

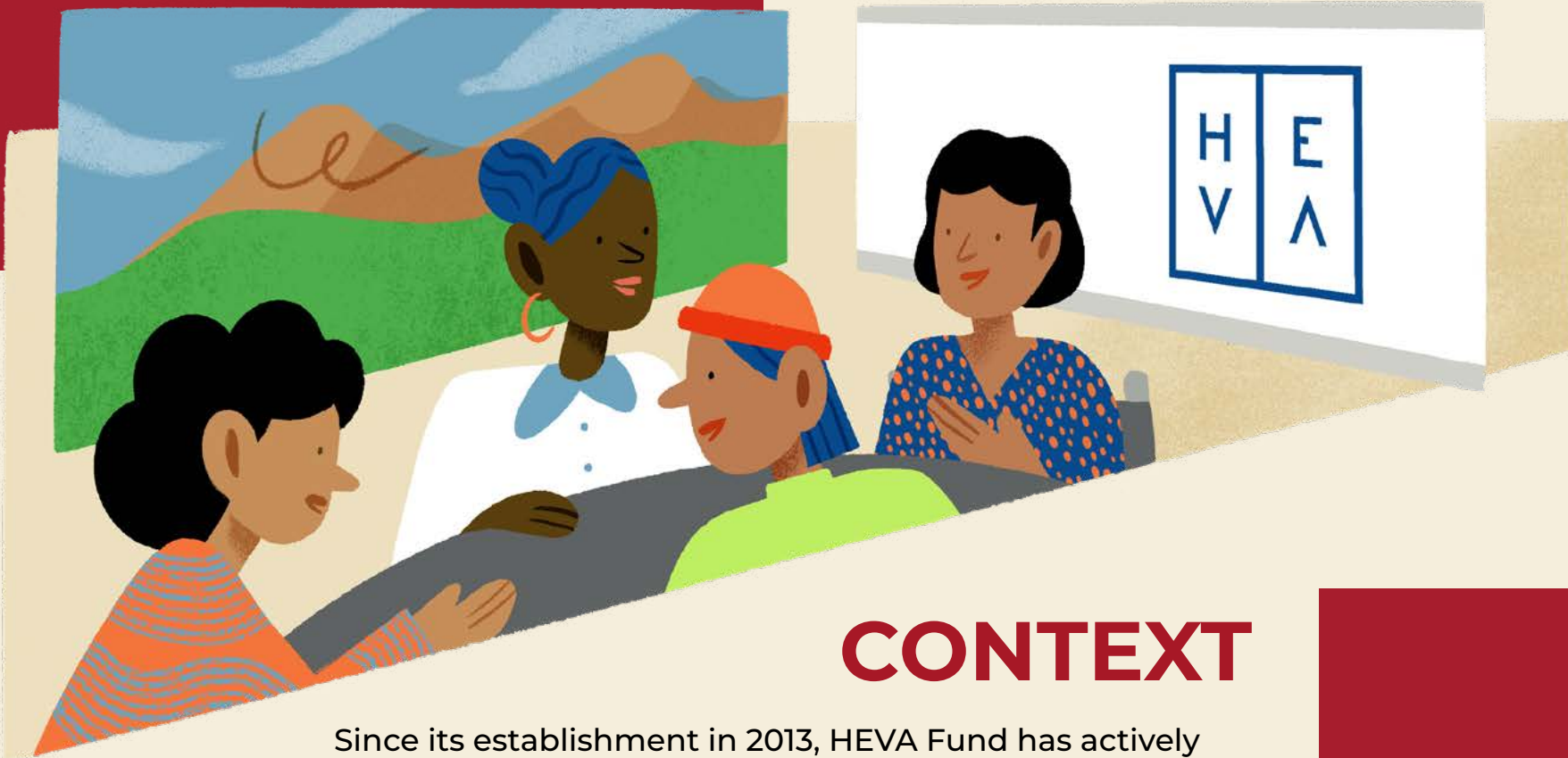


THE POWER
OF MAKING
FUTURES

The **Ascend Programme**

HEVA Fund

Empowering women and gender minorities as media practitioners



CONTEXT

Since its establishment in 2013, HEVA Fund has actively empowered creative practitioners and entrepreneurs across diverse sectors, including: fashion, digital content and television, live music, cultural heritage and gaming.

In 2022, in partnership with Africa No Filter, the HEVA Fund launched the Ascend Programme, a pilot initiative to empower emerging media practitioners. It specifically focused on cisgender women, trans men and women, and non-binary and gender non-conforming media practitioners from urban and rural areas involved in human rights activism or journalism, LGBTQIA+ activism, traditional and innovative digital media, social media, and content creation.

Headquartered in
Kenya

Operating in
Rwanda
Uganda
Ethiopia
and **Tanzania**

THE BIG IDEA

Women and gender minorities struggle to represent themselves in an empowering manner within mainstream narratives and imageries, which either erases or silences them or perpetuates misogynistic and discriminatory values.

The Ascend Programme provided a learning space for 15 emerging media practitioners, equipping them with the technical skills necessary to tell their stories more effectively and amplify their perspectives in a way often overlooked in mainstream narratives.

In this way, the programme responds to the growing demand for the development of new media spaces that allow women and gender minorities to express themselves, share their viewpoints and shift stereotypes.



