



Building local capabilities for housing rights advocacy

Lessons from grassroots-led civic media labs in Lagos

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Lagos, Nigeria’s most populous city, has a shortage of affordable housing that has resulted in the proliferation of informal settlements. Residents routinely face state-sanctioned rights violations, prompting counter-campaigns by grassroots movements and civil society groups. This paper analyses the contribution of a series of civic media labs — community-based sessions that provided training in media and communication skills — to building the capacity of grassroots groups to effectively advocate for their right to housing. The analysis highlights opportunities for leveraging capabilities developed during the labs for longer-term impact, as well as short-term strategies for supporting grassroots-led media advocacy in exclusionary political contexts.

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Abbreviations

CDA	Community Development Association
CML	Civic Media Labs
CPEEL	Centre for Petroleum, Energy Economics and Law (University of Ibadan, Nigeria)
DSLR	Digital single-lens reflex (camera)
FGD	Focus group discussion
ICTs	Information and communication technologies
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
JEI	Justice & Empowerment Initiatives
LGA	Local government area
M4C	Media4Change
NG	Nongovernmental organisation
RQ	Research question

Summary

Civic media strategies — involving the co-option of standard media tools and communication practices to amplify marginalised voices — have been deployed by grassroots groups and activists in both global North and South contexts to advance a range of democratic ideals. The IIED-led ‘Civic media for housing rights’ project set out to establish and evaluate the use of media advocacy tools and strategies to challenge housing rights violations wrought by the state against informal settlement residents in Lagos, one of the most important cities in west Africa and the economic powerhouse of Nigeria.

Through a series of ‘labs’ facilitated by Media4Change (M4C), a grassroots media advocacy group, residents of three informal settlements in the city were trained to develop and disseminate media content highlighting the challenges they face in accessing basic urban services — security, potable water and waste management respectively — and advocating for community-centred solutions to those challenges. The project was premised on the theory that participation in the labs would empower communities with media skills to tell their own stories and consequently reshape their representation in the public and policy spheres. This paper presents the findings from action research conducted in parallel with the labs to document lessons from the process and analyse their implications for the role of civic media in strengthening grassroots advocacy.

The research was guided by a series of questions which were grouped under three main headings corresponding to the overarching imperatives of the inquiry: **understanding the capabilities, methods and tactics** for media advocacy already present at the grassroots level that could be built on; understanding how new civic media tools and strategies can help **address constraints and limits** to the realisation of citizens’ rights engendered by the exclusionary political context; and **exploring opportunities for influence and impact** to understand the extent to which civic media capabilities at the grassroots can affect urban planning and policy.

These questions were addressed using a range of qualitative research methods: **key informant interviews** to compare the initial expectations of M4C for the labs with the realities of implementation; **non-participant observation** to garner relevant contextual information during the labs and at M4C strategy sessions; **in-depth interviews** to evaluate the degree to which the labs contributed to learning among participants; and **focus group discussions** to probe participants’ perceptions of the efficacy of lab outputs in influencing public discourse and policy change.

With regard to capability development, the study found that significant capacity for media making — in particular, for video production and editing — already existed within M4C. The labs essentially entailed M4C trainers, themselves residents of informal settlements, sharing the technical skills they had accumulated over several years with participants from other communities. Importantly as well, participants demonstrated high levels of capacity and confidence in getting residents in their respective communities to engage with the process of producing the video documentaries that ultimately emerged from the labs. While these accomplishments were remarkable in themselves, what the findings revealed to be even more potentially transformative was the attention paid by both the trainers and the trainees to storytelling as a way to centre community experiences and perspectives in the narratives that go out about them.

The study revealed several contextual constraints facing grassroots advocacy groups, but also opportunities presented by the labs to address those limitations. First, although long-running frictions in local politics initially posed a threat to achieving community buy-in, lab participants were resourceful in finding ways to emphasise the collective benefits of media advocacy for their respective communities. Second, initial suspicion/confusion at the community level regarding the motives of lab participants eventually gave way to trust that the long-term value of the project to the community superseded any immediate material benefit to individuals. Third, a tension between individual aspirations for success (often from outside the community) and a change campaign that requires considerable investments of time and effort at the community level, makes it challenging to retain local capacity for grassroots advocacy even where it has been built. Fourth, and relatedly, generally low levels of literacy at the grassroots level limit the pool of individuals that can facilitate communication with external audiences, making it important to ensure that this capacity is sufficiently embedded in future iterations of the labs. Lastly — and importantly for a project premised on the acquisition of technological skills — the labs demonstrated the potential for boosting historically low levels of access to media equipment through institutional support to grassroots groups, though gaps remain in the underlying infrastructure required for those tools to work optimally.

Crucially, the study uncovered four key areas of opportunity for deepening and broadening the potential of grassroots media advocacy to inform constructive engagement and state action in the Lagos context:

to grow the labs from a one-off event into a rolling capacity building programme that targets younger residents with the optimal combination of time, curiosity and capacity that enables them to prioritise M4C objectives; to build residents' skills for civic engagement beyond their communities, including via social media and traditional networking/communication channels; to facilitate a move away from tokenistic gestures by individual politicians toward more systematic responses from state institutions; and to 'conscientise' grassroots groups to look beyond individual economic aspirations — important as these are — toward a more politically-aware vision of change, in the tradition of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

The above findings point to the need for continued institutional support to grassroots housing movements by civil society organisations, while recognising that the infrastructural gaps that limit the effectiveness of technology-based solutions will require longer-term public investment to address on a large scale. The experience of Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI)/M4C on the civic media labs demonstrates low-hanging yet effective ways to provide such support in resource-constrained contexts. These include facilitating access to media production and storage facilities for grassroots groups and building capacity in fundraising to enable them to independently scale up and replicate lab activities in a wider range of communities. These interventions, while not complete solutions in themselves, constitute an important first step on the road to achieving sustained policy impact through substantive grassroots participation in civic media discourse and practice.

1

Introduction

Lagos, one of the most important commercial capitals in west Africa, has a staggering housing deficit of 17 million units (Mohammed, 2024). Situated on a narrow strip along the Gulf of Guinea, with more than 40% of the area comprising inland water bodies and wetlands (Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, 2021), the city-state is a site of continuous contestation between the government and citizens over scarce land and housing resources (Sesan, 2023). Perhaps the most visible (and violent) evidence of this conflict is the recurrence of forced evictions and demolitions that are either carried out or legitimised by the state, many times in concert with entrenched private interests.¹ Rarely do state actors take responsibility for the deficit of affordable housing that has engendered the proliferation of informal settlements across the city, with the tendency instead being to promote narratives that criminalise the very existence of those communities (Spaces for Change, 2018).

In this and other contexts, civic media has emerged as a potentially powerful tool with which to challenge state-sanctioned violations of the rights of the urban poor to housing and other services (Slum Dwellers International & CoHabitat Network, 2022). Civic media refers to a range of practices and strategies by which ordinary citizens deploy media technologies and platforms in the service of community development goals (FasterCapital, 2024). Civic media therefore implies alternative uses — perhaps even the co-option — of standard media and communication practices, with a view to amplifying citizens' voices in public discourse and representing

their interests in public policy. Research undertaken in exclusionary global South contexts (Frediani and Cociña, 2024 p. 3) reflects on the ways in which media-enabled 'communication practices' might be used by grassroots movements to advance housing rights for marginalised groups. The research concludes with a series of prompts urging further inquiry into strategies for strengthening existing grassroots communication practices with the aim of gaining increased influence with relevant audiences, especially in contexts where state-sanctioned rights violations persist.

In this vein, the report analyses the use of civic media for advocacy by grassroots housing movements in Lagos, one of two cities (the other one being São Paulo in Brazil) in which the IIED-led 'Civic media for housing rights' project was implemented between 2022 and 2025.² The project set up civic media 'labs' to train grassroots groups in the use of media technologies to narrate their experiences around various housing-related challenges, and propose community-centred solutions to relevant government actors. The theory of change implicit in this approach was that participation in the labs would empower grassroots groups to use media technologies as tools of resistance in the struggle for their inalienable right to the city. The labs were facilitated by members of the Media4Change (M4C) team, the media advocacy arm of the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation ('the Federation'), a movement of urban poor communities across the city that has been supported by the NGO Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) since 2016.³

¹ One of the more high-profile episodes of this state-sponsored violence was the demolition of the Otodo-Gbame community in 2016 which left 30,000 people displaced and several dead. The harrowing tale has entered popular culture with 'Legend of the Vagabond Queen of Lagos', a 2024 feature-length movie produced by a coalition of grassroots groups and civil society actors led by Justice & Empowerment Initiatives.

² <https://www.iied.org/civic-media-for-housing-rights-lessons-struggles-against-evictions-sao-paulo-lagos>

³ JEI is an NGO that provides legal counsel and paralegal training to Federation members in Lagos and Port Harcourt, two revenue-rich but highly unequal cities with a long history of unlawful evictions.

Concurrent with the implementation of the labs, was a 'documentation' process, conducted by researchers who were external to the process and to the operations of M4C/JEI more generally. The value of having this externally-directed approach to documentation was that it facilitated the kind of independent research and analysis critical to understanding the process and outcomes of the labs. This task was particularly suited to qualitative inquiry, which entails going beyond apparent indicators to probe the individual motivations and collective pathways that lead to change.

The research was conducted along three overarching lines of enquiry that the labs were designed to address:

1. Understanding capabilities, methods and

tactics: How can grassroots organisations use civic media and related information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance their organisational capacities, support community empowerment, and amplify low-income residents' voices when advocating for housing rights? What are their key methods, rhetorical strategies and tactics when developing and disseminating civic media?

2. Addressing constraints and limits: What are the constraints facing grassroots organisations when utilising civic media in exclusionary political contexts?

How can new methods of media production, engagement with local authorities, or other tactics help to address these challenges?

3. Exploring opportunities for influence and

impact: What are the roles of civic media in expanding grassroots groups' capabilities to influence decision-making processes? Under what conditions can civic media influence local policy agendas and advance housing rights? When and how have housing social movements' civic media practices helped to change local discourses and perceptions of marginalised residents?

The rest of the paper details the approach taken to research these questions, as well as the findings that emerged in the process, and is structured as follows. The next section describes the study context, the implementation of the labs and elaborates on the methods used in data collection. This is followed by an in-depth discussion of the findings, structured along the lines of the areas of enquiry outlined above. The paper concludes with a summary of the key insights gained and their implications for grassroots groups and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the broader struggle for housing rights in this and similar contexts.

2

Methodology

2.1 The study context

In keeping with the grassroots focus of the civic media labs, engagement was embedded in specific community contexts, with the characteristics of those communities shaping lab design and implementation, and vice versa. The communities involved — Ago Egun, Isale Akoka and Otumara — are similar in their designation by the state as informal settlements, but their selection by JEI and M4C was informed by diverse characteristics that contributed different insights to the study and ultimately provided for a robust analysis across cases.

