or difficult discussions to consume. Turning to South African DSTV for content, where they can engage with their issues.



Shoko Festival 2019, Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe
courtesy of Magamba Network



Shoko Festival, Hub Unconference, Harare
courtesy of Magamba Network

¹⁵ <https://thefeed.co.zw/>

With the high cost of data, mobile operators are very comfortable in their space. Eighty percent of the internet is consumed in data bundles. With the broad use of WhatsApp, fake news can easily spread. Creatives are competing less for global content and global eyeballs are not on WhatsApp. This affects how people are writing about themselves, how Southern African narratives are entering global content space.

Grant-making landscape in the creative sector

Historically, creative activists, artists and makers have used a message-based development angle to fund the making of work and to sustain activity. With a rich history of theatre-for-development in the region, many makers in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe have operated within this milieu. Makers attach content, whether live or digital, to a particular issue, such as Health, HIV, Malaria or UN sustainable development goals. In the last 10 years there has been an uptick in the availability of support for creative entrepreneurship, with organisations and bodies such as the British Council supporting hubs and emphasising the income-generation aspect of creative activity.

While these are worthwhile and have served as valuable income for makers, there is simply no grant-making body that supports, let alone actively encourages, makers to experiment, dissent and challenge the societal norms on their own terms and through their own artistic vision or reading of the social conditions. This no-strings-attached funding, instead of a condition where 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' is almost unheard of. However, there is still enormous precarity in the creative sector, and independent artists or emerging organisations in particular often eke out a chameleon-like shape-shifting professional existence and adapt to what the revenue stream requires. The relationship between institutional strength and editorial independence is critical. The ability for makers and arts or media organisations to sustain a critical voice over time even as censorship increases and policy-level measures to silence dissent are put in place, remains to be seen.

3.1.3 Eastern Africa (EA)

"2019 has been a turbulent year for free speech. We have seen many incidents of violence by security forces, internet shutdowns, attacks on journalists and activists. Some countries introduced laws that were meant to silence civil society," said Mugambi Kiai, Regional Director of Article XIX, Eastern Africa. *"But this year also showed how much resilience people in Eastern Africa have, and their determination to make themselves heard, in the streets and online. Governments can no longer ignore the people."*¹⁶

R.O.O.M is part of this movement, where young makers are provided support to, on their own initiative and with full autonomy, challenge status quo. In the R.O.O.M programme's East Africa regional programme, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are core partners. Countries which, with each their specificity and unique culture and development, in many ways have a shared history, culture and, to some extent, a transnational language - Kiswahili.

In Kenya, there is a tradition of criticality, and creating bold, politically challenging art and literature. R.O.O.M's AV grants are important in trying to keep this critical consciousness alive in a younger generation of content creators. Creating a culture of criticality and free expression in Kenya entails positioning

¹⁶ <https://www.article19.org/resources/eastern-africa-2019-annual-report-resilience-freedom-of-expression/>

the R.O.O.M project in the space where other donors do not provide support to creatives, namely free expression. While there is an emphasis on creative entrepreneurship and industry in the country more widely, HIVOS is the only donor that emphasises criticality. This goes hand in hand with capacity building, as the more self-sufficient the art-makers can be, the more they can retain independence and editorial control.

The productions supported by the R.O.O.M AV grants in Kenya have a diverse range of themes including governance, corruption and accountability directly, while others take this on more obliquely. Only one grantee had LGBTQI narratives as the main focus, and gender does not appear to be an exclusive focus of any of the productions although it features in the mix with other issues. Considering matters of national importance beyond tribal or ethnic categorisations recurred as a theme in at least three of the productions.

Most organisations are based in Nairobi, with the notable exceptions of Tribeless Youth (Nakuru County) included among the five 'finalists' of the region¹⁷. However, many of the Nairobi-based organisations have a wide reach or they reference other marginalised parts of the country. In terms of media and channels used, of the videos made for digital platforms, there is an even spread among



Photo Credit: Creative Education and Empowerment Zanzibar (CEEZ Africa)



Production of Culture and Development East Africa's Utamaduni Express program under the ROOM project.

¹⁷ LakeHub based in Kisumu, Western Kenya was not among the reviewed projects, but represents another grantee outside of Nairobi.



#UsaniiNiSauti

ROLE OF CREATIVES IN ADVOCACY

Zoom Meeting

6TH APRIL 2021 | 11AM - 1PM
@TribelessYouth

Panelists

@Dorphan_age
Dorphan is a performing artist who uses his creative ability as a writer and performer to express the human experience, especially the disenfranchised one.

@quiqrre
Qui Qarre is a poet, author and a content creator. She's passionate about conversations on mental health and social justice.

@Shikkiey
Shikkiey is a singer, songwriter, and spoken word artist with a deep love for the African woman. She often uses her art to advocate for human rights and speaks about the novelties of the African culture

@tonymboyo
puppeteer and innovative participatory development trainer,

 **Zoom** [https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwvdu-srTopH92-C_n5Jl6g58CGMq8-wrU](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwvdu-srTopH92-C_n5Jl6g58CGMq8-wrU)

Tribeless Youth - Poster for one of the activities on creatives and advocacy implemented by Tribeless Youth in 2021 under the ROOM project.

animations, documentaries, miniseries, podcasts and music projects, some with a focus on youth, others with a more indigenous cultural and archival focus. Many of the productions are concerned with exposing and showcasing the experiences of marginalisation and discrimination.

Also in Tanzania, authorities are increasing the pressure on anyone with access to a public stage, with a voice – be it musicians, journalists, editors and bloggers, artists, and citizens with a platform. Arbitrary arrests, harassment, intimidation, and even murder, are among the concerted state efforts to control the vibrant East African creative industry.

In Tanzania popular musician Nay wa Mitego was arrested for releasing a song, titled “Wapo”, which was deemed

to be critical of the government. His fellow musician, Roma Mkatoliki, was kidnapped by people suspected to be government agents while he was at a recording studio. It is still unclear why he was taken. Roma later released “Zimbabwe”, a song about his ordeal and the risks of speaking truth to power. He was then banned from performing for six months. These events have led to popular musicians speaking out against political oppression, facing all the risks that this involves¹⁸.

The R.O.O.M programme in Tanzania also supports makers and spaces with funding and the building of capacity to operate more safely and effectively in this environment. Of the four makers supported by R.O.O.M, the one included in the Level 3 analysis was CEEZ Africa (Stone Town Records).

Uganda lines up with the other countries in Eastern Africa with freedom of expression characterised as a fairly contentious area.¹⁹ The Constitution of Uganda from 1995 provides for the right to freedom of expression, but there is a plethora of other laws in play that introduce both civil and penal sanctions for those that violate their rights to expression. With the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2014²⁰, the space for civil liberties and freedom of expression are put in a frightening perspective, also when the act removed the ultimate option - the death penalty for being gay.

February 2021 President Yoweri Museveni ordered the suspension of the Democratic Governance Facility which made Jon Temin, director of Africa programmes’ at Freedom House issue the following statement²¹:

¹⁸ <https://www.dw.com/en/tanzania-freedom-of-expression-deteriorating-under-magufuli/a-43423391>

¹⁹ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3461749

²⁰ https://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/files/198395121/TristanRegan_The

²¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/uganda-suspension-democratic-governance-facility-highlights-growing-concerns>



We are alarmed by the decision to suspend the Democratic Governance Facility. This fund is critical to the operations of many Ugandan civic organisations mandated to advance the rule of law and good governance and some government bodies, including the Uganda Human Rights Commission. Through this action, the government of Uganda is standing in the way of progress driven by Ugandans themselves.



It is in this environment that R.O.O.M makes support available to creatives ready to and wanting to challenge a system and an environment, every day seemingly worse – what may be the next? R.O.O.M has provided grants and other support to three makers of which one has been selected for the final Level 3 scrutiny, namely Pollicy, a group of young technologists, creatives, data scientists and academics in Kampala, Uganda, working to empower citizens to seek better public health, education, infrastructure, and security services.

3.1.4 Summary

It is in these regions of Africa and the Middle East and under the described realities, the R.O.O.M programme unfolds, where at least one uniting condition for creatives and other freedom of expression actors is an adverse environment, with suppression and lawlessness as the conditions. In the findings section below, we present the ways in which the R.O.O.M programme supports these actors, and discuss how, why or why not the diverse range of R.O.O.M strategies are effective.

