

Theory of Change: Empower, Amplify & Influence

The Theory of Change governing Voice was updated in 2019 as a result of the [Mid-Term Review](#) and in anticipation of the Extension Phase. This part is also available online via <https://voice.global/about-us/what-we-dream/>

In all societies, to some degree, some people have more opportunities, are more valued, occupy more public space or have a stronger decision-making voice than others. In the ten countries where the Voice programme is implemented, People with Disabilities, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people, Women facing exploitation, abuse and or violence, Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Minorities, and vulnerable youth and elderly, are generally among those who have less opportunities, are less valued, living the effects of discrimination and marginalisation in their families, surrounding or society at large.

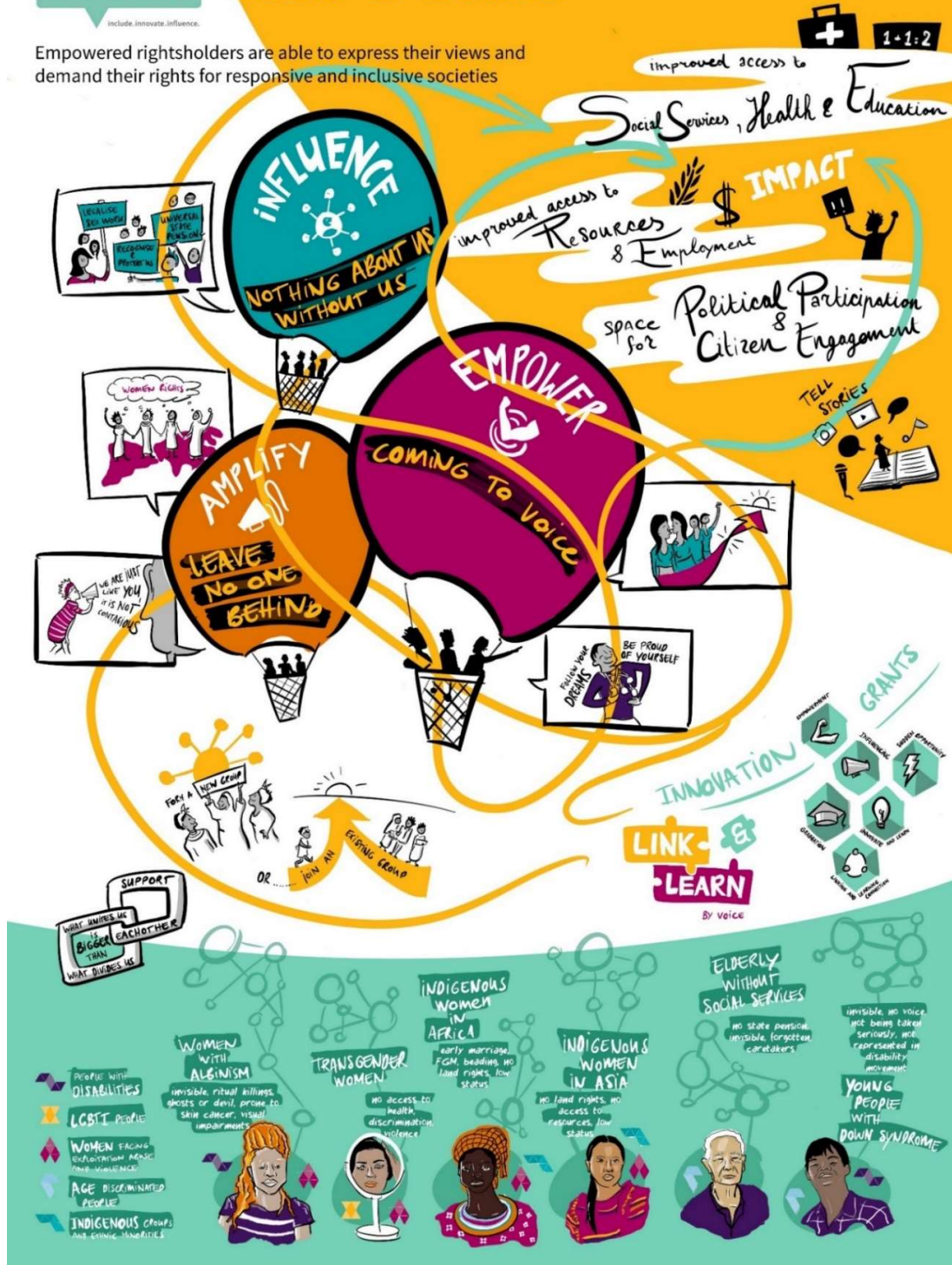
For some, being yourself and defending your rights and views leads to violent and life-threatening experiences, for others to loneliness or inner despair. For many the seemingly unsurmountable obstacles to access education, to express your rights and dreams or to participate fully in all aspects of life, leads to dependency and difficulties to make a decent living.