Figure 1 shows the approximate location of the three communities, all of them situated in close proximity to the economically-strategic Lagos Lagoon. The communities' occupation of prime waterfront areas, right on the edge of the mainland and with relatively easy access to the central business district on the island, makes them coveted territory by public and private sector actors alike, and increases the likelihood of rights violations (see Sesan 2023 for a detailed discussion of the heightened vulnerability of informal settlements along the city's waterfront to extrajudicial evictions).

Figure 1. The three study communities — Ago Egun, Isale Akoka and Otumara — lie west of the Lagos Lagoon, located roughly between Bariga and Otto



Source: Aliu et al. (2021).

Ago Egun is a tight-knit fishing community with origins further west along the Atlantic coast, in which generations of residents have retained a strong sense of tradition and cultural identity. It also has entrenched patriarchal norms which circumscribe the reach and impact of interventions, like the labs, that aim for inclusiveness.⁴ Isale Akoka, on the other hand, is a more metropolitan yet largely ethnically-homogenous community, with its Ilaje-majority population.⁵ Located less than three kilometres from the University of Lagos, the flagship university in the city, the influence of the wider community is evident especially among the youth — with many nursing ambitions to attend the university.

Otumara is unique in its constitution: it is a multicultural community comprising a few long-time native settlers,⁶ but also many non-native groups previously displaced from other settlements. The community was selected by JEI and M4C during the design of the labs because the risk of forced eviction by the state was imminent at the time — the assumption being that the immediate threat facing the community would galvanise residents to engage actively with the opportunity to advocate for their right to housing.⁷ The extent to which this

assumption was borne out in reality — discussed in later sections — illustrates the important ways in which community characteristics can be expected to shape the implementation and outcomes of civic media labs in different contexts.

Notwithstanding the differences between the communities, interest in the labs — at least in learning the basic skills involved in photography and video production — was ubiquitous, though to a lesser degree in Otumara than in the other two communities. However, interest was moderated by availability for several would-be lab participants. As a female tailoring apprentice in Otumara put it, "...it's not like I don't have interest, but the work I am learning is a hindrance for me."

Indeed, the majority of those who registered their interest at the start had a primary occupation (Figure 3) that already took up considerable amounts of their time (Figure 4). This element of availability has implications for participants' ability to commit to media making and advocacy in the medium to long term, including in the ongoing post-project phase. The next section describes the design and implementation of the labs, both of which were led by the Media4Change team.

Figure 2. Basic training in Ago Egun community



Photo credit: Temilade Sesan.

⁴ For example, men in the community were able to participate in the labs in significant numbers (see Figure 2) partly because the timing happened to coincide with the off-peak season for fishing, while women, who work year-round, could not keep up their participation for the duration of the programme even when they showed interest at the beginning.

⁵ The Ilaje are fisher people who migrated from further inland to settle in several communities across Lagos, including in Isale Akoka.

⁶ 'Native' broadly refers to the Yoruba-speaking tribes that have settled in Lagos over time, though their origins are diverse and even sometimes contested.

⁷ The Lagos state government announced plans for the regeneration of Otumara in 2021, a process that has historically resulted in the forced eviction of residents in communities across Lagos. Forced evictions carried out in neighbouring Otto in March 2024 reinforced the perception of this threat to Otumara.

Figure 3. Primary occupation of civic media lab participants in Ago Egun, Isale Akoka and Otumara.

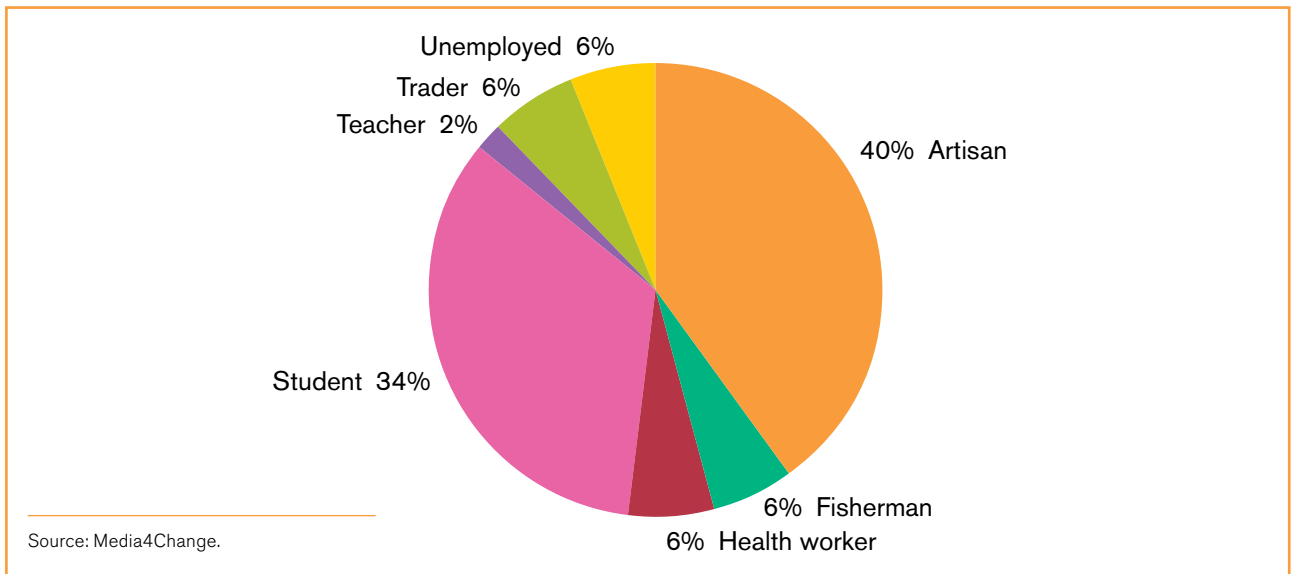
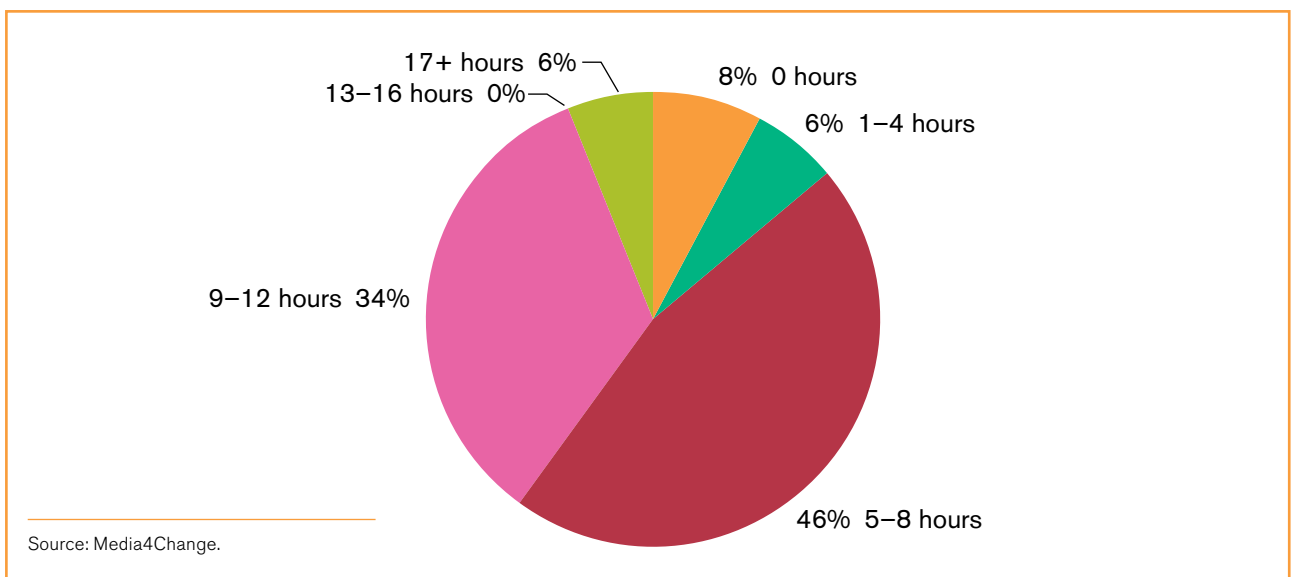


Figure 4. Time spent by civic media lab participants in Ago Egun, Isale Akoka and Otumara working or studying each day (in hours)



2.2 Overview of the civic media labs

The civic media labs in Lagos started in September 2023 with implementation in three distinct phases. In order of increasing intensity and involvement these were: a training phase (September to December 2023); a project phase (January to March 2024); and a post-project phase (April 2024 onward).

The **training** phase consisted of instruction in the principles of media making, in three levels: basic, intermediate and advanced. The basic and intermediate levels were conducted over a three-day period in each

of the three participating communities, for a total of six sessions in each community. The approach to training in these phases was primarily instructional, with members of the M4C team teaching pre-designed content, aided by PowerPoint slides, in a traditional classroom format. This primary approach was supplemented by practical demonstrations as well as small-group reflection sessions, especially in later training sessions when trainers had had the opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of their methods.

By the end of the intermediate stage, overall attendance had dwindled to the point that the three communities could be merged into one class for the advanced-level training, which also spanned three days. Trainers

placed a higher premium on demonstration at this stage, enabling trainees to practice the principles and techniques they had been introduced to in the first two stages. Given that it was now expedient for trainees to handle media equipment such as cameras and laptops themselves, the location of the training was moved from the communities to the M4C unit at the JEI office. The core topics covered in the course of the training phase included photography, videography, sound, storytelling, editing and media advocacy (the training curriculums, developed independently by the M4C team, can be found in appendices 1–3).⁸

The **project** phase of the labs was designed to be entirely hands-on, to give trainees room to demonstrate the knowledge of media making they had acquired during the training phase. Trainees identified priority areas in their respective communities and jointly developed narratives around the need for constructive government intervention in those areas. In this way, participants from Ago Egun identified the need for clean drinking water as a priority area in their community; those from Isale Akoka agreed to take on the narrative of insecurity; and those from Otumara engaged with the issue of poor waste management in their community.

As happened in the training phase, initial ‘story planning and shooting’ sessions in this phase took place in the respective communities, facilitated by the M4C team (see appendix 4 for a sample agenda). However, participants were required to report fairly regularly at the M4C office during the editing stage that followed, primarily because they lacked access to editing equipment. There was a risk of miscommunication in trying to explain technical terms/concepts that were not easily translatable from English (the language in which most of the equipment operated). But the practical nature of the phase — made more contextually relevant by the engaging style adopted by the M4C facilitators — helped to overcome this.