3.2 Which strategies have been effective for makers?

The strategy that appears to be most effective is the holistic, integrated approach that:

- (i) supports critical content creation through AV grants;
- (ii) capacitates organisations and makers to strengthen their institutional and financial structures; and
- (iii) encourages collaboration.

Each of these strategies is mutually reinforcing and it is the cohesiveness between them that is most effective for makers. As expressed by Muhammad Mustapha, from Lebanon:



It has worked really well with discussion and continuous follow-up in the grant process. During the COVID-19 time, they checked on me and helped find ways to resume my project. All in all, I feel like I am in a safe-net, with flexible and responsive colleagues, listening to my needs.



Furthermore, the R.O.O.M programme has been found to fund productions which no one else would support. This was expressed by many makers, including productions about taboo issues and themes including albinism, homosexuality and persons living with disability.

In terms of capacitating organisations and makers to strengthen their institutional and financial structures, the programme is found to balance well between, on the one hand, the need by Hivos and Sida to have full documentation of expenses and (implicitly) nurture a culture of transparency and accountability, and on the other hand, the special features of the group of partners, mostly not operating as well-oiled Southern NGO machineries, and – as quoted above – with 30% ‘first time’ recipients of donor funding (opening of section 2.3.2).

While a few grantees are struggling with the requirements, more report about the empowering experience of having been trained and, for the first time, finding themselves in a position to manage their funding, and to even apply for support from other partners. Where such prospects have not been promising, the programme has found solutions by either inviting the prospective grantee into a hub (or collective setting), where a budget could be administered by colleagues, or, when necessary, to realise that this partnership would not work.

Hivos have made a special effort to adjust the potential clash of cultures by having the regional programme managers invite their financial colleagues/accountants on grantee-visits with them, so they may also understand from whom they are receiving budgets and accounts in the future, ensuring the transparency and accountability also in this way, towards partners.

Finally, in all three regions, the evaluation found examples of makers having received support to infrastructure purchase to go online, to produce music or to do AV production. Such production equipment was found to have catapulted hubs and collectives to a new level, facilitating production for many others, and being in a league where investment collaboration and funding opportunities which were not possible earlier came within reach. CEEZ, from Zanzibar, says:



The support from Hivos is a donor grant but it is also a future investment - that kind of support that allows us creatives to invest in equipment and content and pay salaries for admin costs. This is all very important. Here in Tanzania, there is no government funding and it is hard to get investment as a creative entrepreneur.



3.3 Have makers become more self-sufficient/sustainable? How?

We have considered self-sufficiency and sustainability, both, at a personal level and financially.

Personally, in terms of resilience and self-confidence the team found pride and ownership among young makers, resulting from new opportunities, new collaborations, both locally within hubs as well as across borders. Such collaboration and networking have inspired makers through exposure and broadened opportunities. Furthermore, to the many makers whose grants have focused on training and inspiring groups of youth, this sense of community contribution has been important to many, along with its valuable sense of connection with the community. Finally, a couple of the creatives, now organised within a collective or hub highlight how the collective organisation forms are more resilient in crisis situations.

Financially, short term funding of production, even core costs, does not render an initiative either self-sustainable, or sustainable. Makers, however, stress that during the period of funding, it has been

a luxury to be able to focus on their creative production work. More extended periods of core cost funding were highly appreciated in the cases this was found.

In terms of audience reach, the fact that the grant allows for line items to develop online reach, (e.g., paying for boosts and ads) along with other strategies to increase reach (enhanced quality) has meant that hubs, such as Kuwala (Malawi), and small maker organisations (the Women's History Museum) have been able to attract other funding streams and broader publishing and distribution.

In Kenya, Tribeless Youth used the initial funding to move forward in new ways. Shikoh Kihika, the Tribeless Youth Executive Director says:

I think we are still marching towards the financial bit. With the grant we got and what we learnt, we have been able to apply for more resources and have more donors coming in. We are now able to manage our creatives, and we have developed from three to six staff. We are seeing the organisation develop and blossom!

Equipment purchases, specifically of digital editing and recording devices, has played a role in building self-sufficiency, especially in response to COVID-19 related restrictions. Where makers rely on digital publishing, the purchase of cameras and recording equipment has enabled better production quality, which in turn increases credibility and enables hubs or makers to take on income-generating contracts. These income streams have the effect of strengthening the financial well-being of organisations and makers, which, in turn, means they can be more independent of editorial or self-censorship.

3.4 Have the makers become more independent? How?

Editorial independence. Undoubtedly, the AV grants and capacity buildings strategies have worked hand in hand to increase editorial independence for makers. The grants help makers to create content they would otherwise have difficulty creating. The fact that it deliberately funds critical content is important when, usually, there are strings attached for donor funding. Self-publishing was one area highlighted particularly in the MENA region.

This independence is exemplified in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where a R.O.O.M grant helped The Center for Innovation and Technology (CITE) to grow their audience. They had the resources to commission work from artists at a time when livelihoods had been drastically reduced overnight. CITE became the go-to page because there was a scarcity of content (news as well as entertainment) elsewhere:

Bulawayo is marginalised by central government. Journalists and mainstream news outlets were struggling to produce content or were closed. Many media houses were closed due to COVID lockdown and relied on government funding for survival. Because we produced and shared content online we were independent. We didn't need to beg the government for money, we could produce our normal content with no pressure to be nice to government.

Zenzele Ndebele, CITE.

Makers express how it has been a huge relief not to have to struggle with platform owners on content (from record labels, over animation, and films). Owning the means of production, the channels, has allowed makers to have additional revenue streams.

The editorial independence and production space has given confidence, not least among marginalised creatives. A participant from the Eastern African Partner Meeting underscored it:

With the Hivos funding I am independent to be who I am: woman, part of LGBTQI+ and a film maker! It gives such an incredible feeling of freedom! This Hivos programme makes us feel “you are not crazy” – that everything we stand for is not right.

For some makers, independence means being able to afford their own space, to select other makers with whom to share the space with, and not being dependent on others who may not agree with the work being done.

Steve Kivutia, Project Manager, Audio Engineer & Music Producer of Ketebul Music in Kenya highlighted yet another aspect of ‘independence’:

Being a Hivos international partner makes you recognised, you lend in a way a part of their brand in a particular way. This partnership has added value. Above all they have ‘had our backs’: We had only dared to include queer issues with Hivos backing. Police will not clamp down on us as brutally when we have an important supporter.

Another kind of independence highlighted by several makers was the incredible empowerment derived from having the capacity to manage their own administration, to understand and to be able to perform.