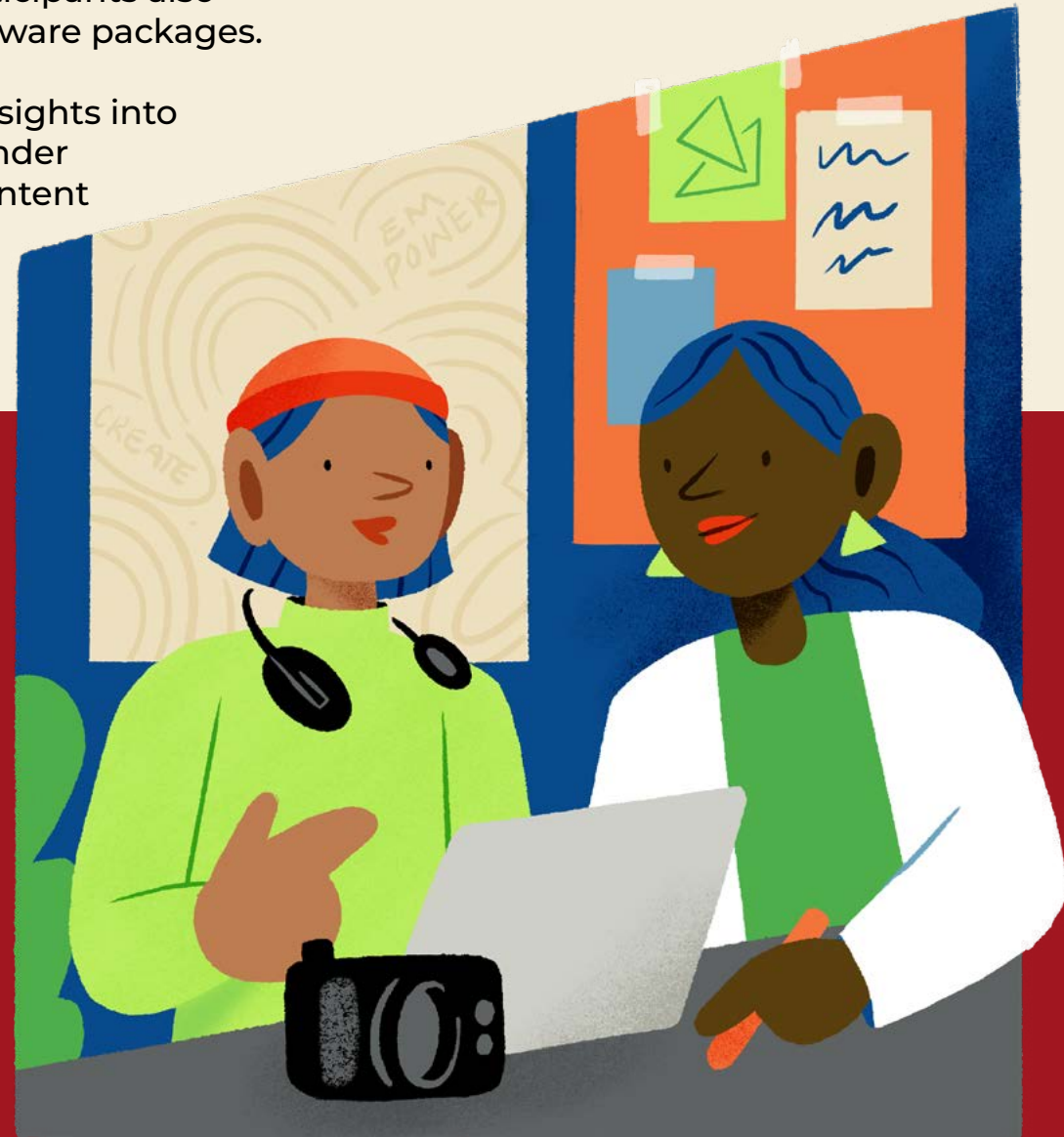
ACTIONS

The Ascend Programme offered a combination of online masterclasses, one-on-one sessions, group presentations and networking opportunities. In some cases, participants also received a stipend to buy equipment and software packages.

The programme gave participants valuable insights into shifting how women and individuals from gender minorities are depicted in media, planning content and crafting compelling pitches for local and international media outlets based on empowering narratives.

“We discovered effective methods to encourage student engagement and one approach involved allowing students to create presentations for their peers and the facilitator. We also offered one-on-one sessions to help students learn how to effectively voice their ideas, fostering empowerment and confidence among participants.”

Njeri Gitungo,
Project Manager, the Ascend Programme



The Ascend Programme fostered a collaborative environment, enabling participants to connect with facilitators from the LGBTQIA+ community and promoting a safe learning and networking space where participants broaden their perspectives through respectful exchanges between them.



“Safety was a primary concern when issuing the call, so we avoided making a public announcement. Instead, we leveraged our established networks and communities to reach our target audience.”

Njeri Gitungo,
Project Manager, the Ascend Programme

OUTCOMES

The Ascend Programme has created an environment for impactful knowledge sharing and networking between participants, facilitators and HEVA, paving the way for participants to develop future collaborations and a community of creatives.



Its interactive and participatory nature empowered participants to recognise the impact of their voices and stories. It equipped them with writing media content and audiovisual production skills, fostering a more comprehensive approach to their media practices.

LEARNINGS

- ▶ ICSOs can implement gender-expansive fellowships or training programmes, supporting individuals whose gender identity expands beyond traditional binary male and female categories to generate more inclusive and safe spaces for networking and access training.
- ▶ ICSOs should prioritise targeted programmes to foster connections and networking among emerging media practitioners, explicitly focusing on empowering women and gender minorities.
- ▶ Online training can allow organisations to reach individuals from peri-urban and rural areas to participate without travelling. Support for internet access is necessary to guarantee participation.



- ▶ ICSOs should consider developing mid to long-term mentoring programmes to allow the incorporation of more practical sessions, further enhancing the participants' creative businesses.
- ▶ HEVA wanted to create a platform to share public-ready content from the applicants. However, given that many businesses were in their early stages with a steep learning curve, it was not possible. A longer programme duration (over eight weeks) in a potential second iteration would be beneficial.



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