The ongoing **post-project** phase is more open-ended than the previous two phases. The goal of this phase, as stated at the outset, was to ensure completion of the training and project phases culminated in the absorption of qualified trainees into the M4C team on a long-term basis. This process has yielded more promising results in Ago Egun and Isale Akoka than in Otumara, for reasons that will be discussed below. Following

the completion of the project phase, graduates from the first two communities approached the media team and expressed their desire to be absorbed into the team. Over the next few months, the media team worked out an arrangement in which people from those communities could work part-time from the JEI office, on a paid basis, on media advocacy projects of their choosing. As of July 2024, four months after the end of the project phase, the Isale Akoka team was working on a documentary on the livelihoods of people in their community, and the Ago Egun team was looking to start a new project of their own. This momentum was entirely missing with the Otumara team, and it was difficult for the media team to get the three residents who went through the project phase to commit to long-term involvement, despite their best efforts.

Overall, the M4C team — led by an in-house creative director — demonstrated a high degree of independence and proactivity in setting the agenda for the labs. What was perhaps less foreseen, by both the M4C and documentation teams, was the haphazard way in which implementation ultimately unfolded. Here the ability of the M4C team to learn and adapt quickly as the labs progressed — essentially, to think on their feet especially as they had no prior experience of taking media training directly into communities — proved to be invaluable. Weekly media team meetings at the JEI office provided much-needed space for reflection and course correction, on matters ranging from the criteria for admitting trainees into the different phases, to the appropriateness of the content and delivery of the labs, to the effectiveness of the team’s recruitment efforts in each community.

This last aspect proved to be the thorniest, with recruitment being especially difficult in Otumara which, as has been highlighted above, was the community facing the most immediate threat of eviction by the state government at the time. This was in spite of direct outreach campaigns conducted by the M4C team, in addition to their standard approach of recruiting ‘gatekeepers’, such as executives of community development associations (CDAs),⁹ to mobilise residents. In fact the reticence shown in Otumara early on persisted throughout the duration of the labs, and meant delays in meeting important milestones, especially during the project phase.

⁸ While the design and delivery of the training phase appears to have been appropriate from a technical perspective, the factor that made the difference was the ability of the trainers to connect with trainees — a dynamic that may have resulted from the affinity occasioned by similarities in the lived realities of both groups. As an example, while English was the language used in the design of the curriculum, good translation skills on the part of the trainers meant that they often delivered the content in Pidgin English, a streetwise adaptation of the English language that the trainees, like many other residents of the city, use in their everyday interactions. This flexibility in the trainers’ approach was apparent even in the case of Ago Egun, where it was necessary to have an intermediary interpret the sessions in Egun, the native language of the community.

⁹ Community development associations are voluntary resident organisations that are mandated by Nigerian law and which, in principle, exist to foster inclusive representation, governance and development at the community level (Oyalowo, 2021).

2.3 Documentation of the civic media labs

For the reasons described above, consistency of participation was difficult to achieve in all three communities (but more so in Otumara) for the duration of the civic media labs, with implications for the documentation of the process. We had envisaged taking a 'longitudinal' approach in which we would follow the same cohort of participants in each community from beginning to end. But the lack of a regular pattern of attendance from one session to the next created difficulties. This is where the flexibility of the qualitative research approach adopted by the research/documentation team proved invaluable. The exploratory and open-ended nature of the approach helped the team adapt the research plan to circumstances that unfolded as the labs progressed, yielding relevant and practical insights.

The research began with a **structured survey** in which a questionnaire (appendix 5) was administered to each participant the first time they attended a session during the training phase of the labs, whether that was at the basic, intermediate or advanced level. Google Forms was used to make data analysis simple, but the surveys were completed with the face-to-face support of the research team — a necessity given that participants had differing levels of access to technology. Fifty survey responses from the three communities were captured in this way, indicating that this was the number of unique participants who came into contact with the labs at one point or another. Its objective was to gain a sense of individuals' expectations of the labs at the start and thus establish a reliable baseline for subsequent analysis.

The initial plan to conduct a second survey at the end of the labs was rendered impractical as the size and composition of the cohort differed significantly from what obtained at the beginning. The research team was ultimately able to mitigate the impact of this gap by securing a handful of longitudinal interviews with the eight participants across the three communities who managed to attend all six sessions at the basic and intermediate stages of the training phase. These longitudinal interviews — 16 of them — were a subset of 30 **in-depth interviews** conducted with 22 unique

participants in both stages. The subset of 16 interviews enabled tracking of participants' learning journeys from the basic to the intermediate training stages, with the aim of evaluating whether and how the training contributed to changes in attitude and knowledge about the use of civic media in housing rights advocacy over the period. The question guides used for this set of interviews can be found in appendices 6 and 7.

Four **focus group discussions** were held with trainees — one with the cohort of 12 participants that remained at the end of the advanced training phase, and one each with the three communities at the end of the project phase. These focus groups were especially important for probing trainees' perceptions of the efficacy of the training and project outputs in achieving a set of communication functions — identified by JEI and the M4C team at the outset (details of the functions are provided in the next section).

Further, **key informant interviews** were conducted with three members of the M4C team. These were conducted using a separate question guide (appendix 8) and were useful for understanding the team's motivations, expectations and evolution over the course of the labs.

Finally, **non-participant observation** was used to garner additional contextual information during the labs, as well as during weekly M4C review meetings attended by members of the research team. The observation technique used in this latter setting was flexible, with the researchers taking unstructured notes while listening in on the team's process and organisational practices. This revealed important insights regarding the team's capabilities that will be discussed in subsequent sections. The observation conducted during the labs, however, was guided by a protocol (appendix 9) — a checklist of attributes that the researchers knew to look out for and systematically record while they were engaged in the sessions. This facilitated documentation of the processes and interactions among participants during the labs.

The insights generated from the researchers' interrogation of the labs are discussed in detail in the following sections.

3

Findings and discussion

3.1 Understanding capabilities, methods and tactics

The project phase described above yielded three separate outputs, one from each of the three communities involved. While all the outputs followed a similar production process (as outlined in appendix 4) and employed the same medium, namely video documentaries, each was unique in content and context.

The use of video across all the communities, while not predetermined, was perhaps unsurprising given that this is a communication medium that has become established within the M4C team over the years. The process of making and disseminating videos encompasses several other communication practices such as interviews, story-telling, narratives, meetings, community screenings¹⁰ and social media. These were jointly identified by M4C, JEI and the IIED team in an earlier preparatory phase devoted to conceptualising and designing the labs.¹¹ The latter comprises active M4C feeds on Facebook, X, YouTube and Instagram. Historically the M4C team has measured the impact of its social media strategy in qualitative terms, by examining feedback generated by particular posts, and adjusting its strategy accordingly.

The M4C social feeds were the main communication channels for the three communities throughout the duration of the labs, chronicling and sharing updates on community outreach and engagement, training sessions and project outputs. In addition, M4C created a WhatsApp group for each community to facilitate internal communication. However, engagement with the WhatsApp platforms was limited, perhaps partly reflecting the low levels of smartphone ownership among participants. However, even among the subset of participants who had smartphones and who could access the respective community groups, engagement was mainly driven by core M4C team members. This, combined with the ongoing reliance of the communities on JEI/M4C facilities and social media expertise, indicates the need for continued capacity strengthening for them.

The issue of low virtual engagement was evident even with assignments, where participants were given take-home tasks and asked to submit their responses to the community WhatsApp groups. Box 1 shows the lone response to such tasks that was recorded — from a participant in Otumara — throughout the duration of the labs.

¹⁰ Community screenings involve the showing of films or documentaries, typically produced by the M4C team, in selected communities to showcase/highlight topical issues and generate public discussion around those issues.

¹¹ Other communication practices identified were: photo voices, flyers, T-shirts, exhibitions, word of mouth, traditional print media and protest. These other practices did not feature prominently in the implementation of the labs.

The narration in Box 1 outlines the principles of storytelling that the media team used at all levels of the training. This vital component proved to be fundamental to trainees' understanding of the change agenda underpinning the labs, distinguishing the programme from others that prioritise the acquisition of technical film-making capabilities.

As a result the three communities incorporated emphatic calls for change into their final projects. The Ago Egun video made a case for improved access to clean drinking water. While the Isale Akoka video shone a light on the need for improved security, and the Otumara video addressed the need for improved waste management in the community. Although the videos were short, with an average running time of five minutes, they were produced to a professional standard with support from experienced members of the M4C team. However, their real value lay in their ability to communicate community-specific challenges and opportunities for change with conciseness and clarity. The project teams 'crowd-sourced' these inputs through interviews with fellow residents, and then applied their learnings of storytelling techniques to shape the narratives they wanted to communicate about their respective communities.

The narratives in the videos were accompanied by analyses that showed the depth of understanding that residents have about their communities. The Isale Akoka video, for example, made an insightful connection between the long-running situation of insecurity in their community with the lack of meaningful schooling and employment opportunities for young people. Across the board, the project teams demonstrated high levels of capacity and confidence in engaging with different segments of their respective communities, be they traditional leaders or groups of market women — again, a testament to the efficacy of employing a community-led approach to civic engagement.

The videos were produced to advance a set of **communication functions** which, like the communication practices described above, were collaboratively defined in the period leading up to lab implementation. Appendix 10 outlines those functions, along with aspects of the labs that developed participants' capacities in those areas. It also includes illustrative excerpts from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted with M4C and project team members respectively.

BOX 1. LONE PARTICIPANT RESPONSE TO TAKE-HOME TASK ASSIGNED DURING THE BASIC TRAINING PHASE.

Prompt: Identify a story you want to tell using the following questions social change makers need to ask: (1) Why tell the story? (2) Who am I telling the story for? (3) Whom should I collaborate with to tell the story? (4) How should I tell the story? 5) How should I craft the story?

Story: *“Beautiful and modern houses lined up the streets of the Isheri North Government Residential Area Estate, located at OPIC on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. But the sight of large volumes of water which a car owner, no matter how daring, could not drive through overtook the roads, drainages and house entrances. The flood emerged after the water release by the Oyan Dam in Abeokuta, Ogun State.*

“Stuck in their apartments, boarding canoes or wading through the knee-height water for average heights individuals have been the main options open to many residents.

“The sights of children struggling to have a place on the boat, among adults in a hurry to go to their workplace, became common in the neighbourhood since the flood began. During the off-peak periods, motorcycle riders who could wade through the water ferried willing passengers who agreed to pay the hiked fee. For others, they had to pull up their trousers, dresses or gowns, transfer their footwear into their hands, and carefully wade through the water.

“The same scenario plays out during the evening peak periods.”

Why tell the story? “To make people know what is going on in the community.”

Whom am I telling the story for? “I am telling the story for the local government, to assist them.”

Whom should I collaborate with to tell the story? “I will be collaborating with the community members and the chairperson.”

How should I tell the story? “By taking pictures and videos.”

How will I craft the story? “By creating a relatable character and developing a clear theme.”

Regardless of subject, participants in all three communities identified relevant local and state government agencies — the state security apparatus, the waste management authority, the water corporation — as the ultimate target audiences for their communication practices. This is perhaps indicative of their awareness of the systemic nature of the problems facing their respective communities. Historically, however, communities have attempted to communicate with these top-level agencies through intermediaries that they have found more accessible including CDA executives, traditional rulers, local NGOs and international organisations. Over the course of the labs, the target audiences for the communities expanded to include mid-level actors such as the organised private sector, the news media, upper- and middle-class citizens, and even celebrity bloggers. The ethos of change for the communities remains the same — while these groups are valuable allies in their own right, the higher goal is for their support to translate into favourable shifts in government policy and attitude toward informal settlement residents.