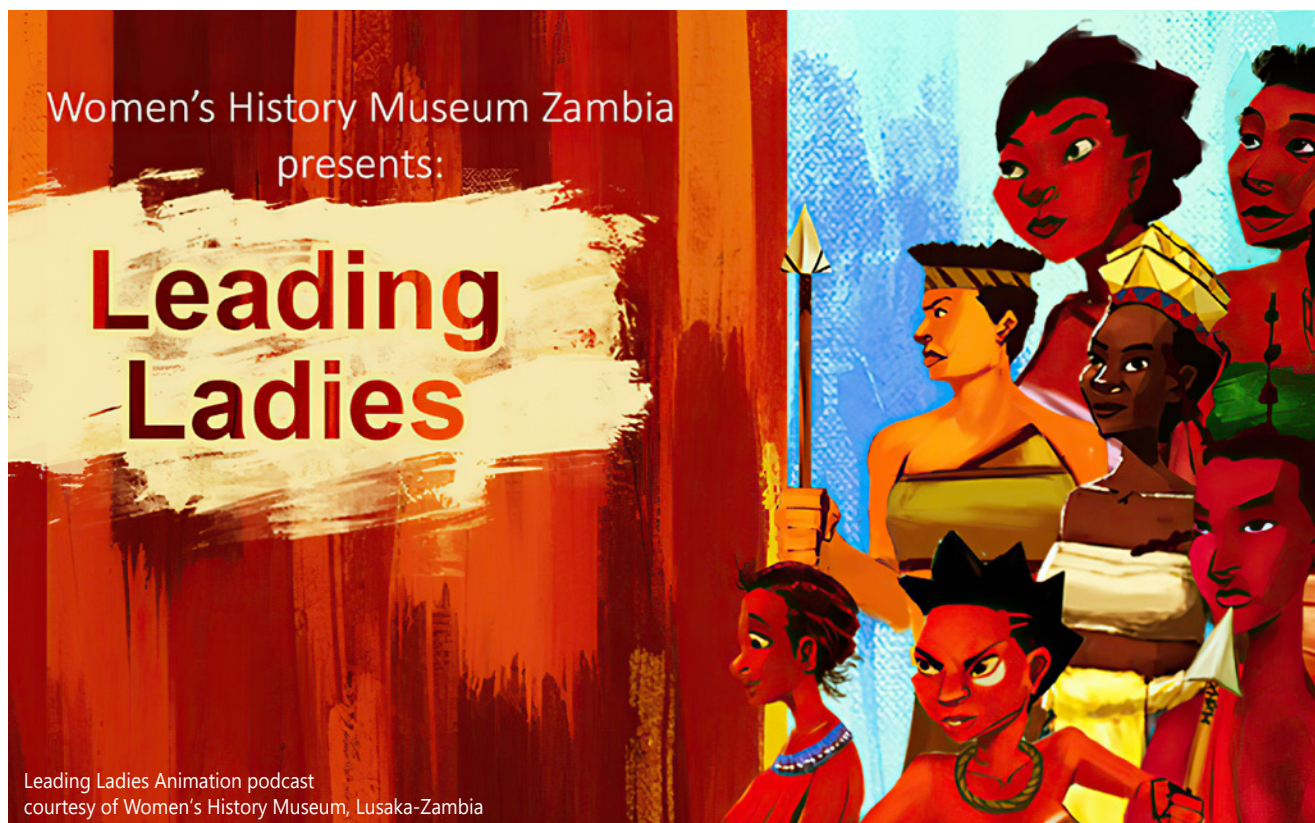
3.5 Do they create more critical cultural, media productions?

All of the makers interviewed in all three regions produced more productions, both in quantity, improved quality and deeper criticality than before becoming Hivos/R.O.O.M partners. This, notwithstanding that most grantees also stress that they already were quite critical to begin with – a basis for being considered for a grant.

In Zimbabwe, CITE managed, over a six-month period, to produce 24 episodes of comedy consisting of five to ten -minute skits with local artists on the Laughter Cafe. Content dealt with corruption, current affairs, human rights, and other issues that were coming about as a result of the hard lockdown and curfews.

People had to be home by 6pm, people couldn't work (informal traders) so a lot of stress and economic stress. Comedy helped people to learn more about COVID, so we were also creating awareness. We posted content on the social media pages, and commissioned music through Beats & Rhymes – 6 artists, 2 songs each over 6 months – 1 artist a month from June to December and a podcast series with 10 podcasts every month.

Zenzele Ndebele, CITE.



Women History Museum in Zambia have produced two 10-episode series of *Leading Ladies Zambia*, a 2D animation and documentary podcast series exploring historical women figures and leaders and their influence on Zambia's development. The second season focuses on contemporary narratives of women from 1930 to date. This upcoming series exposes the continued discrimination that women in leadership face, how they overcome obstacles, and how their roles transform perspectives of women and leadership. While the content is not directly critical, it serves to reclaim previously invisible narratives.

In other realities it was stressed that editorial independence works hand-in-hand with criticality, which also, with the time and space provided through the grant, gave the makers time and space to work, and to disseminate their critique among others through opportunities to amplify the reach, including through opportunities to pass on insights to groups of young makers.

The workshop on critical thinking for MENA was appreciated as it also tackled the cultural constraint that youths traditionally have to respect elders.

3.6 If they create more critical cultural and media productions: How has this development evolved?

So, the criticality of the productions has been strengthened and to a certain extent become more conscious. There are many reasons for this development.

Co-creating at proposal level helps to nudge makers to propose stronger, more critical content. People are not used to being able to address sensitive issues, it's almost as if they do not believe it is really allowed. The Hivos team does not influence the content in any way, except at proposal level to encourage makers to frame their proposals more critically. For example, the makers involved with Kuwala Creatives making work about albinism, began the project by wanting to bring more visibility to people living with albinism. A process of deeper enquiry by Hivos made the team tackle a deeper more controversial and sensitive aspect of the topic, namely the relationship between albinism and muti, or so-called witchcraft.

Capacity building is working very well. Financial systems, templates, reporting, and tracking spending has a positive impact institutionally, which in turn frees up time and capacity for makers to make, and to be bolder in their content creation. Most makers reported that this had helped them a great deal.

Ketebul Music from Kenya attributes the continued development of critical cultural productions to the Hivos support. Patrick Infield, the Head of Ketebul's Video Department, Camera Operator & Editor, says:



Creative Education and Empowerment Zanzibar (CEEZ Africa)



The change we are experiencing is incredible and it is no longer Ketebul Music who did it all, a lot of different players contributed. Now 60-65% of the music played in the radio in Kenya is Kenyan. Now the biggest pop group is Sauti Sol, playing traditional Kenyan instruments, who grew with the Ketebul support. When we started in 2005 it was not considered cool at all. Now they are getting huge audiences and online listening. Here in Kenya all grew up being hip hop rappers, noone wanted to play instruments, but Sauti Sol would carry instruments – and this changed the interests. Now you can meet 10 young people in the park, all carrying instruments on their back. This is a change we encouraged.



More hubs now have a gender policy in place and more of an awareness about how to be inclusive of, for example, younger women makers. Further, the intellectual capacity building around issues and debates such as challenging hegemonic narratives has further enabled young makers to frame their own work, expression and artistic intentions in ways they may not have thought about previously. The idea that digital media can be used to speak about ancestral narratives as well as to imagine futures and redefine contemporary narratives is liberating for young makers.

Sense of pride and ownership in young makers among others comes from a strengthened quality, which improves with access to better equipment, time, and space. With improved quality comes bigger audience reach, more credibility and a claiming of digital spaces.

3.7 Are underrepresented voices brought forward?

With a resolve up uplift unheard voices and underrepresented groups among others coming from 'remote areas', Hivos early 2020 present an important result with 40% of all grantees in Southern Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa stemming from remote and underrepresented areas and in East Africa the figure is 20%.. Hivos defines 'remote areas' as 'non-capital or low-income areas in cities'.

Many grantees interviewed demonstrate a high level of awareness around the importance of providing space for new, young and underrepresented voices. This may be because the grantees themselves are or have been in the same situation themselves - like the queer film maker producing a film about queer women living in a refugee camp, or a music producer supporting poor aspiring musicians to get the music out for free, or governance programmes' in poor neighbourhoods, working with local youths to express what they are missing out on as advocacy messages in community murals.

Women have a distinct role in many activities leading productions, producing their own films, etc.

All five grantees that were interviewed in Southern Africa have been able to strengthen the representation of marginalised voices in some way.

Mfalme Productions, Kenya, in their animation studio, produced a series called *Makaraao*, which is Sheng for 'police'. The series focusses on politics, corruption and social integration in Kenya, and uses the series' popularity to give voice to stigmatised populations, as Mfalme Production's Boniface Mwalii explains:

Somali people in Kenya have been made to feel like a minority. In Makarao we give them a voice, including them. We try to give an example of how Somalis are abused by the police. One episode, the police are checking cars: "Ah, you can go, no Somalis in the car!". About LGBT we have managed to sneak in new messages, showing that you need to co-exist with different sexualities. With animation you can do a lot – and we do.

During the lockdown period, on-the-ground reporting by CITE brought more awareness to concerns about increased gender-based violence and violence against children (women and families locked into their homes with abusive partners). CITE, based in Bulawayo and therefore somewhat marginalised in the Zimbabwean context, has been able to extend its listenership and viewership to other audiences in Zimbabwe. It has also represented other marginalised indigenous languages – Nambia and Kalanga – increasing the cultural diversity in its programming, making it possible for people to listen to a Nambia song for first time, for instance.

CITE also created podcasts targeting women listeners, e.g., *Queening it with the Empress*, which is firmly aimed at taking charge of the narrative and reclaiming powerful storytelling for women.

Women's History Museum bringing out indigenous and ancestral histories and little or under-documented stories of women leaders, warriors, etc.

In the Malawian example, Kuwala Creatives worked with people who live with albinism, excavating the reasons why albinism is so stigmatised in Malawi and thereby helping to create a rights-based awareness of this topic.

