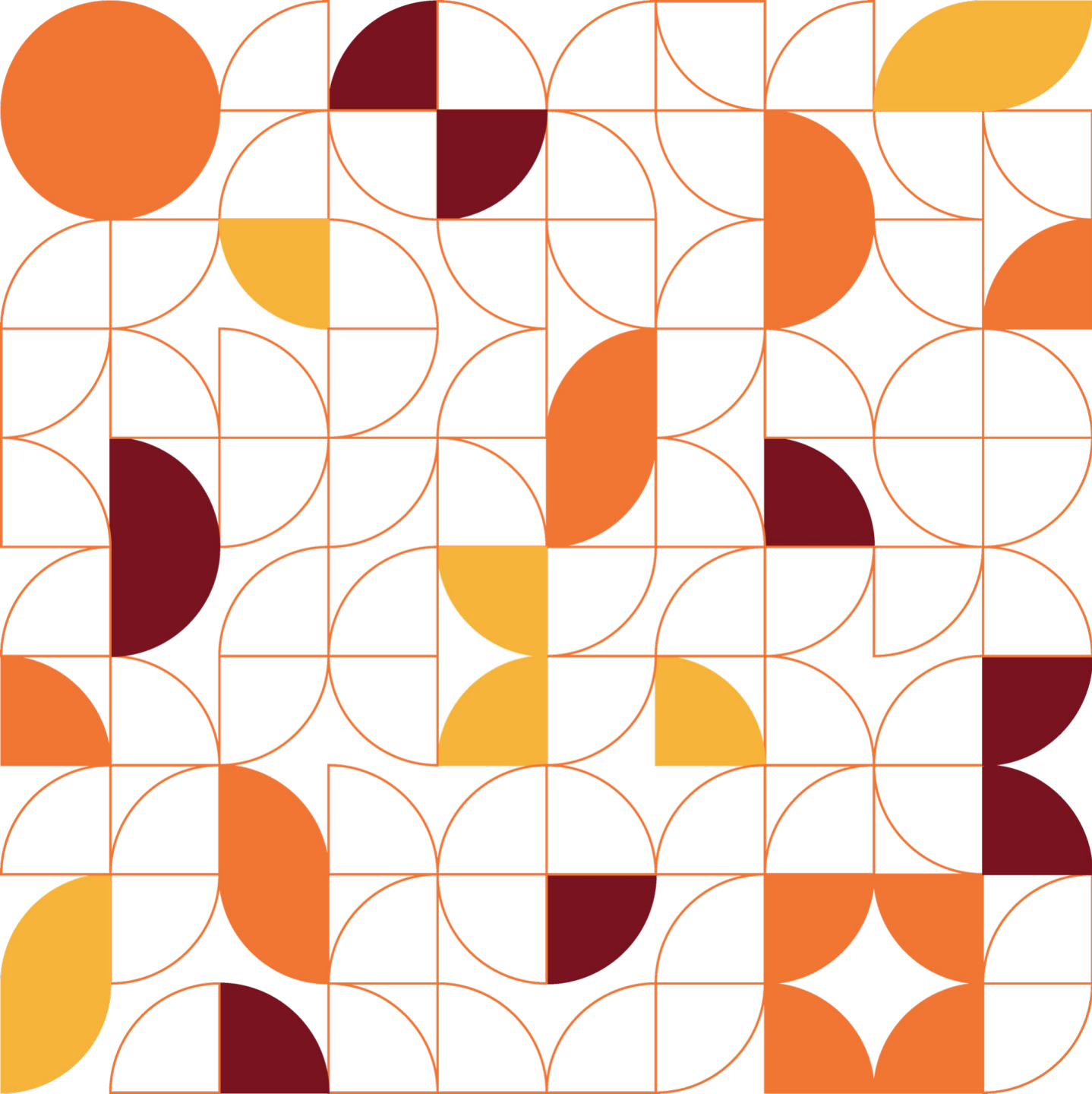Reos Partners

Re-Imagining INGOs: RINGO Project

A CASE STUDY FOR A SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB

2025

Phase 1: Define Initiative

About

In essence, this phase is about establishing the enabling conditions for the success of the initiative.

A dedicated team clarifies the intention and impact objective of the initiative. The team ensures a solid and systemic understanding of the context by including diverse perspectives to ensure the impact objective is responding to a clearly identified need in the system.

The team establishes trustful collaboration with key stakeholders of the ecosystem - and potentially establish co-convening partnerships.