Yet, this is only one side of the coin, one way to describe what is. There is always change, there is always movement, nothing is ever static. And many rightsholders have organised themselves and found their voice to make sure they are heard, to make sure they are seen. To influence others to respect them and take them into account, not to be excluded from education or health services and not to be limited in their access to (productive) resources and to have (self-)employment. And to sustain this, rightsholders ask to be heard and included at all political levels and to see their right to active citizenship respected. Claiming to set their own agenda. The changes they make visible to us all tell a different story. A story based on hope and the believe that the positive experiences and big or small changes in the lives and wellbeing of the rightsholders groups count. That every positive gesture, every act of recognition and inclusion, improved policy or attitude change, is important to counter balance the negative and discriminatory attitudes and actions. Countering believes based on myths by telling a story based on lived experience and on human values.

Every so often it only takes one or a few strong people who've find their own voice, their inner confidence and drive to connect with others in similar circumstances. Who see the opportunities, who follow their heart and seek to be with likeminded people. Driving and undergoing a process of empowerment, knowing one's self-worth and building confidence to speak out. These forerunners and leaders grow the circle of members and activists, starting of a spiral of changes for the individuals involved and the broader rightsholders group. Further, through joining their voices and efforts, leading to changes in policies, governance and the position and inclusion in society. Looking at all these different stories and forces behind the emergence of rightsholder led communities, and the smaller and bigger changes that take place in the process, Voice developed a vision what paths these changes follow and which conditions favour and support these empowering and capacity strengthening processes.

VOICE THEORY OF CHANGE
include. innovate. influence.

Empowered rightsholders are able to express their views and demand their rights for responsive and inclusive societies



Based on the above, the Voice Theory of Change (ToC) is expressed in three pathways, to *Empower*, *Amplify* and *Influence*. These pathways are non-linear, intertwined and influence each other.

Some rightsholders groups started their journey for recognition and rights just recently, others many decades ago. And within groups, many times particular voices are as yet unheard, and there are sub-groups who are facing double or triple discrimination or forms of exclusion. Like indigenous LGBTI people, female adolescents with disabilities. Yet women (as compared to men) always face the effect of being a woman in a patriarchal¹ society, facing gender injustice on top of any other form of exclusion or injustice.

There are many actors at play, some allies and some opponents. Some supportive, and some trying to block the way forward. And the world, the reality rightsholder groups engage in is ever changing, at times unexpectedly. The activist movements and rightsholders groups will organically adapt to these changing landscapes/ realities, trying out different routes, interweaving the pathways.

Voice believes that supporting these authentic voices of rightsholder groups and activist movements and their allies, will strengthen the change making impact of rightsholder led empowerment processes, influencing and amplification of their voices. Therefore, the Voice Theory of Change seeks to strengthen the capacity of (informal) groups, organisations and networks to influence, to find strategic allies among powerholders and duty-bearers, and to promote collaboration within civil society to defend rights in an ever shifting civic space.

The (revised) image of the Theory of Change beautifully visualises personas from the various rightsholder groups on their journey. These are inspired by existing rightsholders within Voice and the challenges they encounter. These are not meant to be exhaustive but just an illustration.