However, during focus group discussions with lab participants at the end of the project phase, it became clear that they were yet to devise concrete plans for disseminating their videos, whether to their fellow residents, mid-level audiences or top-level government agencies. The discussions elicited several interesting ideas, from establishing an autonomous social media presence to leveraging opportunities for online visibility, as indicated in the following quote:

“... most bloggers tend to be interested in something like this. If they see the video, they are like, so something is happening like this. They can just take it up and post it around because some bloggers, they don't pay them; they just gather news around and put it on the internet for people to see. So, I think if they see our videos and seem interested in it, they can just post it.” Participant, Isale Akoka Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Beyond outlining the possibilities, however, the participants had not taken any clear steps toward implementation. For example, when asked, in response to the quote above, whether participants had identified any bloggers or influencers who were likely to take up their community's cause, they responded in the negative. More broadly, participants had not thought through strategies for sustaining public engagement with their project outputs beyond tagging relevant

entities on social media posts. The focus group discussions were useful for getting participants to start thinking in this direction, indicating that further capacity building on strategic dissemination would be beneficial for them.

3.2 Addressing constraints and limits

The interviews and focus group discussions conducted with lab participants revealed several constraints — political, social and economic — to the development and use of civic media to promote change in their respective communities. At the same time, the interviews led to the recognition by participants of opportunities and strategies — some of them subversive — for engaging more constructively with political actors at the community and city levels. Here, there is ample room for civil society organisations like JEI to support communities and grassroots movements to organise more effectively.

Practical challenges (such as problems accessing technology) however, are more structural in nature and will likely require longer time frames and greater public investment to overcome. The key dynamics identified across the board with regard to constraints within the community/city contexts, and the opportunities for influencing them are detailed below.

3.2.1 Navigating community-level politics

The role played by internal politics at the community level was most apparent during the project phase, when lab participants began engaging with other community members through fieldwork conducted for the video documentaries. In Ago Egun, a tussle between two camps over which of two candidates was the rightful successor to the deceased Baale¹² spilled over into the fieldwork. Lab participants seeking interviews with fellow community members were treated with suspicion until they explained that their project would serve the interests of the whole community rather than those of a particular camp:

“They tried to stop us but we mentioned that we are not from one Baale, we are from the Federation and it is a project for us. and our prayer is that we should achieve what we are fighting for and not just coming to the community to get stories and leave.” Participant, Ago Egun FGD

¹² The Baale is the highest traditional authority at the community level in Lagos and other states in southwestern Nigeria. Though Baales nominally operate outside formal state structures, they have become increasingly allied with the political elite in recent times, often at the cost of eroding community trust in the office.

A similar dynamic was experienced in Otumara, where there is fragmentation, not only within the traditional leadership structure, but also at the level of the community development association which is more formally constituted, at least in principle:

“We have three different CDAs. Okay, I think for me that’s a problem. It’s a single community, it’s supposed to have one, but because of the power struggles... it’s a community that has two Baales and three CDAs, which is not supposed to be so... There are three points in the community, one at the entrance, one at the middle, and one at the street end. It’s tricky because you would not want to do anything that would harm the interest of this particular person when you are going into their territory. So, you have to tread carefully to avoid clash or conflicts.” Participant, Otumara FGD

These internal rifts have led to the disintegration of trust and solidarity at the community level, making it even more difficult for residents to mobilise and speak with one voice. However lab participants were able to identify opportunities for pushing their Media4Change agenda through in the post-project phase. In Ago Egun, participants deliberated on the possibility of working around the tensions between different political camps by engaging the leaders jointly — rather than separately — with their documentary on access to drinking water, to mitigate the risk of their agenda being co-opted or otherwise politicised by any one camp.

Separately, participants in Otumara advocated a similar workaround for the issue of fragmented authority in their community — they expressed the possibility of approaching representatives of the three CDAs with their documentary jointly rather than individually. This proposal deliberately attempts to build on a past record of joint action by the CDAs in the area of waste management, indicating a strong alignment between the focus of the documentary and community priorities. In any case, the ultimate goal of lab participants in each community is to push their message through to higher levels of government where powerful political actors can be persuaded to take action. With this in mind, Otumara participants identified past CDA members with a proven track record of engaging with the local government council as potential allies in getting the attention of the relevant authorities at the municipal level. In all the communities, the path to influencing state agencies was less clear, indicating a need for further support in this regard from the mid-level actors (media channels, private-sector actors, and the wider public) identified above.

3.2.2 Managing community expectations

Another dynamic evident during the fieldwork for the documentaries was a general misunderstanding around the objectives of the Media4Change project. This put the onus on lab participants to manage the perception of residents in their respective communities about the nature of the project, and the benefits they could expect to derive from it. Initial reactions from residents in the three communities ranged from suspicion to solicitation. People were either wary that the video footage and stories being collected by participants would ultimately be used by the state government to justify a mass eviction, or they expected that the exercise would generate immediate material benefit, either in cash or in kind, for the community:

“During the last shoot we went for, people threw things at me, they were asking me why I was video recording them. Later I let them know that we weren’t trying to record them for a bad thing, that we were just doing a coverage because of our project and many more like that. There was a day like that that we were working and someone came to stop us and carried our equipment. We had to go to the Baale of the community to settle the case.” Participant, Ago Egun FGD

“We don’t even know who did [the Otto demolitions], because there was no notice, there was nothing, they just came and scattered it. So, it kind of raised panic, because we have been faced with threats of eviction... a few men have stopped me and like, hope it’s not this video that you did, this camera. I think most of them, just because they have seen me going around with the camera, they just come to me and ask me, oh have you heard of this thing, what happened? They are trying to get information off me because they feel I should know more about the situation on the ground.” Participant, Otumara FGD

“...when we started the shooting, we told the Baale about the water project but the Baale was like we should not forget to get the water provided into the community maybe through the government. And he was like if we don’t provide the water, next time when we come, they won’t give us audience because we disappointed them by not bringing the water.” Participant, Ago Egun FGD

This tendency to cast lab participants as either malicious or benevolent actors with the power and resources to either punish or reward residents highlights the possibility of future reputational risks for those who might want to carry on the change agenda beyond the civic media labs project. Again, the ability of grassroots media makers to manage community expectations properly is central to their ability to secure the trust and buy-in of their peers into the change agenda in the long term. Participants generally succeeded in persuading fellow community members of the value of their respective projects, without needing to offer any additional compensation. This indicates an ability to influence and potentially mobilise their peers for change-oriented projects. These experiences of successfully navigating community expectations should be captured and shared with future cohorts of the civic media labs and/or other M4C initiatives.

3.2.3 Balancing idealism with material concerns

As was highlighted in a previous section, availability was a key determinant of participation in the labs. In turn, there were several factors that combined to determine individuals' availability for the labs or the lack of it — notably gender, employment status and the imperative to earn a living.

Women's traditional roles and responsibilities — both at home and at work — severely limited their participation in the labs, however dedicated to the Media4Change campaign they appeared to be. In Ago Egun, as indicated earlier, women are expected to carry the bulk of domestic and livelihood responsibilities, leaving them with very little time for other pursuits. This is in contrast with the men — many of them fishermen for whom the off-peak season is seen an opportunity for rest and recreation. This fundamental disparity in cultural expectations of women and men in the community led to the latter being able to give expression to their enthusiasm for using Media4Change. In Otumara, the only female participant who had childcare responsibilities in addition to her regular routine as a market trader, resigned after attending a few sessions in the training phase with a baby in tow.

In general, the most involved participants were those, like one young student from Ago Egun, who had a basic capacity to engage with the labs *and* were in a phase of their lives that afforded them time and space for experimentation. Conversely, people who had relatively high capacities but who had access to high-yielding employment or education opportunities were less involved over the duration of the labs. This indicates the significance of materiality, or the tendency for individuals to prioritise opportunities that develop their personal capacity to earn an income. In Otumara, for example, one of the most skilled participants was

a recent university graduate who, in spite of her desire to promote change in the community, left to pursue opportunities outside the community. Another Otumara participant who runs a relatively successful business periodically lent his acumen to the project, but could not keep up a regular attendance due to competing demands on his time and attention. These examples highlight the existence, simultaneously, of an opportunity and a challenge. The capacity to use media for change exists at the community level. However this capacity may coincide with a tendency for high-achieving residents to be drawn away by other pursuits, often of an individual rather than a communal nature.

Linked to the above point, the affinity of participants across the board for opportunities that increase their earning potential would appear to be at odds with the notion of solidarity that is at the core of the Media4Change campaign. As a key informant interviewee put it, in reference to Otumara:

“...if [the labs] had been a training that had to do with skill acquisition, you would have seen them come out in large numbers. But our first challenge is trying to get them see reason on why they should take part in anything that has to do with media. That's why we have a smaller number... [The skill acquisition programme] I was directly involved with, the NGO brought experts to take them on shoe making, how to design, to use CorelDraw and Photoshop... for that training we had thirty people on ground that were consistent throughout... [For the civic media labs] I was only able to get two people from my personal network... only those two people turned up.” — Key Informant Interview 1

The implications of these tensions are two-fold. First, the situation suggests that target communities are more likely to be interested in the Media4Change agenda if they see a link between that agenda and their individual aspirations for employment and education. Second, beyond a recognition of the immediate material concerns of residents of those communities, there is scope for strengthening their political consciousness regarding their fundamental rights as citizens, and increasing their appreciation of the enabling nature of those rights.

3.2.4 Co-opting language and literacy

As highlighted previously, language barriers during the training phase were greatly mitigated by the flexibility and adaptability of trainers on the M4C team. They switched easily between Pidgin and standard English in delivering the content, and an interpreter was used in Ago Egun where many residents do not speak

either of those languages. There were challenges in the training phase with certain terms that came with the use of equipment like phones or cameras and which were not easy to express in lay terms. In such instances, trainers relied mainly on show-and-tell tactics to demonstrate the functionality of the principles or concepts. This workaround was also largely effective at the beginning of the project phase, which relied more on hands-on filming and storytelling techniques than on formal instruction. In these earlier stages, language-related barriers to participation in the labs were quite easily overcome.