It is crucial to invest sufficient time to establish the foundations of the initiative. Rushing these steps results in inefficiencies and extra work down the line.
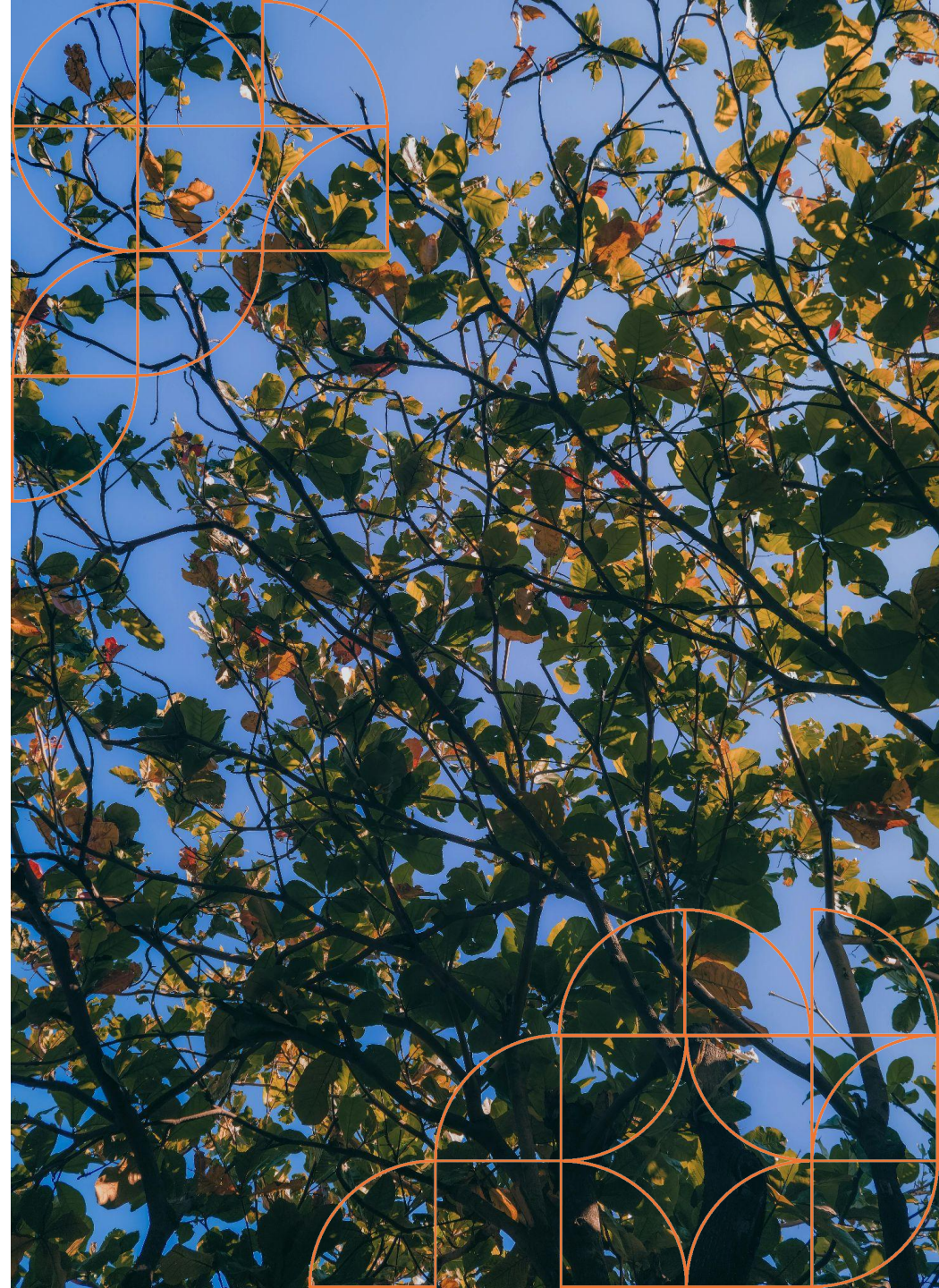
What is RINGO?