Through the various grants Voice offers as well as the Linking and Learning, Voice grantees embark on a journey of solidarity, showing that what unites them is bigger than what divides them. The three pathways are visualised by hot air balloons in different sizes, with different statements and activities (again based on grantee experiences). The yellow and green lines illustrate that the pathways are intertwined, not linear and influence one another. While the balloons may be going at different paces and have different audiences, activities and rightsholders, they are ALL heading into the direction of our overall goal and contributing to one or more of the Voice impact areas.

This view on how changes are happening for the different rightsholder groups, is informing our 'theory of action', that what we as Voice believe we should do to support positive and game changing actions under the different pathways. The main goals, impact areas and our interventions under each pathway are described below.

It is important to recognise that there are many different players involved and numerous change processes ongoing everywhere and at the same time. The actions and changes made possible through the Voice supported projects, are connected to and thriving on all that has come before and is present right now.

GOAL

Empowered rightsholders are able to express their views and demand their rights for responsive and inclusive societies.

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

Rightsholders feel and rightsholder groups/organisations are empowered to use their influencing capacity for their voices to be heard, respected and included.

¹ **Patriarchy** is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

IMPACT GOAL

We dream of a world where rightsholder groups have:

1. ***Improved access to (productive) resources (finance, land and water) and employment:*** Lift barriers to economic inclusion, which currently mean there is lack of access to land and water, exploitative or vulnerable employment situations, and limited opportunities to find decent work.
2. ***Improved access to social services, in particular health and education.*** Make quality services more accessible for rightsholders that are currently left out because of language barriers (e.g. ethnic minorities), distance (rural populations) or neglect. Among the rightsholders, women and youth will gain access to more information and tools that will help them demand better/more services.
3. ***Space for political participation and citizen engagement:*** Lift obstacles for rightsholders to participate in public affairs and decisions that affect their lives. Civic space is under threat, and rightsholders often face particular obstacles to participation in public debate and decision-making. Indigenous groups and LGBTBI persons face the most repression.

The pathways

Empowerment is a process of coming to or finding one's voice. It is not a given but a process that people need to own and work on. At the same time, ownership leads to confidence building and enhanced self-esteem. We acknowledge organisations are made up of individuals, and hence individual empowerment is a critical entry point. Voice rightsholders have the right to own their own empowerment processes.

Interventions

Under the Empower pathway, we support change at multiple levels; Individual (rightsholder), family, community and organisational (grantees).

- Voice prioritises applications from groups that are led by the rightsholders themselves instead of having other organisations working on their behalf.
 - Applicants who recognise and address multiple vulnerabilities are given priority.
 - Voice supports projects that build and strengthen the capacity of rightsholders leading to their empowerment.
 - The creation of safe spaces for rightsholders may need to be facilitated by applicants to exercise their empowerment.
 - Support is provided to individual rightsholders, their families, and communities to acquire new skills to create a more inclusive environment.
 - Support is provided to projects that focus on internal reflection, leadership development, and building alliances with like-minded groups.
- Voice supports applicants to develop their own initiatives based on their relative capacities.



Some example projects to get inspired:

<https://voice.global/grantees/think-able-two/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/my-voice-my-story/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/nakata-vikwazo-nagombea>/<https://voice.global/grantees/empowering-women-survivors-ews-of-marawi-crisis-against-gender-based-violence/>

Amplify is the process of acquiring the means and support to express and raise your voice. For some rightsholders, this may be preceded by a process of coming to or finding one's voice (the empowerment pathway). The collective amplification of voices can build a critical mass of allies, instrumental for the social change we seek in the Voice impact areas.



There are different dimensions of amplification, which are mutually reinforcing and interdependent. Each has their own dynamic. [visualised by a bullhorn]. The amplification efforts depend on the following factors:

- Sphere of influence: This is the closest to the rightsholder's personal life. This can also be the toughest and most challenging circle to realise the amplification. Within this sphere, one may find the strongest allies.
- Other organisations: This is the next domain of amplification which can create the groundswell needed to build a movement and realise social change for the rightsholder.
- Public authorities and private sector: These actors make formal decisions reflected in policies, regulations and laws, affecting the lives of the rightsholders.
- Societal leaders: Traditional leaders, social media influencers, religious leaders and chiefs play a significant role in changing social norms and what stories are amplified.