The stage at which language proved to be a deterrent to some participants, however, was the later phase of video editing which relied on the use of dedicated computer software. The status of English as Nigeria's official language means that the user interfaces of technological equipment, which are mainly imported, are configured in English — and this poses a formidable challenge to non-English-speaking groups:

“My main challenge is the editing part because I don't understand English and the laptop we are using is in English form. So, they need to translate it to French so I can understand better.” Participant, Ago Egun FGD

The participant cited above was not alone in this situation, there were two other participants from the community who faced the same challenge. The settlers in Ago Egun come originally from the neighbouring Republic of Benin, where French is the official language. Nearly all residents have enduring ties to family in Cotonou, its largest city, and it is common practice in the community to send children back home to French-speaking secondary schools.¹³

The apparent desire by residents to preserve both the French and Egun aspects of their identity has had the effect of contributing to their continued marginalisation in Anglophone Nigeria. What this indicates for the civic media labs and similar initiatives is a need to pay attention to the needs of different groups when relying on technological tools for grassroots advocacy. The reality that imported technologies are the norm but are rarely adapted to the needs of socially and economically marginalised groups increases the likelihood of those groups being excluded from technology-based solutions. As regards the civic media labs, given that video editing is an especially valuable skill that participants can use to earn a living, in

addition to advocating for change in their communities, a failure to overcome language barriers at this point risks reproducing the systematic exclusion of those communities from promising livelihood opportunities in Nigeria.

The issue of language is connected to literacy: the more literate in English participants were, the greater their capacity to engage with the more strategic components of the programme. Even in communities like Isale Akoka and Otumara where formal instruction takes place in English, schooling does not always translate to literacy in the language. This poses a potential limitation to replication of the labs. Even though the training materials are available to communities and grassroots groups, generally low literacy levels mean that communities may not be able to use those resources independently. There is scope in this regard for translating the training materials into languages such as Egun, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, French, Lingala, and even Pidgin English, that are spoken across communities within the 'Federation's' network.¹⁴

The literacy factor has also restricted the use of other formats, especially text, in the design and implementation of the labs:

“On the text part... we've actually not engaged [the participants], but if we want to use text we might have a bigger problem, because... at the end of the day even if you want to be a good storyteller, you still have to have this [knowledge] about compositional uses of text. But we've not actually gone deep into that aspect.” Key Informant Interview 2

Even with the video format used in the labs, however, literacy — defined narrowly in the context as the ability to read and write in English — was important for higher-level functions such as navigating editing software on a computer and for elements, such as translation and subtitling, that aided external communication. In Ago Egun, the only participant on the team who was able to perform both of these functions with relative ease was an Egun speaker who had completed his secondary education in English and was proficient in both languages. Going forward, it will be important to ensure the inclusion of these kinds of intermediaries in Media4Change projects so that community narratives, regardless of the language in which they are expressed, can be effectively communicated to the wider public.

¹³ Residents have established a private French-speaking primary school in the community, but they have no secondary-level equivalent.

¹⁴ The Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation ('the Federation') is a loose network of over 100 informal settlements that works with civil society organisations to advocate for the rights of the urban poor to housing.

3.2.5 Improving access to technology and equipment

Access to technology was generally limited for participants in the civic media labs. This reality was even more pronounced during the basic and intermediate training phases given that these took place in the communities rather than in the M4C office, which would have allowed greater access to professional equipment like cameras and computers.¹⁵ The M4C team recognised this limitation from the beginning and attempted to work around it by prioritising demonstrations with smartphones, which were ostensibly more accessible to participants, while introducing specialised equipment to them at a more abstract level:

“... the bigger picture was to let them understand the use of the camera, but we see that majority of them use their phone. Okay, so, let's downgrade to the phone level first before we upgrade to camera... Even if we train them with phones, we give them the room to go through the process of camera in order for us not to make anyone left behind... It won't actually make sense, you call yourself a media person now, and you don't even have an idea of what a camera looks like... we also make sure that they have it and know how to make use of it, and how the texture is supposed to look like.” Key Informant Interview 2

However, even the ownership of smartphones was not evenly distributed.¹⁶ In Isale Akoka, for example, only about a third of lab participants owned a smartphone. This created a challenge for both trainers and trainees and affected the overall quality of learning on the programme. Those without phones were encouraged by trainers to borrow from their friends and family so they could work on assignments and practice in their own time. This proved difficult to achieve in reality however, so many participants did not get a chance to handle even this most basic level of technology required to master the skills they were being taught.

Those who do have access to smartphones in the communities are better placed to apply the media skills they gained in the medium to long term. However, those in this group are also faced with a raft of other challenges which, if unaddressed, will ultimately limit their capacity for impact. Some of those challenges are quite easily overcome in other circumstances, however the resource constraints that are a feature of the context can render them intractable. An example is the challenge of storage capacity, which was identified by a participant from Isale Akoka:

“Another challenge is my memory card, because at times, the storage will be full and it won't be okay for one to just be deleting and deleting. So, the memory card is one of the important things because it has happened to me several times... So, how will I do it?”
Participant, Isale Akoka FGD

There are several off-the-shelf solutions to this problem of phone storage, but they are mostly priced beyond the reach of lab participants, effectively rendering those solutions inaccessible. This is a significant drawback considering that ample storage capacity is an important requirement for producers of media everywhere.

Beyond these equipment-related challenges, lab participants cited problems with access to basic infrastructure, particularly WiFi and grid electricity.¹⁷ In Isale Akoka, for example, it is not uncommon to have power outages for up to a week at a time. The alternatives — mobile internet data and petrol/diesel generators respectively — are ubiquitous across Lagos. But they are too costly to be a dependable solution for many in low-income communities like those involved in the labs.¹⁸ This limitation will be especially frustrating in situations that present opportunities to capture and share ongoing rights violations, such as the forced evictions that occur regularly with little or no prior notice to residents. Media skills will be of little use to a resident if their smartphone has run out of battery or they are unable to afford the mobile data required to upload any media captured to the internet. This poses a challenge to the theory of change, which assumes that grassroots groups will be able to demonstrate greater agency in such situations by virtue of their exposure to media-making skills through the civic media labs.

¹⁵ This was the trade-off evident in the media team's approach: while running the labs in the communities may have encouraged broader participation, especially in Ago Egun and Isale Akoka, participants' ability to access the equipment they needed to learn was constrained in those low-resource environments.

¹⁶ The cost of smartphones — even the used ones that are widely available on the market — is prohibitive for people on low incomes. Smartphones have become even less accessible for many in the past year, with costs having risen astronomically in line with generally high inflation rates in the country (Okonji, 2024).

¹⁷ Electricity access rates are low across Nigeria, with 40% lacking a connection to the national grid. Even in places like Lagos where the majority are connected, power supply is unreliable and unevenly distributed (Sesan et al., 2024).

¹⁸ Other options for residents include phone charging in local kiosks for a fee, or for free in relatively private spaces such as friends' houses. The risks in both cases however range from the invasion of phone privacy by other residents, to theft of phones left unattended at charging stations.

To summarise, while it is evident that access to technology, especially mobile phones, translated to greater engagement with the labs in many cases, this does not guarantee that participants have the capacity to produce or disseminate media outputs independently.

Several factors need to come together to increase the likelihood of sustained engagement and impact: access to technology as well as enabling infrastructure; a willingness to act on opportunities to (re)shape community narratives; and the capacity to communicate these stories effectively beyond the community level. Further institutional support from JEI and other civil society actors will be needed on all these fronts, given that individual and infrastructural gaps will likely take longer-term public investment to address on a large scale. The ongoing access that lab participants have to M4C equipment, while not a complete solution in itself, is an important first step. Other practical steps that can be taken at the institutional level include the facilitation of shared storage spaces for all Media4Change content produced by communities within the Federation network, and dedicated training on engagement with traditional and social media platforms.

3.3 Exploring opportunities for influence and impact

The last point above about the need for continued institutional support to grassroots social movements by civil society organisations is crucial for capacity strengthening on both sides. It also links to the question of what is required to achieve sustained impact on housing policy at the community and city levels? Our documentation of the civic media lab process reveals four key areas of opportunity for deepening and broadening the potential of grassroots media advocacy to inform constructive engagement and state action in the Lagos context: growing the labs into a robust, capacity-building programme; building skills for engagement beyond the community; eliciting a systematic response from the state; and rallying grassroots movements around a political vision.

3.3.1 Growing the labs into a robust, capacity-building programme

The implementation of the labs provided a valuable learning opportunity for both communities and the M4C/ JEI team, especially given that it followed a previously untested model. Communities experienced a particularly steep learning curve as they had generally low baseline levels of exposure to media skills prior to the labs. The low levels of sustained participation recorded in all cases, but especially in Otumara, partly stemmed from

this lack of familiarity with the novel ideas introduced by the labs. When asked about the requirements for sustaining participants' newly-acquired media advocacy skills at the individual and community levels, an M4C member made the following observation about Otumara:

"...if civic media labs are going to make a difference, I don't see them making a difference at this first instance. That is, if the programme were to happen two or three times again, maybe if we get four or five people that are ready to give their all for this one, and the community members see how they have been doing with media — how they have been able to make media, how to use media as a tool for development and make change in the community, they might get interested..."
Key Informant Interview 1

In other words, by conducting labs in the same community multiple times rather than on a one-off basis, it would be possible to produce successive cohorts of local role models who show, rather than tell, their peers what can be accomplished through media advocacy. The theory here is that, even if numbers are low at the beginning as occurred in this first iteration of the labs, they will grow as word spreads in the community of the change being created through the labs. A virtuous cycle could therefore be created in which each iteration of the labs provides lessons that can be used to improve on subsequent ones.

Another suggestion in this vein was the introduction of individual assignments/projects in between lab sessions to facilitate a cycle of learning and practice, and sustain interest in the programme. This, however, links back to the challenges of access to technology already identified for many low-income residents. For this component to be inclusive and effective, civil society partners would need to provide, at a minimum, the kind of ongoing technological support being given by JEI in the post-project phase of the labs.

Another suggestion was to involve younger people in future labs, in a supportive and continuous way, with training in both the technical and advocacy aspects of the Media4Change agenda. This is consistent with our research findings on residents' availability for the labs, which indicate that there may be an optimum time (for example, the period immediately after secondary school) when participants have the right combination of time, curiosity and capacity to be receptive to Media4Change objectives. This implies the need for a patient approach that recognises individual potential, but is also willing to invest in nurturing that potential over time:

“At least we know we were able to get the attention of some younger people. Although they might not fully understand now, they’ve seen what we have been able to do with media. I was just speaking with some of them yesterday, and I was letting them know [how] media has been able to help the community... I was [explaining] to them that, if not that some people stepped in, the government might have come and demolished the place. So, I pushed that idea to them... they memorise it because they are still young, you know... but when we continue pushing it to them, they will understand better.” Key Informant interview 1

Importantly, this approach will require significant funding, so civil society groups as well as grassroots movements will need to be proactive in stating their case for support to prospective funders. The depth of engagement that can be facilitated with this longitudinal approach may augur well for long-term impact in specific communities. However, it may come at the expense of breadth if resources are scarce. In any event, this aspect of fundraising is yet another area in which there is scope for civil society partners to provide systematic support and capacity building to grassroots movements over time.