RINGO is the first globally-coordinated cross-sectoral effort to revolutionize global civil society by interrogating the *purpose, structures, power, and positioning of INGOs.*
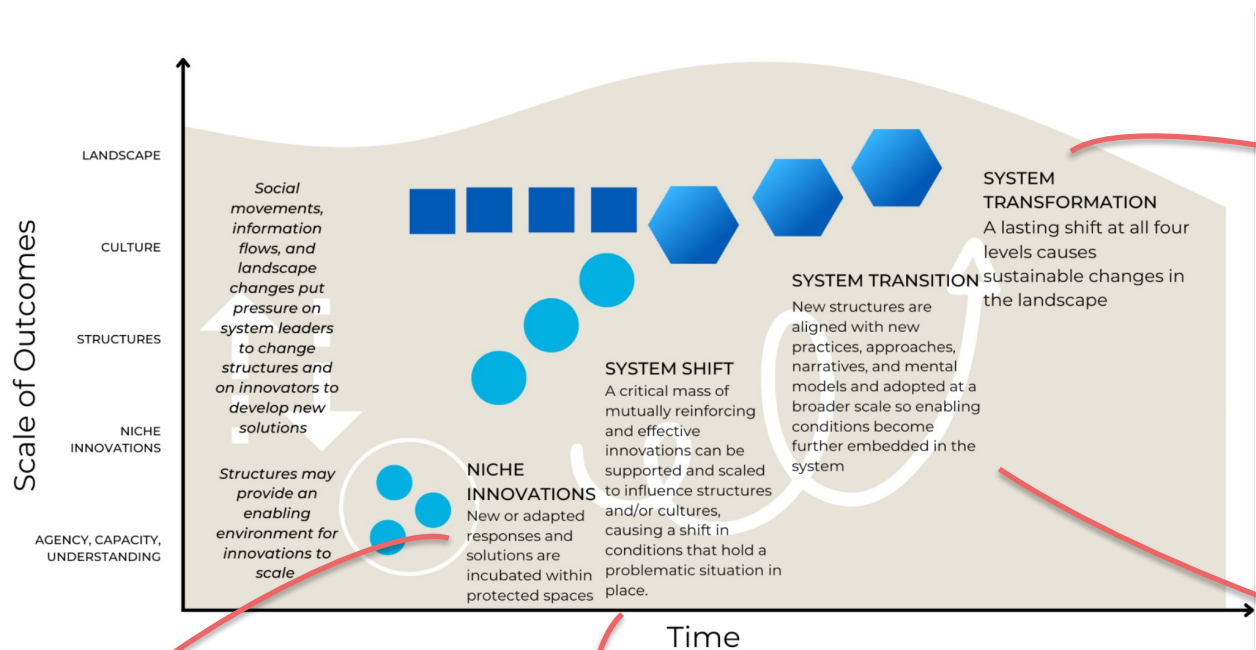
- It's central approach is **RE-IMAGINING BY DOING** – and a focus on bringing stakeholders into action.

- A '**Social Lab**' of global innovators who represent 'the system' of INGOs, including funders, INGO leaders, local civil society organisations, and academics. It started with 55 innovators and quickly grew to 95.

- **9 prototypes** have been launched that can transform INGO institutions and the systems in which they function. These prototypes will have enormous impacts on how INGOs are structured, their funding and accountability models, what this means for organizations locally, and what solidarity means.

- RINGO is co-convened by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and RightsColab with Reos Partners as process partner.

Setting the Ambition Level

Scale of Outcomes (vertical axis)

LANDSCAPE

CULTURE

STRUCTURES

NICHE INNOVATIONS

AGENCY, CAPACITY, UNDERSTANDING

Social movements, information flows, and landscape changes put pressure on system leaders to change structures and on innovators to develop new solutions

Structures may provide an enabling environment for innovations to scale

NICHE INNOVATIONS
New or adapted responses and solutions are incubated within protected spaces

SYSTEM SHIFT
A critical mass of mutually reinforcing and effective innovations can be supported and scaled to influence structures and/or cultures, causing a shift in conditions that hold a problematic situation in place.

SYSTEM TRANSITION
New structures are aligned with new practices, approaches, narratives, and mental models and adopted at a broader scale so enabling conditions become further embedded in the system

SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION
A lasting shift at all four levels causes sustainable changes in the landscape

Time

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LONG-TERM GOAL: By 2030 INGOs have become open and equitable vehicles for global solidarity. They will work in genuine partnership with national level civil society (and civil society in other national contexts) to shift power and mobilise resources so that people affected can determine their use. We experience INGOs as useful support structures to help build the resilience and strength of civil society everywhere.