Interventions

- Voice selects grantees which enable the rightsholders to amplify their voices.
- The Linking and Learning Facilitators bring grantees, rightsholders and other organisations together to facilitate change agendas.
- The Linking and Learning Facilitators organises learning events that strengthen grantee and project participants' capacities in multimedia documentation and use of (social) media to amplify their own stories.
- The Linking, Learning and Amplification Officers initiate and leverage the amplification at the local and national level both offline and online.
- The Communications Hub amplifies the local and national voices at global level, mainly online.

See what projects contribute to the amplification of voices:

<https://voice.global/fr/partenaires/proseda-sensibiliser-sur-albinisme-au-mali/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/campaign-for-pro-poor-effective-inclusive-land-reforms/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/finding-a-voice-through-film-second-phase/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/data4chan-ge/>

Influence is the process where rightsholders and their representatives will use a range of lobby and advocacy tools to influence individuals, families, communities, private business, religious leaders, (social) media, and other decision makers' policies, practices, and behaviours.



Ultimately, the combined interventions will lead to rightsholders:

- claiming their rights as equal citizens;
- having meaningful participation in political, economic, and social spheres, and;
- accessing services and resources.

Influencing should happen and move across multiple levels from individuals to communities to (sub-) national to international. Actions at the individual level can reinforce actions at other levels. Their impacts happen in many different directions.

Interventions

- Rightsholders and their representatives develop and implement their own influencing strategies as grantees.
- The selection process is based on the country context analysis, responding to issues and opportunities important to and identified by the rightsholders.
- Grantees acquire skills and capacities to implement these. They are encouraged to include ways to build alliances and to expand their networks.
- Voice facilitates meetings, organises events, and provides (digital) platforms where grantees and other like-minded civil society organisations can exchange and learn from each other's experiences in influencing.
- Voice connects grantees to practitioners, tools, and instruments to further support their influencing abilities and power. This is especially true for Influencing grantees as recommended in the MTR.
- Provide access to an integrated tool to guide and inspire grantees to build their own Theory of Action based on the Voice ToC.

A selection from the influencing projects Voice is supporting:

<https://voice.global/grantees/wise-social-assistance-for-elderly/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/advancing-transgender-intersex-rights/>

<https://voice.global/fr/partenaires/ensemble-pour-la-justice-fiscale-la-redevabilite-et-la-democratie-au-niger/>

<https://voice.global/grantees/fore-fronting-our-agendas-advocacy-to-protect-sex-workers-rights/>

Assumptions

During consultations with grantees and rightsholders as well as the context analysis updates, we realised that the assumptions we started with needed to be changed, modified, and/or clarified. As such, this revised Voice Theory of Change is based on a related but different set of assumptions:

1. Most rightsholders can freely access and use tools such as radio, theatre, art, social media, mobile phones, etc. that help them amplify their voices and influence others.
2. Rightsholders and their representatives are able to find and identify role models and allies within government bodies, (other) civil society organisations, and/or local authorities.






3. Individual change leads to social change, including political and cultural change.
4. Individuals, families and communities have the necessary skills, supportive structures, and safe spaces to raise their voice, beyond their comfort space/personal sphere.
5. The rightsholders and their representatives are ready to work on their own empowerment and influencing process.
6. Rightsholder groups become empowered and are willing to influence through sharing experiences and forming new alliances based on aligned values.
7. The rightsholder has the capacity to amplify, maintain access, and control over their stories for amplification even beyond the lifetime of Voice.
8. Individuals, families and communities understand and appreciate the role of safe spaces in supporting discriminated and excluded rightsholders, including the possibility of isolating other rightsholders at times.
9. Individuals, consortium partners and grantees have self-reflected before amplifying.
10. Grantees and Voice Coordination and Country teams are able to create circumstances in which it is safe to amplify

Ultimately, the combined interventions will lead to empowered rightsholders which are able to express their views and demand their rights for responsive and inclusive societies.