3.8 How productions have lifted up underrepresented or unheard voices - Which strategies were amplifiers? In provincial cities, rural and low-income areas?

By funding makers in provincial cities and amplifiers in low-income areas, as has been the case with the R.O.O.M grantees Pollicy in Uganda, Ketebul in Kenya and Edzai Isu in Zimbabwe, capacity is developed, both, among the grantees and the community groups they engage.

Pollicy in Uganda stresses:

Hivos has opened up opportunities to work with very creative projects. Pollicy is building a whole community with creatives and academia together. The grants from Hivos have given cohesion and also empowerment: we have passed a lot of skills on to the community through a wide range of tools. Pollicy has become a trendsetter in how to work with communities. They have allowed us to keep the light on, so to say.

Strategies that combine live, on-the-ground events, such as conferences or screenings, can take digital content that some audiences may not be able to access and bring them to rural or more marginalised

communities. For example, a digital rights campaign run by Magamba Network received relatively low viewing and engagement statistics on YouTube, possibly due to high data costs. The same content was screened and combined with discussion in a community setting outside of Harare, and a conference provided space for digital rights conversations to be discussed in depth. This “Chitungwiza Media Pop Up” screening was done at a Community Hall in Chitungwiza and in attendance were 70 people. With hashtags such as #Ghettocinema, this strategy combines the online events with an on-the-ground component where in-person debate would have a different quality and flavour.

Women’s History Museum has engaged similar strategies and recorded that school-based writing groups took the content and used it to create their own poetry slams, while the Textbook Association of Zambia is publishing the stories in primary school textbooks, highlighting women’s herstory and women’s voices.

Leading Ladies foregrounds and restores previously lost or ignored narratives, thus correcting an imbalance in the mainstream hegemonic narratives about women in leadership and women’s role in his/herstory. This has developed from the initial idea of pre-colonial histories to include women in the anti-colonial period, and now to document living legends and to incorporate more regional stories, for example from Zimbabwe and Malawi.

Some of the further constraints encountered include the persisting digital divide between urban and rural areas in Southern and Eastern Africa, and the urgent need to ensure effective gender capacity building, including getting practical and inclusive gender policy in place. Several hubs already have this.

3.9 Do they reach a wider, more diverse audience with their productions than before?

Several of the makers interviewed noted that collaborations that came about through the R.O.O.M programme enabled them to reach a wider audience. Notably, one of the projects working with Kuwala Creatives in Malawi, focusing on supporting girls with renewable energy packs in a refugee camp, caught the interest of makers from Morocco at African Crossroads, which resulted in a musical collaboration. As a result, there was a cross-pollination of followers online for both musicians, with Moroccan audiences following the Malawian artist and vice versa.

Similarly, a collaboration between a Malawian and Zambian comedian has resulted in a large increase in followers for both makers as they acquired each other’s fans.

In Kenya Ketebul Productions stress that they support poor youth – for a very good reason:

■ ■

People who are really talented normally come from very difficult backgrounds, hunger being the driver. Youth from such backgrounds try to prove something to get food on the table. Ninety percent of the people who play music professionally in Kenya come from Eastlands, 90% who do high-level sports in Kenya are from there. And they bring the audiences!

■ ■

Further examples of wider and more diverse audiences were highlighted in Section 3.8 above, where both Magamba and Chitungwiza Media Pop Up through hybrid action: screening productions initially meant for online use in communities and for urban events, brought together important audience size.

Several people interviewed remarked that in Southern Africa, artists and audiences consume content locally and are often not very aware of what other artists are doing even across the border. In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, CITE has recorded an increase in viewership from Harare and other areas, breaking the separation between these locales. This increase in audience figures coincides with the lockdown period in 2020 – 40 000 followers in August increased to 48 000 in November. CITE reports that at the start of the grant period, 50,000 to 60 000 listeners per week were listening to content, and that this number increased to 150,000 listeners per week by the end of that period. The weekly reach increased threefold. On YouTube 500 new subscribers were added every month during that six-month period. Zenzele Ndebele from CITE reports:

We grew our audience and became a trusted source of news. Entertainment hooks people to the page. If there is an event on, people ask us. We now have a fact check desk – the entertainment and news work together in growing an audience that trusts us.

Women's History Museum reports that the overall interest and engagement with the first season was incredibly high, with a few episodes reaching over 90,000 viewers. The popularity of the museum and the series has been picked up by the major press, including Quartz and BBC. Netflix has also reached out to explore the possibility of producing a full series.

The funding allows us to share and make it free to anyone to view. We watched where it went – Youth groups who had a whole session on season 1. A Spoken Word group who took up the Season 1 and made work, creative responses to the content. So many creative spin-offs that we could not have predicted. The Alliance Francaise hosted a poetry slam in response to the content. An artist from the 1st episode got noticed by SA. Schools approached us, to develop Episodes 1 & 2 as Grade 4 readers.

For seasons 1 and 2 the reach was 259,000 views. All episodes were on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Feedback, comments, new audience and listeners, were received across the region (Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe). It has had an organic growth. Establishing a YouTube channel resulted in much wider audiences compared to TV.

3.10 Potential impact on audiences / audience reaction

Some of the most exciting and visible impacts are the examples where audiences have been inspired to take up the themes and narratives raised in a particular production and **produce their own expressions, digital and otherwise**. For example, the Women's History Museum has led to a number of events where schools and poetry groups have, in a sense, taken up the baton and made their own,

related content. This is indicative of a deep level of engagement, and evidence of a younger generation of makers actively shifting the narratives they grew up with.

Alex Kirui of Mfalme Productions, explains how they are always alert when around police and decision-makers due to their very critical content in the *Makara* animation series share this surprising experience:

During the African Crossroads last year (2019 in Mombasa) – some very senior people in the country came to watch. Asking: “what can we do with you?”. Audiences at the level Mfalme has, impress decision makers. We have the feeling now that we are able to make very critical programmes’ – very – as long as we can demonstrate that we do this for things to be done differently. Righting social wrongs. Improving service delivery, for instance.

Dialogue and debate online can be tracked by views, shares and comments but the numbers and statistics of these may not reflect the full level of engagement with the issues because audiences may be afraid to be seen to agree too openly with certain perspectives, especially with increased social media surveillance in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the R.O.O.M programme countries.

CITE and other Zimbabwean makers noted that it is on WhatsApp rather than other platforms that discussions are more likely to go viral. This is because of the affordability of WhatsApp bundles. In some cases, this reach might be organic and viral but can also, to an extent, be ‘owned’ or channelled by the makers themselves. For example, CITE moderates six WhatsApp groups of approximately 220 people each.

Discussion tends to happen in WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp is a cheaper channel to use. CITE has 6 WhatsApp groups which they moderate, with approximately 220 people in each. We estimate that each person sharing shares to another 5 groups, and that is how content goes viral.

Perception is that WhatsApp might be safer, but we don’t know who is on groups, sometime there are foreign numbers. 1st largest audience is in Harare, 2nd largest is Zimbabwean diaspora, 3rd is Bulawayo, even though that is our target base.

Interestingly, producing too much content too quickly does not necessarily increase debate and dissent.

If we produce too frequently it can have the effect of stifling the debate – better to allow each episode to have space afterwards to generate dialogue and discussion.”

Zenzele Ndebele, CITE.

The R.O.O.M Programme has given space for filmmakers working with different gender roles. New thematic areas call new audiences to the fore, searching to encounter the uniqueness online. Both makers mentioned having experienced the interest and need for their stories, also when an open presentation on internet-platforms is not desirable.

Crossing borders was the meeting ground for creative entrepreneur Gregg Tedwa from WiBO Culture (Kenya) and electronic music producer Reda Senhaji from Beats 'n' Roots (Morocco). While they produced an album in Morocco during the first African Crossroads, they have just – funded through a collaboration grant, followed up with 'Kiunga Vol. 2'. Gregg Tedwa says:

The creative sector does not create enough income for the creator to create and have peace of mind. Instead of creating you have to get out to look for work opportunities and don't have time to think and refresh with other artists. Most of the time artists want to have some creative exchange and cultural exchange. It is so important to us to feel what other people do. Collaboration and Hivos' support and networks give you a chance to explore new markets outside of the continent, Europe or US. This provides also a validation of creative work. When you collaborate and are validated, you climb a ladder towards a global platform, visibility.