3.3.2 Building skills for engagement beyond the community

Relative to the technical aspects of media making, the topic of engaging non-community actors in the communication of media outputs — whether through social media or other platforms — was only touched on very lightly in the lab training curriculum. This is important because many participants, despite having multiple social media accounts prior to the labs, were not proactive in posting any kind of content on those platforms. This behaviour has continued into the post-project phase, where the main driver of engagement has been the M4C team via its various social media feeds, rather than individual participants. This approach has its advantages, not least of which are the visibility and legitimacy that the M4C accounts have built over time in association with JEI. While it may be difficult to precisely measure the impact enabled by these platforms, even seemingly small indicators such as ‘likes’ and ‘reposts’ count toward change and ought to be recognised as part of an overall impact strategy.

However, multiple points of engagement can serve to amplify community voices on social media, and these can be activated by training individual residents not only to post/repost media content on their own platforms, but also to engage meaningfully with others on those posts, by commenting for example. This last point is relevant even for the M4C social media feeds. There is scope for proactively deepening conversations with the public on those platforms to drive engagement metrics (and, by extension, impact) upwards. This level of engagement on social media requires an investment of skill, time and resources — all of which can be facilitated by civil society organisations working to build the capacity of individuals within grassroots movements.

Beyond social media, greater exchange is needed between community actors and external elements (ideas, people and places) to enable the former to build capacity for autonomous engagement beyond their communities in the long term. The approach taken by M4C in the advanced training phase reflects this:

“For the advanced training, then we were saying then that actually it sounds like a good idea [to take the training to the JEI office] because people going out of the community to see what’s happening out there is a form of training on its own. I mean, if you take someone who has never been out of the Otumara, they will think Otumara is the end of the world...” Key Informant interview 1

Members of the M4C team had separately expressed a need for this kind of external input, for example, through professional training opportunities or periodic exchange visits to grassroots movements in other contexts. The point here is that, while M4C members have been able to accomplish a great deal through self-help and solidarity with their peers in various communities, cross-fertilisation with others beyond their community is required to broaden their horizons and inspire them to do more.

Overall, grassroots groups in the context need to be empowered to design and implement holistic communication strategies that go beyond the sporadic showcasing of outputs, to address tactical issues such as who to prioritise for engagement, and why. This ties in with the next point about the need to strengthen avenues for establishing systematic support for communities from the wider public.

3.3.3 Eliciting a systematic response from the state

There are examples of communities which have been able to elicit support from societal actors, including those in mainstream media, as well as from state actors. However, such interventions are often reactive rather than proactive, and they constitute more of a ‘knee jerk’ response than a systematic one. The fact that these random attempts at responsiveness often coincide with election campaign seasons casts doubt on the motivation and commitment of state actors in particular:

“I think there have been times that some reports have been made from the community to the radio stations. I think there was a time when we had an issue with security... some guys were terrorising us and some calls were made. For a little while, they responded actually because I think it was the election period. People were calling from the community: this particular thing is happening here, we need help... and they responded to it.” Participant, Otumara FGD

Such responses can enable small, if temporary, wins for the chronically underserved communities involved. The added value of the civic media lab process is that it provides an opportunity for communities to proactively deploy strategic communication in engaging with state actors and with the mid-level societal actors highlighted earlier.

The theory of change proposed for the labs assumes that by proactively building constructive narratives around community issues and communicating them widely, public commitment will ultimately increase beyond random, one-off interventions to a more systematic engagement. Indeed, the issues addressed in the final project videos — lack of drinking water, insecurity, and poor waste management — are endemic problems that will require sustained public intervention to overcome. These outputs are therefore best viewed as entry points into a longer-term, iterative process of deliberation and political action that will ideally culminate in substantive change for residents in the project communities.

3.3.4 Rallying grassroots movements around a political vision

The in-depth interviews conducted by the research team at the start of the civic media labs explored the motivations of participants for joining. Individual responses varied, but the majority emphasised the personal advancement they hoped to gain from

the media-making component of the programme. Mention of the advocacy and change aspects, where it came up at all, was secondary. This focus on material benefit persisted despite a clear emphasis on the change element in M4C’s messaging during the recruitment phase — messaging that the team emphasised throughout the duration of the labs. The team’s consistency ultimately delivered results. Many lab participants came to appreciate the potential of media advocacy to enable change, with the modules on storytelling being some of the most impactful in this regard.

While this shift in participants’ perspective counts as a win for the change agenda, their overriding interest in material benefits should not be overlooked. It is instructive that many M4C team members juggle personal projects with community-focused ones in a bid to profit from their media skills. Indeed, it can be argued that people have a better chance of giving back to their communities after they have had a chance to empower themselves first. Viewed in this light, there may be a case for future labs to engage explicitly with this desire for self-actualisation on the part of participants. At the same time, it is important to consider the potential drawbacks of this scenario — specifically, its inability to engender the degree of political awareness that communities need to engage critically with government authorities and broader society. Again, this is linked to the point above about the imperative for state actors to engage systematically at the community level. Political pressure is necessary to realise this, and the pressure needs to be applied from below.

This ultimately makes change a political project, one with vested interests and power struggles at its core. The challenge lies in getting communities sufficiently committed to this project in the long term. In Otumara, where the majority of residents identify strongly with their origins in the southeast of the country, weak ties to the land seem to be a factor that has historically precluded political engagement:

“I would just say [residents] are acting less concerned because, even before it got to this extent, I called for a meeting... let’s meet, let’s see how we can involve ourselves in these things. But at the end of the day, it’s just me... People even taking charge are the landlords and some property owners... the Yorubas and the Ilajes — those are the ones running helter-skelter... In Otumara, the Igbos take like 78% of the community, you cannot get all the Yorubas again, because some of them have even sold out their properties to the Igbos. At the end of the day, we are left with like 10% of

the community running all the things... They actually have this sense of negligence that, any how it happens, they are going to look for a way. They have that mindset that if [eviction] happens, they shall always look for a way, so that's just it." Key Informant Interview 1

In Isale Akoka and Ago Egun, on the other hand, past engagement has resulted in little change for residents — and they highlight this as evidence of the futility of trying to influence politics for the better. Perhaps more problematically, many residents have become inured to the state's abdication of its responsibility to provide the public services — water, waste disposal, security, education, and so on — that they seek. Rather than engage critically with the state on its many failures, residents often direct their censure inward, criticising the coping strategies their communities have had to deploy in the vacuum created by government inaction.

It is not surprising that the lack of responsiveness and accountability from local and state government actors has generated this level of citizen apathy over time.

Paradoxically, however, this is precisely what makes political engagement necessary, even inevitable, in the context. Our analysis of the civic media labs reveals that there is more work to be done in this regard. The experiences of the host communities illustrate how state negligence can combine with low incomes and low levels of literacy at the grassroots to produce especially high levels of political disenfranchisement. To address this gap, future interventions by civil society need to emphasise broader civic education and political sensitisation for grassroots movements. This is the foundation that is required for the media-making and advocacy skills delivered by the labs to take root and thrive. A framework that can be of use here is Paulo Freire's radical philosophy of conscientisation which advocates for restoring the rights of people who have been systematically marginalised and oppressed by dominant classes — in this case, the governing class — through critical dialogue, reflection and action (Freire, 1996). This is the depth of engagement that is required to realise change on a sufficiently broad scale across the city, in both spatial and temporal terms.

4

Conclusion

This paper has described the implementation of IIED's civic media labs in Lagos by Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) and the Media4Change (M4C) team from 2023 to 2024. The paper has also discussed in detail key findings from the process of monitoring and evaluating lab activities as they unfolded in real time. The synchronous, iterative processes of implementation and evaluation mean the project falls within the scope of action research, which uses the tools of critical inquiry and analysis to foster ongoing reflection, learning and adaptation in various fields of practice.

The design of the action research project in this case provided us with the opportunity to test the underlying assumption of the civic media labs, that training social housing movements in the use of media technologies is an effective way to improve their communication and advocacy practices for greater policy impact. This theory of change is especially pertinent in the context of Lagos where, as was detailed in a policy analysis report that preceded the present study, a disregard for the right of citizens to decent, affordable housing by the state has left the former — especially those living in the hundreds of informal settlements scattered across the city — in a perennially precarious position, and often without recourse to the law. A further dimension to the design of the labs in this context was the promotion of peer-to-peer learning, demonstrated in the reliance on the M4C team — who are themselves members of the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, the de facto grassroots housing movement in the city — to implement the labs, rather than bringing in external expertise. This decision was directly influenced by Amartya Sen's 'capability approach' to development, which emphasises the autonomy and agency that individuals and groups in particular contexts have to

choose the course of action that is best for them under their specific circumstances (Jacobson, 2016).

Set in the 'living labs' (Hossain et al., 2019) of Ago Egun, Isale Akoka and Otumara communities in Lagos, our research interrogated the practice of the M4C team in directing and delivering the training curriculum as well as the products (short video documentaries). The discussion of our findings proceeded along three main dimensions, in line with the research questions that prompted the inquiry: an understanding of how civic media tools and strategies can be deployed to boost the capability of grassroots groups to communicate and advocate effectively for change; an appreciation of how new training and tools can help mitigate factors that have historically limited the effectiveness of grassroots media advocacy in the context; and the identification of opportunities for broader policy influence afforded by the civic media practices of relevant grassroots groups.

The first main finding was that, in the process of making the video documentaries that ultimately emerged from the labs, evidence was strongest for capability development in the areas of positive narrative-building and storytelling, irrespective of access to technological tools and/or know-how. The narratives unearthed by lab participants proved to be more incisive and insightful than is typically the case with externally constructed narratives, pointing as they did to the structural causes of community problems and defying simplistic narratives that conveniently place the blame of inaction on citizens. This finding reinforces the primacy of the goal of grassroots advocacy — change — regardless of the means (media or otherwise) deployed to that end. This is a fundamental achievement. In the face of negative narratives and stereotypes routinely propagated by state and non-state actors (Ouma et al., 2024), this newly-

developed capability to challenge dominant external voices can shift agency back to grassroots movements and lay a foundation for new directions in policy and public engagement.

Secondly, lab participants demonstrated resourcefulness and resilience in surmounting initial barriers posed by long-running rifts within their respective communities. They ultimately succeeded in mobilising fellow residents around the common vision of change, helping to build community trust in the process. Constraints of a structural nature however posed more formidable barriers to inclusion. These included: restrictions posed by gender norms (which limited the participation of women in some instances); the high costs associated with the acquisition of media tools and equipment (which limited the practical application of technical skills learned during the labs); and generally low English literacy levels (which limited the ability of participants to engage with the broader policy *milieu* in more strategic ways). Considering that this last factor is crucial for effective advocacy with external audiences, it will be important to ensure that this capability is present — or can be built — to a practical level when future labs are being designed.

Lastly, and perhaps most crucially for transformation, our analysis revealed the possibility to build on the desire for economic and social improvements that drove participation in the labs, to gain broader political momentum around the issue of housing rights in the long term. In particular, grassroots groups — and citizens more broadly — need to acknowledge that change is a fundamentally political process, one that responds most effectively to explicit engagement and pressure from below. This process of ‘conscientisation’ (Freire, 1996), is one that can be facilitated by civil society actors, whilst also helping grassroots groups overcome individual and infrastructural barriers to self-actualisation highlighted above in the short to medium term.