Rightsholder groups

NOthing about us Without Us (NOW-Us!) is a guiding principle within Voice to select and support local civil society organisations. Those affected most by the issues need to be in the driver's seat of their own destiny.

Here are the Voice rightsholders, keeping in mind that vulnerabilities can overlap/intersect and can be reasons for extra forms of exclusion:

-  People with disabilities
-  Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people
-  Women facing exploitation, abuse and/or violence
-  Vulnerable youth and elderly
-  Indigenous people and ethnic minorities

A national context analysis determines the priorities for each rightsholder group at national level whereby intersectionality or people facing double or triple forms of discrimination are strongly encouraged. If a group is underrepresented at national level a global grant Call for Proposal may be used to equilibrate. All Voice focus countries serve all rightsholder groups - which is a requirement for the Extension Phase (2021-2024).

Via the homepage of our website you can also access pages dedicated to the rightsholder groups such as for example <https://voice.global/target-group/women-facing-exploitation-abuse-and-or-violence/>

Key principles

'Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome.' Arthur Chan

As rights-based organisations, both Oxfam Novib and Hivos already have strong value statements. All throughout the Voice extension, the consortium seeks to reaffirm the following terms and principles:

Rightsholders

Voice recognises the role society plays in marginalisation and discrimination and supports ownership of the influencing agenda by the people concerned. Voice considers terms such as beneficiaries and target groups do not honour the individuals and organisations as rightsholders that can make legitimate claims. Similarly, states and other actors are duty-bearers that are responsible and can be held accountable for their acts or omissions. Putting the rightsholder groups at the centre of Voice therefore requires a changing transformative narrative. Consciously reminding that we're all rightsholders, avoiding a new form of othering, and recognising each groups demand for human rights, respect and dignity.

Nothing About Us Without Us

Abbreviated to NOW-Us!, this saying stems from the People with Disabilities (PwD) movement. It emphasises that no policy and/or practices should be decided **without** the full participation of the rightsholders. For Voice, NOW-Us! is also embodied in the modus operandi or way of working, ensuring we walk the talk. Furthermore it emphasises that the rightsholders own their own narrative at all times.

Knowledge generation and exchange should include the people concerned in all aspects and produce accessible information using various media.

Leave No One Behind

Every person – regardless of ethnicity, geography, disability, gender (identity and expression), sexual orientation, race, age or other status – should live their lives freely and fully. We recognise that people have diverse identities as a result may face overlapping forms of exclusion, and are often left behind. Within Voice, we consciously promote taking an intersectional and transformative approach.

The right voices at the table rather than on the menu

As a key to vital inclusive societies and sustainable development, we recognise the critical role of civil society as a platform for different rightsholders to raise their voices. For Voice, this means inclusion, openness, and embracing diversity lie at the heart of all we do and stand for. It also means that we support locally driven agendas which are flexible and need to adapt to changing contexts.

In everything we do we are committed to transparency and open data, where possible.

Innovativeness

Innovative approaches are sought in all key components of Voice. Being innovative means not only creating new ways of working but also creating space for improvement in every step of the implementation of Voice, which can entail different steps in different contexts. This implies flexibility, to allow for the implementation of new ideas.

Voice is furthermore innovative, because of its explicit focus on the inclusion of informal civil society organisations, as not all rightsholder groups are formally organised. Also, the space for ‘failures’ is innovative: to encourage experimental and innovative projects, taking risks is allowed and failures are framed as lessons to learn from. The linking and learning process provides an environment for different groups to share and learn from successes and failures of others.

Safety and Security

In all processes and activities of Voice, safety and security of all grantees shall be ensured. This includes physical, emotional, and digital safety and security. Depending on the current local context, risks shall always be assessed and proper mitigation strategies shall be developed. Information/data from grantees shall be protected, following Voice and local data privacy policies.