3.11 What new networks, partnerships and collaborations have they become a part of as a result of R.O.O.M?

As presented at the opening of Chapter 3 – on findings – the MENA situation analysis explains why many of the grantees from MENA are individual makers, and also due to a violent security situation, less likely to reach out and engage across borders.

Despite political pressure and need for caution in both Southern and Eastern Africa, all grantees interviewed reported on a variety of partnerships, collaborations and partnerships established through regional or continental events, through taking part in specific programmes' or by establishment of direct contacts by the Hivos team between a maker and a colleague from elsewhere.

With Hivos it is good with visionary support which is not too patronising: working with a shared vision of how to get there. Having a Hivos partnership has added value in itself, but the Hivos team also ensures that we get a chance to meet up with colleagues or specialists, who can bring us forward. This is really unique!

A similar story is found with the Zambia Women's History Museum, which has, through Hivos intervention: been included on Google's Art and Culture in a partnership agreement; Zambian textbook Association wants to develop books on the material; a Swedish museum has reached out for collaboration; and Inebriated Blazer (Zim)²² has requested collaboration.

Kuwala Creatives in Malawi reported having established a collaboration as a result of a partnership forged at African Crossroads with the HIBA Foundation.

Magamba Network was able to forge several civil society collaborations around digital rights as a result of the Hub Unconference run by The Feed Zw.

²² https://www.behance.net/blazer_zw

These partnerships include a professional advancement side as focused upon above, but practically all partners stress that it has also carried important personal development, friendships and loads of fun with it. Values that are not as concrete to present and measure as audience figures and new directions, but which leave marks on the individual maker, bring her/him to new personal strength and opportunities.

The Digital Earth fellowships and peer-mentoring (impact does not go only one way) belong in this second category of personal development and insights.

3.12 Which strategies are effective in confronting structural issues: police corruption, neoliberalism, gender inequality?

Reappropriation of African culture, roots: “Past, present, future” workshops to inspire young makers with an understanding, have been mind-blowing to many young makers, realising that the medium they use (digital) can also encompass ancestral stories and indigenous content. This has been powerful and conscientising, bridging generations and opening futures.

Linking entertainment to news: Combining comedy or music with hardcore reporting or critical content has been one effective strategy. The Malawian comedians who started to tackle more political stories believe that they gained credibility (“people started to take us seriously”) and the converse also seems to work. CITE documented that the entertainment factors served as a hook to get people onto their digital channels.

Reporting local community news that mainstream newspapers would not normally cover, for example service delivery issues such as waste collection in Highfield, Harare, resulted in local councillors having to follow up on promises made due to pressure from the community.

On-the-ground reporting that is given a creative twist before publishing also proved successful in Malawi, with Kuwala Creatives. The agency was able to run activities that involved deploying a team of creatives to the streets and beerhalls, etc, to gather first-hand accounts, conversations, videos and debates concerning some of the common narratives in politics. These were given a post-production treatment before publishing on social media and website channels and bringing a creative angle to heated debates. Creatives bring their own angle/viewpoint to political tensions at a time of demonstrations and protests:

In one instance, a well-known human rights defender leading demonstrations was about to be assassinated – he was being trailed and his car was shot at. The media reported this in a certain way. We took screenshots and shared the discussion, comparing what really happened with what was reported. We exposed the truth, which was that the car was shot. We were able to challenge the mainstream narrative. Similarly, in Nsundwe, an area where violent demonstrations were happening, we took videos from eyewitnesses and gave them a “comical analysis” – we bring humour to bear on serious issues. Raw footage, direct eyewitness experience brought to audiences.

Collaboration – when this happens nationally (e.g., Malawi, Kuwala Creatives) artists can expand their reach, get more traction as viewership increases and issues can no longer be ignored or side-lined by authorities.

Networking, e.g., SA-Zim Summit, and other workshops, enables content to have a wider reach, enables collective problem solving and sharing. For example, two news agencies, one based in Zambia and one in Malawi, now share news items, reducing the risk of censorship or being silenced.

Appealing content: Content does not always have to be controversial to change narratives, e.g., Women's History Museum creates even more hunger for uncontroversial stories because there is such a genuine gap. Women's contributions have been erased from history and documenting these inspires a younger generation of young women poets and makers to have more confidence and agency in their lives, as well as be encouraged to take on similar themes in their own work.

Surprising treatment in surprising media, like the animation films on, among other topics, police corruption by Mfalme Productions in Kenya, which the police loves! Using this as an opening for some more explosive messages along the way.

Continue to boldly invest in infrastructure, assets for post-grant life and for facilitation of the work of other makers as well. This naturally must be done wisely based on clear guidelines.

4. EVALUATIVE CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Relevance

The R.O.O.M programme has through this mid-term evaluation been found to be relevant in all ways: first and foremost through its unique contribution to urgently needed dissenting voices and debate in democracy and freedom of expression constrained realities; by supporting new, young makers uplift underrepresented voices; by having a flexible and adaptable approach to programming in a reality where frequent re-orientations are needed; and, in general, in view of its understanding and way of operating within the highly complex, tense and risky environment.

Finally, the way the R.O.O.M programme is conceived and implemented matches perfectly both the objectives and ambitions of Hivos International and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

4.2 Coherence

The R.O.O.M programme fits perfectly into the given reality and adds unique value to the environments as compared to other arts and culture funders in the regions.

Furthermore, the programme, with Hivos behind it, operates in a very conducive and collegial spirit of collaboration, co-creation and co-funding with other like-minded artists and creative funders in the area.

Finally, the programme operates in a decentralised manner, leaving major policy and process decisions to the team of highly capable regional managers as the programme presently prepares for a 'hand-over' of the global coordination from The Hague to the region.

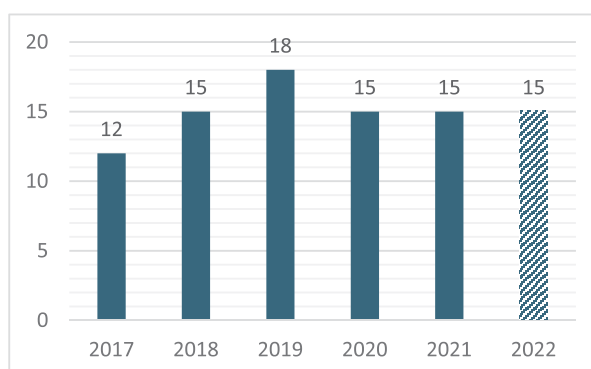
4.3 Efficiency

Without a clear financial mandate or scope of this mid-term evaluation, no detailed assessment of efficiency can be shared here.

The R.O.O.M budget provided by Sida

is the following, totalling from 2017 to 2022 90 M SEK (~ USD 10,659,700²³)

- 2017 12 mio SEK
- 2018 15 mio SEK
- 2019 18 mio SEK
- 2020 15 mio SEK
- 2021 15 mio SEK
- 2022 15 mio SEK (foreseen)



²³ Converted with Oanda April 19, 2021 (<https://www1.oanda.com/currency/converter/>)

4.4 Effectiveness

With the overall objective of the R.O.O.M programme being:

New and counter-hegemonic narratives by a young generation of makers contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in societies where public space is shrinking.

The question here is whether the programme is achieving its goal. Are the subprogrammes' and the activities contributing effectively to the above? In the Section 5, below, on 'lessons learnt' we focus on what worked and what did not work, and why, as per the situation revealed in the evaluation.

For the benefit of this evaluative conclusion, we will say that the programme is effective. With an exceptionally clear focus on the overall objective, the programme managers – and even a major part of the grantees – make reference to the objective regularly. The R.O.O.M programme can only be seen as a clearly and cleverly result-driven programme.

It works holistically to address the erosion of the informed conversation and the core principles of the Declaration of Human Rights along with human decency, among marginalised makers living in poverty, and cutting-edge creative frontrunners, tech-specialists and academics doing better. This erosion represents one of the scourges of our time, and a challenge and threat comparable to the climate crisis.

The evaluation has found that the programme adds significant value to the context, and aside from practical suggestions and recommendations (later), we consider the programme effective.

4.5 Sustainability

Will the net benefit of the R.O.O.M programme continue?

Conscientisation²⁴ is generally considered an irreversible process: once you have 'seen the light', understood the context you operate within, your position in it, your past, your present and the future, and you have good people around you with the same understanding. This intervention is sustainable.