There are several limitations to the model deployed in the labs. While the peer-to-peer learning model facilitated a sense of cooperation, it may have been constraining from a technical point of view, as there is considerable scope for the M4C trainers themselves to broaden their expertise. More fundamentally, the degree of appropriateness of the lab approach for specific communities may be contingent on the existence of certain preconditions in those communities. A key ‘takeaway’ from the study is that context matters, and not all informal settlements — even when they appear to face similar threats and have access to the same opportunities — can be assumed to be amenable to the same strategies for change. For example in the Otumara community where residents were most at risk of eviction by the state government, it was the least committed to the lab process. This is apparently because, despite having been settled in the community for decades, many residents are economic migrants who have comparatively weak ties to the land and are prepared to accept transience as part of the deal.

Nonetheless, the experience of JEI/M4C on the civic media labs project highlights a number of ways in which civil society actors can provide institutional support to grassroots groups seeking to build capabilities in media advocacy: by facilitating access to technological equipment and co-working spaces for media production; providing shared storage space for the content developed by different groups; navigating access to external support for sustaining and scaling-up lab implementation, including through grant applications; and expanding the remit of the labs to include skills-building for more strategic engagement with broader public and policy discourses. These inputs may appear modest relative to the scale of the challenge, but they are essential for empowering citizens to lead a more radical programme of change in the long term.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Basic training curriculum for civic media labs

Day 1

- Introduction: Getting to know one another and level of experience (Bisola: 9am–9:30am)
- Making media: overview of week and goals (Bisola)
- What is “social impact media”? How can media make change? (Mr Vagabond: 9:30am–11:30am)
 - i. Social Justice
 - ii. Environmental Concerns
 - iii. Health and Well-being
 - iv. Education
 - v. Poverty and Inequality
 - vi. Human Rights
 - vii. Civic Engagement
- Introduction to Media4Change team and presentation of past media work and media-advocacy campaigns (Mustapha)

Break: 11:30am–12:10:pm

- Introduction to photography (Sam: 12:30pm–2pm)
- Basics of DSLR camera, including aperture and shutter speed basics (with practical exercise).
 - i. Rule Of Thirds
 - ii. Framing
 - iii. Focusing
 - iv. Camera settings/modes
 - v. Lens and shot sizes
 - vi. Lighting
- Basics of smartphone photography (including recommended applications). Practicals and critique sessions.
 - i. How to take better shots with a phone
 - ii. Understanding the pro-mode in phone camera setting
 - iii. Shooting angles

Day 2

- Introduction to storytelling (Halima: 9am–11:30am)
 - i. What is storytelling?
 - ii. Different categories of stories that are told
 - iii. Social impact stories that we tell
 - iv. Crafting a narrative
 - v. Interview techniques
 - vi. Story messaging
- Film screenings on documentaries and examples (Mustapha)

Break: 11:30am–12:10pm

- Watching and discussion session on films and messaging
- Introduction to Media Advocacy Campaign review past work completed and key themes (Muyinat: 12:30pm–1:45pm)
 - i. Use of media for advocacy
 - ii. Review past work done with different campaigns
- Introduction to Audio recording (Mustapha: 1:45pm–2:30pm)
 - i. What is sound recording?
 - ii. Different sound recording gadgets/equipment
 - iii. Basic settings on audio recorder
 - iv. How to take good sound

Day 3

- Introduction basic to videography (Michael: 9am–11:30am)
 - i. What is videography?
 - ii. Different types of videography
 - iii. Pre-production planning
 - iv. Show and not tell
 - v. Camera settings for video
 - vi. Software used in editing
 - vii. The creative eye
 - viii. Camera kits and brands

Break

- Field practice on video training and critique session (Mustapha: 12pm–1:30pm)

Appendix 2. Intermediate training curriculum for civic media labs

DAY 1: Photography

- Applying the rules of photography in taking a photo that tells a story (mobile photography and DSLR) (Sam: 10am–11:45am)
 - i. Composition (Elements in composition you need to know)
 - ii. The creative eye
 - iii. Simple Light Situations
 - iv. Portrait photography and environmental photography

Break: 11:45am–12:15pm

- How do you link your photography with the story (Sam: 12:15pm–12:45pm)
- Group assignment and practical session in the community, presentation of photo stories and portraits including composition, the creative eye taken by participants (Michael: 2:45pm–2pm)

DAY 2: Storytelling

- The deeper understanding in storytelling for impact (Bisola: 10am–11:45am)
 - i. What are the 5 W's
 - ii. Art of Storytelling
 - iii. How to be a better storyteller
 - iv. Who am I telling my story to?
 - v. Who can I collaborate with?

Break: 11:45am–12:15pm

- Highlighting stories participants might want to pursue and grouping them. Practical draft in making creating those stories (Bisola: 12:15pm — 1pm)
- Presentation of projects by groups (1pm–2pm)

DAY 3: Media Advocacy and Sound

- Now that you have made your story, what next? (Muyinat: 10am–11:45am)
 - i. How do you put this media to good use?
 - ii. Campaign strategy you want to employ
 - iii. Target audience, how does it get to them?
 - iv. Media advocacy in partnership
 - v. Distribution plans and method
 - vi. Monitoring and evaluation

Break: 11:45am–12:15pm

- Film screening on Media Advocacy (12:15pm–12:35pm)
- Audio stories (Mustapha: 12:35pm–2pm)
 - i. How to tell audio stories
 - ii. Pre-Production
 - iii. Scripting your audio story
 - iv. Managing audio media
 - v. How you can link audio media with advocacy
- Editing

Appendix 3. Advanced training curriculum for civic media labs

Day 1: Videography

- Videography setup for interviews (mobile photography and DSLR) (Sam: 9am–11:30am)
 - i. Explanations on camera settings for videos (Similarities with photography)
 - ii. Differences in resolution and the right one for filming
 - iii. How the rules of third apply to videography/filmmaking
 - iv. How to position subjects for interviews

Break: 11:30am–12pm

- Discussion on common challenges faced in videography (Sam: 12pm–12:30pm)
- Group practical session in setting up your camera for filming — Digital camera & Smartphone (Michael: 12:30pm–1:30pm)
- Group assignment on videography setup, interview recording of one another on topics suggested (Sam: 1:30pm–2:15pm)
- Group presentations (Sam: 2:15pm–3pm)

Day 2: Storytelling

- How to conduct an interview (Bisola: 9am–11:30am)
 - i. Interview techniques and public speaking
 - ii. How to prepare your subject for the interview
 - iii. Body language while interviewing
 - iv. How to keep your subject engaged
 - v. Getting follow up questions on your subject's story

Break: 11:30am–12pm

- Audio session on stories (Michael: 12pm–12:45pm)
- Group practical assignment on coming up with a topic and going to get the story on field (Bisola: 12:45pm–1:50pm)
- Groups assemble to prepare their stories for presentation (1:50pm–2:20pm)
- Group presentation (2:20pm–3pm)

Day 3: Editing & Media Advocacy

- Editing your video (Collaborative practical process) (Sam: 9am–11:30am)
 - i. How do you organize your files
 - ii. How the story sequence you want to edit will look like (Beginning, middle and end)
 - iii. Syncing audio and video
 - iv. Editing process on the smartphone — Apps to use and how to use them

Break: 11:30am–12pm

- Film screening on Media Advocacy: “AN INSIGNIFICANT MAN” IMPACT CAMPAIGN (12pm–12:30pm)
- Now that you have finished editing, what next?
- Social media dissemination: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube (Michael: 12:30pm–1:15pm)

Appendix 4. Agenda for project phase of civic media labs

Day 1

- Questions and feedback from participants from the last three phases, and the plan for the next few months (Vagabond: 9am–9:30am)
 - i. What they've learned
 - ii. What they tried out
 - iii. Things they still want to improve on
 - iv. What is their mindset like since the last three phases of training
- Quick revision of trainings done over the last three phases (9:30am–11am)
 - i. Media Advocacy (Muyinat: 9:30am–10am)
 - ii. Storytelling (Michael: 10am–10:30am)
 - iii. Photography & Videography (Mustapha/Sam: 10:30am–11am)
- Project planning and how to create your collaborative story
 - i. Project planning for your story and roles & responsibilities shared, using the project planning form to guide your process (Bisola: 11am–12:15pm)

Break: 12:15pm–12:30pm

- Participants identify story they want to work from suggestions they made before or new ideas and start project planning (supervised by Bisola: 12:30pm–1:15pm)
- Presentation of project planned (Questions from trainers to help guide the idea: 1:15pm–1:45pm)
- Research to be conducted on project, next steps and period for execution (Mustapha/Sam: 1:45pm–2pm)

Day 2

- First day of participants playing their roles and feedback on their project thoughts so far (supervised by Mustapha: 9am–9:15am)
- Drafting the questionnaire for your story and identifying people and locations (9:15am–9:45am)
- Dividing the group for field outing interview and research for more information on their project (9:45am)
- Research fieldwork for project by participants (9:45am–11:30am (supervised by trainers assigned to each group — Muyinat, Mustapha, Michael, Bisola, Halima, Sam, Vagabond)
- Discussion on what participants found out on the field (Michael: 11:30am–12:15pm)
 - i. Feedback, story wins and challenges
 - ii. Potential strong points to help project
 - iii. What can be done better

Break: 12:15pm–12:30pm

- Going through stories with participants (Sam: 12:30pm–1:15pm)
 - i. Listening and choosing strong stories to return for full interview and use for project
 - ii. Scheduling day for film shoot
 - iii. Room to identify more collaborators from community as assignment before shoot day

Final remarks from trainers to help project be successful (Vagabond, Muyinat, Halima, Tobi: 1:15pm–1:45pm)

Appendix 5. Ex-ante questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
3. What age group do you belong to?
 - 15-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+
4. What community do you live in?
 - Ago-Egun
 - Isale-Akoka
 - Iwaya
 - Oko-Agbon
 - Otumara
 - Sogunro
 - Other
5. What language(s) do you speak?
 - Efik
 - Egun
 - English
 - Hausa
 - Ibibio
 - Igbo
 - Ilaje
 - Pidgin English
 - Yoruba
 - Other
6. What is your occupation?
7. If you are currently a student, please indicate your **current** level at school.
 - Primary
 - Junior Secondary
 - Senior Secondary
 - Ordinary National Diploma
 - Higher National Diploma
 - University undergraduate
 - University postgraduate
 - Other
8. If you are NOT currently a student, please indicate your **highest** level of education.
 - Primary
 - Junior Secondary
 - Senior Secondary
 - Ordinary National Diploma
 - Higher National Diploma
 - University undergraduate
 - University postgraduate
 - Other
9. How many hours do you work and/or study each day?
 - 0
 - 1-4
 - 5-8
 - 9-12
 - 13-16
 - 17+
10. How did you hear about this training opportunity?
 - Family member
 - Friend
 - Neighbour
 - Community leader
 - Religious leader
 - WhatsApp group
 - Other
11. Why did you decide to join the training?
12. When did you attend the training for the first time? (e.g., 20 September 2023)
13. What level(s) of training do you hope to complete?
 - Basic
 - Intermediate
 - Advanced
14. What practical skills do you expect to have gained by the end of the training?
15. How do you expect the training to help you and/or your community three **months** from now?
16. How do you expect the training to help you and/or your community three **years** from now?