The building of capacity of the makers and their collective and hubs to run their organisations sustainably to generate added partnerships also points to potential sustainability.

Looking to sustainability not as a personal or organisational development project only, but also as a practical vision of the value to reap from investments in the arts and creative sector, then the short-lived core cost payments would give the makers a brief period of peace to work. This benefits the conversation in the community and context, potentially adding to conscientisation and empowerment. And the investment in hardware and in infrastructure may, for about half of the engagements, be of a longer duration.

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_consciousness

All in all, it is the assessment by the evaluation team that within the given socio-political and cultural context, and with the human, professional and politico-developmental approach by Hivos - which we find appropriate and productive - the R.O.O.M project is well managed and could not be any more sustainable than it is.

4.6 Impact

The impact as formulated in the most recent R.O.O.M result framework is:

Diversification of dialogue, debate and dissent in society.

Our discussion above in Section 3.9 about audiences and reach by the makers, highlights a number of the constraints experienced partly due to COVID-related limitations on physical meetings. Many of our grantee interviews have highlighted the longing for direct interaction with audiences and colleagues.

With these reservations in mind, the evaluation team will, however, say the 'diversification of dialogue, debate and dissent in society' has definitely been achieved. By how many, where and with which effects on livelihood choices and quality of life, is hard to assess. But the dissenting dialogue and debate has certainly been spurred by the R.O.O.M programme.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

Which Strategies Worked?

While confusion was noted among some R.O.O.M partners about the interrelation of each of the four strategies considered within this evaluation: the AV grants, capacity building, African Crossroads and Digital Earth, each strategy was found to have its particular role to play in the intricate kaleidoscope established to address – to find every possible inroad towards – the fulfilment of the programme objective:

New and counter-hegemonic narratives by a young generation of makers contribute to more diverse dialogue, debate and dissent in societies where public space is shrinking.

With the question asked: within the strategies, which interventions worked? The evaluation's answer is: Most strategies worked! We list them here:

- Editorial independence has been an important result emerging, when makers no longer have to negotiate content and focus with platform owners, but through received funding and capacity building have the own means of distribution.
- Audience reach has been significantly improved through the cocktail of support offered by R.O.O.M.
- Equipment purchase and infrastructure investment have proven very effective. This has catapulted makers into a new range of options with partners, investors, and donors.
- Collaboration, exposure and learning organised by the programme improves productions – and life quality as a creative. Networking and collaboration are some of the R.O.O.M programme's important qualities.
- Working as a collective, in a hub, has by creatives been found to limit (financial) vulnerability during COVID-19.
- Networking content with other creatives secures wider reach, and collective problem-solving as a community.
- Building administrative capacity of organisations/hubs/collectives has been experienced as very empowering and important for sustainability.
- Co-creating at proposal-level has worked very well, supporting the maker to focus in new ways upon the direction given to the production.
- Training and better equipment allows for better quality, which in turn brings bigger audiences and credibility.
- Content does not have to be controversial to change narratives if it is locally relevant.
- Young makers realise that the digital production and distribution formats can also carry ancestral stories.

Which Strategies did not Work? Which challenges were found?

As stated above, the strategies were found to work. Challenges identified in the programme were:

- High cost of data prevented access to some channels, such as YouTube, with the result that a number of makers are 'preaching to the converted' only.
- Timing of funding cycles is too short (six months often too short, also when administered differently).
- There is still a lot of work to do to reach women makers and audiences. The programme includes powerful examples where it is working really well, but research is needed into barriers for engagement by young women makers.
- The evaluation notes, that there too often appears to not be any systematic follow-up after engagements, like after creatives have worked together based on collaboration grants. It would be good to find effective exit strategies.
- The inner coherence of the programme is not well known to several people: Fellows within the Digital Earth programme may not know about African Crossroads – and vice-versa. Maybe a missed opportunity?
- Safety is an issue for all R.O.O.M partners – some more than others. Online Safety has been addressed in workshops that R.O.O.M offers, however, they do not actively address personal safety issues as a part of their partnerships. Creatives are finding their own ways with safe storage of queer film footage for instance. The evaluation team has asked our-selves whether R.O.O.M should engage here?

Challenges around inclusivity:

- African Crossroads was by several informants referred to as an elitist club of insiders²⁵. How to reconcile this with the wish to invite the cutting-edge frontrunners (who may know each other) and at the same time open the event to newcomers?
- The team was met by what was expressed as a "Growing need for African Crossroads to be Africa-led".
- Calls for grant applications are in English, French and Arabic. Applications in Swahili should be made available.
- Partners propose that the resilience grants could have been shared among more recipients – with less funding to each, to avoid the hardships many have gone through.
- During the COVID-19 the online events replacing planned physical on-site events have been found to often become too top-down with too limited interaction, thus alienating those do not already know the other participants (see recommendations).

²⁵ As mentioned above, African Crossroads is meant to be a meeting ground for cutting edge creative doers and thinkers in the field. When a number of these frontrunners have met on a couple of occasions, a feeling of collegiality, of being maybe kindred spirits and of sharing a 'project', is the whole purpose. That a newcomer can feel like an outsider cannot be avoided. The evaluation team wanted to raise this issue as the R.O.O.M programme stresses the desire to be inclusive and to maybe invite even more marginalised, rural creatives inside in the future. How to best reconcile the resulting experiences by all?

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

After the recommendation to Sida to remain on board, the recommendations to Hivos cover four different focus areas:

- (i) Practical recommendations for the consolidation of collaboration with grantees;
- (ii) Programmatic recommendations for further reach towards desired results;
- (iii) Recommendations on short-term development direction of R.O.O.M; and
- (iv) Recommendations for rooting of the R.O.O.M programme for long-term Africanisation.

But before this, where is the R.O.O.M programme positioned in the eco-sphere of progressive culture and arts organisations? How is it considered by other culture and arts actors and freedom of expression and human rights donors?

The R.O.O.M programme is found to be in its own league in an environment where most others focus on the creative economy. The R.O.O.M programme is respected by others in the field and a desired collaboration partner for shared cooperation programmes' by, for instance, British Council and PEN Africa. With the focus on "Resources of Open Minds" and working to advance a true civic space, culture and arts organisations like the DOEN foundation and FREEMUSE recognise this space as uniquely important. This is an important preamble to the recommendations in the minds of the evaluation team.

Throughout the evaluation we have met requests for advancing 'creative economy' recommendations, but we resolve to encourage the R.O.O.M programme to further deepen and consolidate what is already being done in the programme, as it is found that it is very important not to squeeze *the unique other* into *the mould of most*.

6.1 Recommendations

6.1.1 Recommendations to Sida

1. **A continued funding of the R.O.O.M programme is a firm recommendation** based on the mid-term evaluation of the R.O.O.M programme – for at least another two 3-year cycles – allowing for a further consolidation of the ongoing work. This is especially pertinent as there are no indications that the contextual situation justifying the 'freedom of expression' focus of R.O.O.M will change for the better in a near future.
2. It is recommended for Sida to engage actively in pursuit of the longer-term identified **need for a powerful Africa-based and Africa-owned 'heir' to the R.O.O.M programme**. See section IV* below.
3. **Let a thousand R.O.O.Ms bloom** – or at least another one? It is not recommended to Hivos and the R.O.O.M programme, below, to expand the geographic reach to other African countries and regions, nor to steer towards being a real global programme. Advancing work in Franco-phone Africa has been one recommendation frequently heard during this evaluation. Based on

the insights achieved, the team cannot see additional value in this. The team, instead, fear that this would detract value from the existing programme/projects. It is, however, recommended for Sida (and Hivos?) to consider building 'R.O.O.M-like' programmes' elsewhere in the world.

6.1.2 Recommendations to Hivos

I* Practical recommendations for the consolidation of collaboration with grantees

4. Consider **starting grantee-periods with a 2-week organisational/administrative intensive training**, for grantees to establish appropriate systems and plans from the beginning;
5. **Administrative support-time added to grants**: Consider allowing a percentage in grants for administrative support, to avoid the maker spending too much of the creative grant-time or funds on administration;
6. **Timing of grant cycles**: Consider adjusting the timing of funding cycles. Six months is very short for producing content. Production takes time. Makers need to plan and allow for flexibility;
7. **Depth vs Breadth/Reach**: The evaluation noted a tension between on the one hand the wish to spread the net widely and allocate many smaller grants, and on the other, to invest more deeply in projects that have a successful impact. We cannot recommend one over the other, but appreciate the attention given to such balances. One recommendation is to consider further specifying criteria for amplification grants to allow for desired depth.
8. **Invest in the collaborations and linkages** within the existing family of R.O.O.M grantees, perhaps between the recipients of the AV grants and the Digital Earth community, to make visible the possible cross-collaborations between digital makers and the more discourse-based research work that is happening in Digital Earth.
9. **Follow-up after conclusion of grant**: find a way to strengthen exit strategies when partnerships end. This could include network engagement or alumni network type activities. The evaluation team understands the challenge this represents with the level of activity in the R.O.O.M programme and the very slim staffing but it would be important to find a sound way forward.
10. **Conducive on-line environment needed**: As long as COVID-19 measures are in place and the on-site events of the past take place on-line, events need to be re-thought to maintain the friendly, collegial, productive atmosphere celebrated on-site: (i) participants need thorough introduction and unstructured time for getting to know each other and networking; (ii) ways need to be identified to remedy the loss of content for participants with weak connectivity.
11. **One major R.O.O.M online platform**: with rooms for separate events, and with access options to recorded presentations/capacity building sessions at times of day when connectivity is better. This, as most programme activities take place in realities with very irregular network coverage, for which reason online events are rarely experienced fully in real time.
12. **A hybrid model of online and offline meetings for the future**: a benefit from the COVID-19 period is the new familiarity with people geographically distant joining at no cost. Especially if the above recommended online platform is established, accommodating the network challenges, new opportunities will arise.

II* Programmatic recommendations for further reach towards desired results

- 13. Bridging the digital divide:** While publishing on digital media is considered democratic and helps makers to retain editorial ownership over their content, as well as reach more people, a strategy is needed for how makers include audiences for whom digital content is inaccessible due to data costs e.g., YouTube. One example of such strategy is to incorporate public screenings in rural or small towns.
- 14. Expanding the reach** towards rural and marginalised makers and unheard voices is recommended. Focus on outreach to smaller and slightly bigger towns. The R.O.O.M programme could consider in-country representatives in the countries presently underserved.
- 15. Community radios are trusted** and listened to in rural areas and marginalised urban centres: Explore ways to engage this under-utilised resource, reaching many. At the same time, radio is not literacy dependent.
- 16. Gender and inclusivity of young women makers:** There is still a lot of work to do to access women makers and audiences. Successes stand out, but more understanding, surveys, baseline, and needs analysis are still needed.
- 17. Audience analysis:** while the process nature of the R.O.O.M programme is well appreciated, it is recommended for the programme management to identify a way, through selected representative components, to document impact of the programme with audiences, including the generation of understanding of how the programme can best facilitate desired empowerment of makers and audiences and their communities alike.
- 18. Audience mapping, tracking:** to monitor and evaluate the levels of dialogue, debate, dissent and engagement in relation to the productions, capacity-building should facilitate makers to include more work around audience development, tracking actual levels of dialogue, debate - also off-line. How do we know if productions are turning into dissent? Cultural norms that dictate respect for elders might inhibit public criticality, as might fear of being profiled on social media. This kind of engagement might be happening privately or in closed WhatsApp channels, but how do makers monitor that? Providing makers and hubs with tools could be a step towards added depth.
- 19. Protecting the safety of makers** is recommended to be advanced through partnerships with organisations with safe houses and placement programmes. Consider carrying out safety training with makers, ensuring that they have strategies to protect themselves and their spaces against cyber offenses and physical attacks.

III* Recommendations on short-term development direction of R.O.O.M

- 20. Focus on existing R.O.O.M regions and consolidate** rather than reaching out to more regions of Africa.
- 21. Focus on ways of engaging rural platforms** to advance reach and depth, voices and more people living in poverty (see also #14 and #15 above).
- 22. Partnership with progressive media** to further deepen and strengthen the push for freedom of expression at national and regional levels.

IV* Recommendations for rooting of the R.O.O.M work in a programme for long-term Africanisation

- 23. Find ways to root the work carried out by Hivos in existing, African organisation(s).** As such arts and culture organisations, according to the preliminary research carried out by the evaluation team, do not seem to exist presently, apart from in the MENA region through Eti-jihat and Al Mawred, it is recommended to consider creating one, based on all that R.O.O.M has been, is, and when following recommendations above (including rural focus) will become. Building a new organisation, a cooperative structure – ‘a being’ - seems contrary to the intent of R.O.O.M just like such an act in principle is to the convictions of the evaluators. However, a ‘home’ is needed to root the ongoing, continued facilitation and coordination presently held by Hivos through the R.O.O.M programme. To us, this is found to be the most desirable way forward for a longer-term vision.
- 24. Exploratory roundtable to begin planning the above** (start 2022?). The round table should not be too small and not too large. About 15-20 persons including extraordinary R.O.O.M partners from the Digital Earth programme along with extraordinary international experts. The shape of the entity will grow from such conversations and the long and deep experience by R.O.O.M.
- 25. Digital Earth and African Crossroads should be elements of such a ‘being’,** working with artists who are mid-career and more specialised and with a larger international network. Providing a space for both the cutting-edge inspiration and outreach to integration of underrepresented voices and people living in poverty, much like ‘a people’s university’, including special gender work; grant-provision; capacity building; African Crossroads.

7. ANNEXES

1. Persons and organisations consulted for this evaluation
2. R.O.O.M Programme Organigram
3. R.O.O.M Programme activities by year and category 2017-2020

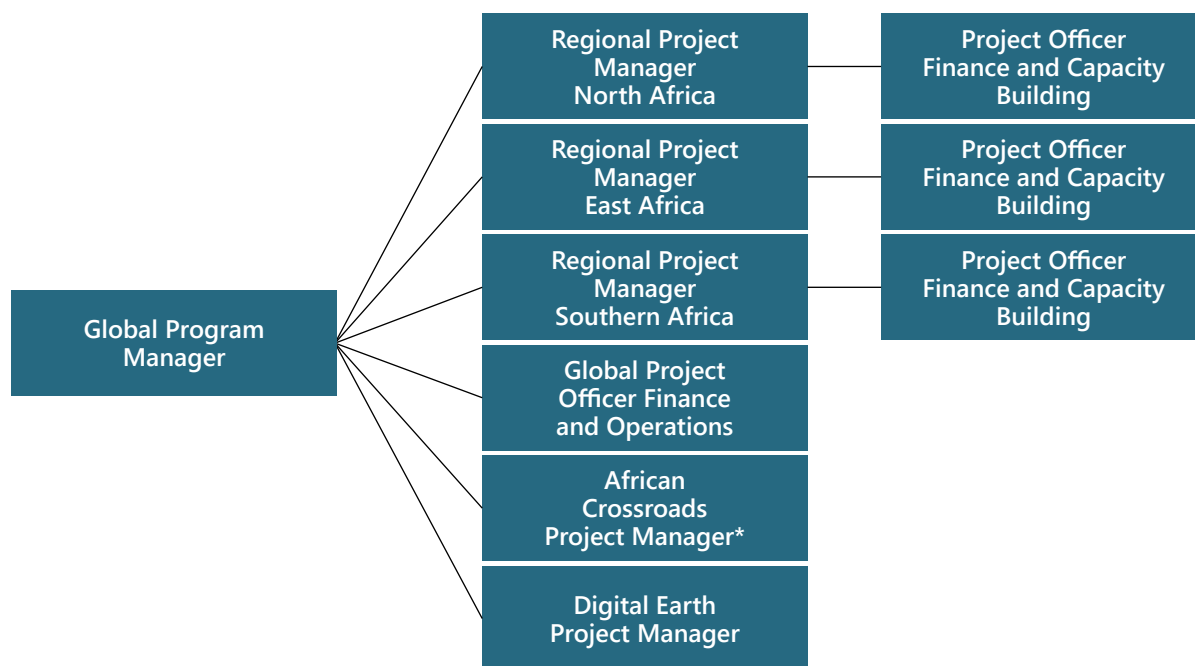
Annex 1: Persons and organisations consulted for the evaluation