Appendix 6. Interview guide for Ago Egun and Isale Akoka participants in training phase of civic media labs

RQ1: What role do residents see for media and communications in giving voice to their priorities and aspirations?

RQ2: What practical and strategic requirements do residents have for media and communications training?

RQ3: How well do different activities and components of the civic media labs help meet specific community priorities?

RQ4: How well do different activities and components of the civic media labs help meet strategic community goals, including solidarity and inclusion?

RQ5: What prospects for change do allied and non-allied actors see arising from civic media lab processes and outputs?

1. Tell me a bit about yourself — your education/job, your family, your interests.
2. Tell me a bit about your community — how long you have lived here, the opportunities you see for yourself and others, and the challenges.
3. Of the challenges you described above, which one would you say is the greatest? Why?
4. Of the challenges you described above, which one(s) relates to your motivation for joining this media training?
5. Do you expect the knowledge you are gaining from the training to help you or your community resolve any of those challenges?
 - a. If no, why not?
 - b. If yes, how?
6. Which particular skills and strategies (from the training) do you think would be most useful for engaging different groups on the challenges described above?
 - a. Your community
 - b. Other communities
 - c. Government officials
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this training process and the expected outcomes for you and the community?

Appendix 7. Interview guide for Otumara participants in training phase of civic media labs

RQ1: What outcomes do residents want from the redevelopment process initiated by the state government in their community?

RQ2: What role do residents see for data-driven communication in advocating for the outcomes they want to see?

RQ3: What opportunities and challenges do residents see for advancing the community's cause through social and traditional media?

RQ4: What changes — in the community, public policy and the wider society — can be attributed to the use of media and communication strategies in advocating for the housing rights of residents?

1. Tell me a bit about yourself — your education/job, your family, your interests.
2. Tell me a bit about your community — how long you have lived here, the opportunities you see for yourself and others, and the challenges.
3. Of the challenges you described above, which one would you say is the greatest? Why?
4. Of the challenges you described above, which one(s) relates to your motivation for joining this media training?
5. Do you expect the knowledge you are gaining from the training to help you or your community resolve any of those challenges?
 - a. If no, why not?
 - b. If yes, how?
6. In light of the state government's plan for regeneration in Otumara, which particular skills and strategies (from the training) do you think would be most useful for engaging different groups on the issue?
 - a. Your community
 - b. Other communities
 - c. Government officials
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this training process and the expected outcomes for you and the community?

Appendix 8. Interview guide for key informant interviews with members of the Media4Change team

Background

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- How did you come to be associated with JEI/Media4Change?
- What is your current role in the organisation?
- How does your work interface with that of others in the organisation?
- How do you interface with local communities in the course of your work?

Programme design

- When did you come on board the civic media labs project?
- What is your understanding of the project objectives?
- What kind of project decisions have you contributed to so far? Give examples.
- Tell me about how the training curriculum was developed — who was involved in choosing the topics, researching the content, preparing the slides, selecting the communities, drawing up the timetable, etc.
- Do you see any challenges/shortcomings in the way the civic media labs are currently structured? If yes, how do you think these can be overcome?

Programme content

- Can you list and/or describe the topics in the training curriculum?
 - Classify them according to whether they are basic, intermediate or advanced
 - Share any official documentation describing the content of the training
- Have you had reason to change/review any aspect of the training curriculum based on feedback from the communities?
- Are there any additional topics that you think might enhance the content in the future?

Programme implementation

- What aspects of the training have you been involved in delivering, and how?
- Have you had reason to change/review your approach to conducting any aspect of the training based on your experience in any of the project communities?
 - Direct feedback from trainees / community representatives
 - Indirect feedback via observations made by media team members
- How do you think the media team should capture and codify the civic media lab process for posterity?

Media4Change?

- Can you describe your personal experience with the labs so far?
- To what extent does your experience align with the expectations you had going into the programme?
- What have been your greatest successes on the programme — as a person and as a team?
- What have been your greatest challenges on the programme — as a person and as a team?
- Have you received any feedback from participants regarding the potential for change they see as a result of the labs? Are you happy with this level of change?
 - If no, what level of change do you think is possible and/or desirable?

Appendix 9. Observation protocol for civic media labs

Note to researcher: Disaggregate your responses by sex as much as possible.

Location:

Session type (basic, intermediate or advanced):

Day (eg, 1 of 3):

Date:

CATEGORY	PROMPT	NOTES
Context	Describe the attributes (physical, social, cultural, economic, etc) of the community and the space where the training is taking place.	
	Is there any phenomenon of interest in the community where the training is taking place? Reflect on why you find this interesting/relevant.	
	Is there any phenomenon of interest in/around the space where the training is taking place? Reflect on why you find this interesting/relevant.	
	To what extent would you say conditions in the community and the training space facilitate the objectives of the lab?	
	Any other observations about the context of the lab?	
Processes	How well organised is the session? (Reflect on issues of promptness, timing, pace, etc)	
	What is the content of the training for the day? (Reflect on topics covered, depth, format, etc)	
	What is the style of delivery by individual facilitators? How appropriate is each style to the context and objectives of the labs?	
	What methods/props were handled by <u>facilitators</u> during the session? (E.g. projector, camera, phone, etc)	
	What methods/props were handled by <u>trainees</u> during the session?	
	Any other observations about the processes in the lab?	
Interactions	How interactive or otherwise are the techniques used by facilitators in the training?	
	What is the nature and level of participation among the trainees? (E.g., are some more active/attentive than others?)	
	How often do individual facilitators pause to check understanding among the trainees and/or solicit clarifying questions from them?	
	How often do participants (take note of specific names) ask the facilitators clarifying questions?	
	Was there any communication / interaction among trainees before, during or after the session?	
	Any other observations about the interactions in the lab?	

Appendix 10. Capacities for M4C communication functions developed by the civic media labs

COMMUNICATION FUNCTION	CML CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	EXAMPLE
Create awareness of community issues in wider society	Social impact media Storytelling	"Most bloggers tend to be interested in something like this. If they see the video, they are like, so something is happening like this. They can just take it up and post it around, because some bloggers, they just gather news around and put it on the internet for people to see. I think if they see our videos and seem interested in it, they can just post it." Isale Akoka
Stop forced evictions and human rights violations	Social impact media Storytelling	"Those attacking us during the interviews were made to understand that... we are not those people that try to bring negativity to the community or give them problems of demolition in the community... And we made them realise that it is also part of human rights, because every Lagosian has a right to access clean and drinkable water." Ago Egun
Inform paralegal work	Storytelling Media advocacy	"... we are using media in connection with paralegals to tell the stories about our communities." M4C team member
Educate communities about the law	Storytelling Film screenings	"Our community is a waterfront community, and you know, nowadays, the government wants the waterfront. So, with all the skills I have learnt so far in this training, I can even tell stories on how the community was founded because we have been there now for more than 45 years and then there is no law that this place belongs to the government. Even if it is for the government, we have been there for long and they cannot just come and say they want to use that place... So, with all these things, I can actually... go against the government that the place is not theirs, it is already for people living there." Ago Egun
Change harmful narratives about communities	Social impact media Videography Film screenings	"I have learned a lot. How to produce, how to do [video] editing... How to introduce yourself to people. How to go to them and tell you, this is where we are from, this is our place. How to tell them your story... And if something is happening in an area, how you can invite people... and how you can protect your people." Isale Akoka
Sound a call to action	Social impact media Videography Media advocacy	"I think most of [the community leaders] will do things in their own interest so they will not want to do anything that would damage their access to the local government. But I know if the video is eventually posted there, I think it would be a cause for discussion. It means it will be discussed and carried up." Otumara

COMMUNICATION FUNCTION	CML CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	EXAMPLE
Support the urban poor	Social impact media Media advocacy	“I think the video portrays a kind of lifestyle. People in that environment are living, and as citizens, what should be their right? What should be given to them? So, it’s like reaching out to [the government] for help and what they think can be the solution... The education in that environment is too poor. They need education, and these people are part the people that voted the so-called leader there.” Isale Akoka
Change government policies	Social impact media Media advocacy	“I think, talking of the impacts of the work we’ve been doing, like with the recent development in Otumara. For the government to go for a partnership with the community to develop, means we’ve been able to communicate our challenges to them. We’ve been able to say: this is our community; we welcome development but we don’t welcome forced eviction and degrading of people. It means our message has gotten to them...” M4C team member
Help communities to organise around issues	Media advocacy	“We have three different community development associations... It’s a single community, it’s supposed to have one, but because of the power struggles...There are times that the three of them come together as one body, like a forum. So, that’s our target — their forum... There are some past CDA members that have a say in local government that could help us pass this information. We have up to, like, three to four to five of them to go to and say, this is what we’ve been doing. We would like for you to help us.” Otumara
Build voice / agency / autonomy among community residents	Media advocacy	“...there were a lot of things I didn’t know about before but when we entered the programme, I knew about them. Things like how to report or how to fight for our community... The ways to go through so we can be attended to whenever we are trying to reach higher authorities.” Ago Egun
Co-opt language and terminologies	Media advocacy	“I think it can make a difference because... the way we structured the video, we will bring in a speech by the government... talking about commissioning about 180 [waste] trucks to go into communities... We just took that video... we came to the community and we were showing them... have you heard about this? This is what the government said. So, from there, the plan was to actually go on social media, tag the respective officers that made those statements, and show them, look at what you said you have been doing, and look at what the people said has been done. There’s nothing...” Otumara

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Lagos, Nigeria's most populous city, has a shortage of affordable housing that has resulted in the proliferation of informal settlements. Residents routinely face state-sanctioned rights violations, prompting counter-campaigns by grassroots movements and civil society groups. This paper analyses the contribution of a series of civic media labs — community-based sessions that provided training in media and communication skills — to building the capacity of grassroots groups to effectively advocate for their right to housing. The analysis highlights opportunities for leveraging capabilities developed during the labs for longer-term impact, as well as short-term strategies for supporting grassroots-led media advocacy in exclusionary political contexts.

IIED is an international policy and research organisation working with partners globally to build a fairer, more sustainable world. Together, we challenge the destructive economic models, unjust power dynamics, entrenched mindsets and protectionist laws that perpetuate poverty, suppress rights and hinder progress towards a thriving world. We explore solutions to complex economic, social and environmental crises, using research, action and influencing to tackle the root causes of climate change, nature loss and inequality.



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