Name	Title/Function/Organisation
Alex Kirui	Animator
Andrew Banda	Alliance for Community Action
Arthur Steiner	Global Manager, R.O.O.M Programme management
Asmaa Guedira	Gender Activist
Azza Satti	Creative Producer
Beshoy Adel	Director, el Fenoon
Boniface Mwalii	Director, Mfalme Productions
Chao Tayiana	Workshop Coordinator, African Digital Heritage
Churchill Ongere	Regional Project Manager Eastern Africa
Daves Guzha	Theatre in the Park
Didier Lebon	Project Manager African Crossroads 2019 - 2020
Dilman Dila	Artist and Filmmaker
Edward Chikhwana	Coordinator, Kuwala Creatives
Elsa Helin	Programme Specialist, Sida
Farai Munroe	Creative Director, Magamba Network
Francois Knoetze	Artist (Digital Earth Fellow)
Gregory Tendwa	Music Producer
Gregory Tendwa	Wibo
Islam Elbeiti	Cultural Coordinator
Ison Mistari	Artist, Studio Manager
Jana Tarabulsi	Artist, Design Lab
Jean Katamanbayi Mukendi	Artist (digital earth fellow)
Katie Bentivoglio	Project Manager African Crossroads 2018
Kwame Nyongo	Director, Apes in Space
Larry Kwiriri	Director of Ceremonies and Coordinator
Leila Ben Gacem	Social Entrepreneur
Lesedi Oluko Moche	Director, Olu and Lime
Lorenz Hermann	Coordinator, CEEZ
Lynsey Smith	Program Manager Creative Hubs, British Council
MacPeherson	Hub Manager, Zaluso Arts, Malawi

Mamadu Hady Sow	Agriculture Entrepreneur
Marion Louisegrand Sylla	Director of Ker Thiossane
Mash Marley	Project Leader, Stone Town Community
Merel Oord	Program Manager Arts and Culture Africa, DOEN Foundation
Mhoze Chikowero	Academic specialized in Music
Michael Banda	Umoto
Mohamed Allam	Director, Medrar
Mohamed Mostafa	Director
Natasha Simma	Executive Director, Simma Africa Creative Arts Foundation
Nduko oMatigere	PEN International Africa Coordinator
Nekesa Were	Director of Afrilabs
Nishant Shah	Director of Research
O'Brien Makore	Coordinator, Ezai Isu Trust, Zimbabwe
Ole Reitov	Founder, Freemuse, Former Director
Omar Nagati	Architect
Oulimata Guye	Curator (digital earth mentor)
Patrick Infield	Head of Video Department, Camera Operator & Editor
Phillip Ayazika / Neema Lyer	Director, PM, Pollicy
Ranwa Yehia	Regional Project Manager Middle East and North Africa
Renee Roukens	Digital Earth Project Manager, Hivos
Sam Groove	Musical Director
Samba Yonga	Principal Consultant, Women's History Museum
Selma Tarzy	Artist
Siti Amina	Band Leader, Siti and the Band
Sophie Leferink	Former Program Development Manager Arts and Culture, former Hivos
Stephanie Kapfunde	Director of Ceremonies and Coordinator
Steve Kivuti	Project Lead, Ketebul Music
Takura Zhangazha	Regional Project Manager Southern Africa
Tegan Bristow	Director, Fakugesi
Temitayo Ogunbiyi	Artist (Digital Earth Fellow)
Wanjiku Kihika	Director, Tribeless Youth
Zenzele Ndebele	Coordinator, The Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE)

Annex 2: R.O.O.M Programme Organogram

* Whereas the R.O.O.M team no longer has an M&E officer (the global programme manager has taken on this responsibility), a recent addition to the team is the African Crossroads Project Manager.



Annex 3: R.O.O.M Programme activities by year and category 2017-2020

R.O.O.M Programme activities by year and category 2017-2020				
	2017	2018	2019	2020
AV grants* *On the basis of date of signing of contract, or new contract.	Number of grants awarded: In the first year no grants have been awarded	Number of grants awarded: EA: 12 SA: 17 MENAs: 18 Collaboration Grants: 15	Number of grants awarded: EA: 23 SA: 23 MENAs: 37 Collaboration Grants: 10	Number of grants awarded: EA: 8 SA: 6 MENAs: Collaboration Grants: 9 Resilience Grants: 7
Capacity building* *workshops, trainings, partner meetings and events organised by Hivos	<u>General</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kick-Off Meeting of the Programme (June 2017) in Nairobi, Kenya - <u>Mapping and scoping studies in all target countries + baseline surveys conducted</u>- Needs assessment for Creative Hub Leaders Toolkit (Capacity building package for partners) - First Open Calls for partners Launched 2017 <u>Workshops:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop on Narratives through African Fashion in Kenya (video: - Workshop on Digital Arts through animation in Uganda - <u>Future of African Cities Summit</u> 	<u>General</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team meeting in Durban, South Africa - <u>Development of Creative Hub Leaders Toolkit</u>: and tested the Toolkit in South Africa. (Video: Outcome of the event was a <u>directory</u>). SA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner Meeting with capacity building on project management, finance and M&E with newly contracted R.O.O.M partners EA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner Meeting with capacity building on project management, finance and M&E with newly contracted R.O.O.M partners - <u>Africa Content Creators Summit</u> 	<u>General</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team meeting in Mombasa, Kenya - Creative Hub Leaders Toolkit was further implemented and 2 <u>creative hub workshops</u> have been organised for multiple days in Kenya and Malawi. Spin-off: 2 additional workshops in Indonesia and Brazil. EA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop on cultural entrepreneurship in Kampala, Uganda - Workshop on intellectual property in Kampala, Uganda - Workshop on digital security in Nairobi, Kenya - Workshop on financial sustainability in Nairobi, Kenya 	<u>General</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COVID-19 adaptations to plans EA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New Ways of Working Workshop - https://east-africa.hivos.org/news/grant-making-and-new-ways-of-working-for-creatives-in-east-africa/ - Training on Growing Audiences and monetisation of content SA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop: New Ways of Working MENAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop New Ways of Working

	<div><div>- Video:</div><div>- Online creators dinner in Dar El Salam, Tanzania</div><div>MENA:</div><div>- Partner Meeting with capacity building on project management, finance and M&E with newly contracted R.O.O.M partners</div><div>- Workshop on Archiving in MENA region ,</div></div>	<div>SA:</div> <div>- Workshop on gender equality and inclusion</div> <div>- Workshop on politics and content creation</div> <div>- Workshop on financial stability</div> <div>- Makers Summit in Zimbabwe</div> <div>MENA:</div> <div>- Workshop performance within the music industry in Beirut, Lebanon ()</div> <div>- Workshops on archiving of audio-visual content and independent publishing</div> <div>- Workshop on critical thinking and game design</div>	
African Crossroads, an annual festival and network	<div>African Crossroads Pan-African festival in Marrakesh, Morocco:</div> <div>Video</div> <div>Pan-African festival in Mombasa, Kenya:</div> <div>Videos</div>	<div>Digital African Crossroads</div> <div>Meet-ups</div> <div>Online Gathering: Videos</div>	
Experimentation - Digital Earth +	<div>- Launch of Digital Earth Fellowship, through Open Call</div> <div>- 20 research fellowships awarded as part of Digital Earth</div> <div>- Ongoing mentoring sessions with 27 Faculty members</div> <div>- Research workshop with Strelka.</div> <div>- Launch of Forces of Art</div> <div>- Launch of call for participation in Forces of Art</div> <div>- Work with 15 research teams to conduct research into case studies from our network: https://forces-of-art.org/about</div>	<div>- Mentoring sessions with 27 faculty members</div> <div>- Showcase and exhibition at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, Lebanon</div> <div>- Showcase and exhibition at Khoj, New Delhi, India</div> <div>- Showcase at Kër Thiossane, Dakar, Senegal</div> <div>- Showcase and exhibition at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France</div> <div>- Showcase and exhibition at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, UAE</div> <div>- Digital Earth Online Magazine launched</div> <div>- Forces of Art research teams continue their impact study</div>	<div>- Second round for Digital Earth Fellowship. 8 research fellowships awarded</div> <div>- Mentoring sessions with 11 faculty members and 1 Online Research Lab</div> <div>- Vertical Atlas publication commissioned which presents findings of Digital Earth fellowship</div> <div>- <i>Forces of Art</i> book published</div> <div>- 4 Workshops Forces of Art</div> <div>- <i>Forces of Art</i> book launch and conference</div>