WITHIN 5 YEARS:
1. **Funding –** the funding eco-system sees a greater balance of finances flowing directly to national/local civil society, with more participatory and inclusive models of funding implemented that enable people affected to decide how resources should be utilised.
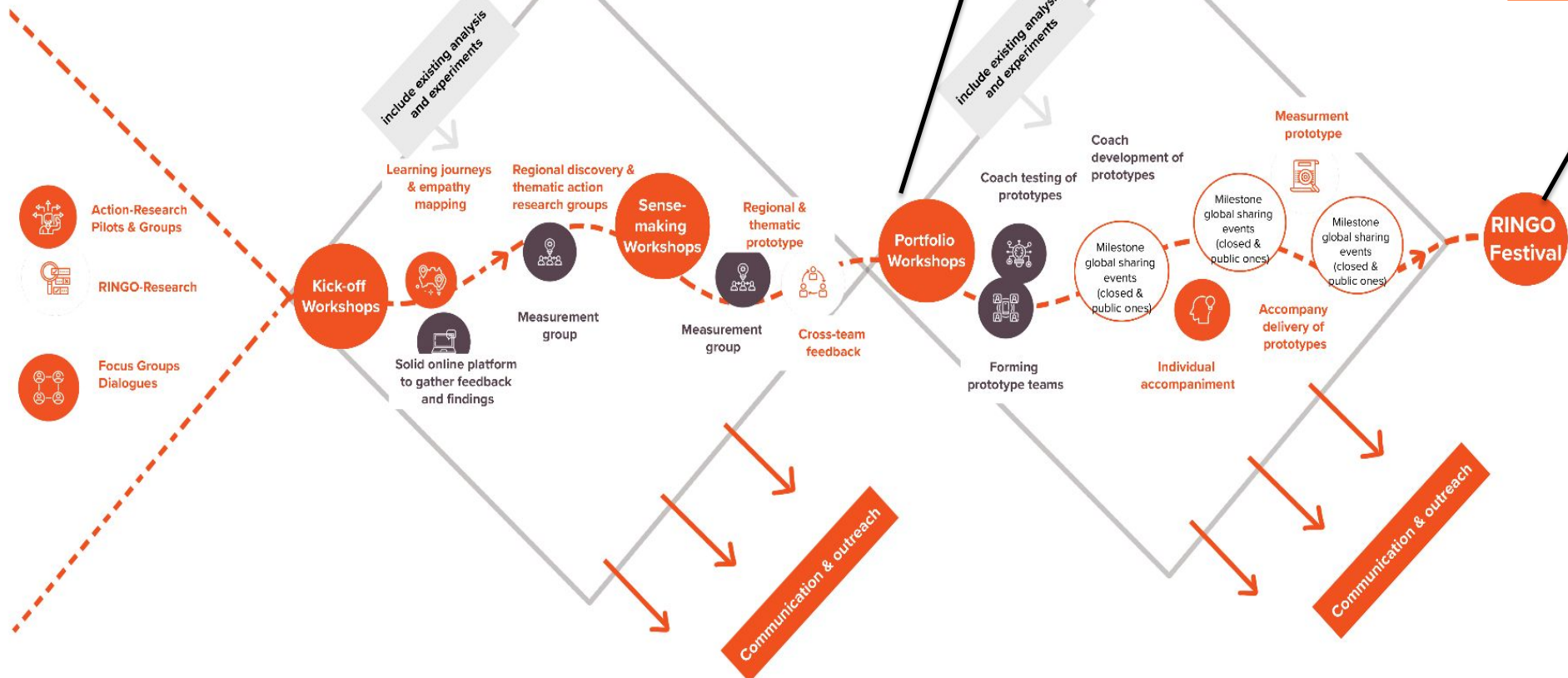
WITHIN 3 YEARS - Prototyping: The first set of prototypes have been tested and their initial evaluation is shared with a wider group of actors and stakeholders, based on a re-imagined relevance of international civil society actors.

WITHIN 3 YEARS – Collaboration: More participatory and inclusive set of models of collaboration between national civil society organisations and INGOs that respond to local populations' lived realities are articulated and adopted.

WITHIN 5 YEAR – Scale: Prototypes that demonstrate successful outcomes and meaningful impact have been evaluated and piloted for scale-up and further tested based on the ongoing learning from the first set of prototypes.

Intervention Architecture

What are the areas of stuckness in the system?

What are key leverage points for change (innovation focus)?

Selection Committee choosing a portfolio of innovation ideas

Create cross-disciplinary innovation teams that develop, test and implement these possible solutions

Share learnings broadly to influence the wider ecosystem

Inception & Convening Phase

Discovery Phase (3 months)

Define Phase (2 months)

Develop & Deliver Phase (18 months)

include existing analysis and experiments

include existing analysis and experiments

Action-Research Pilots & Groups

RINGO-Research

Focus Groups Dialogues

Kick-off Workshops

Learning journeys & empathy mapping

Solid online platform to gather feedback and findings

Regional discovery & thematic action research groups

Measurement group

Sense-making Workshops

Regional & thematic prototype

Measurement group

Cross-team feedback

Portfolio Workshops

Coach testing of prototypes

Forming prototype teams

Coach development of prototypes

Milestone global sharing events (closed & public ones)

Individual accompaniment

Measurment prototype

Milestone global sharing events (closed & public ones)

Milestone global sharing events (closed & public ones)

Accompany delivery of prototypes

RINGO Festival

Communication & outreach

Communication & outreach

Phase 2: Mobilize Team

In essence, this phase is about enrolling a diverse and committed multi-stakeholder group that have to have agency to co-create lasting change on the specific problem the initiative aims to address.

Additionally, a hosting team is formed, who jointly have the necessary process and content capabilities to ensure a successful initiative and host the wider stakeholder group - the lab team.
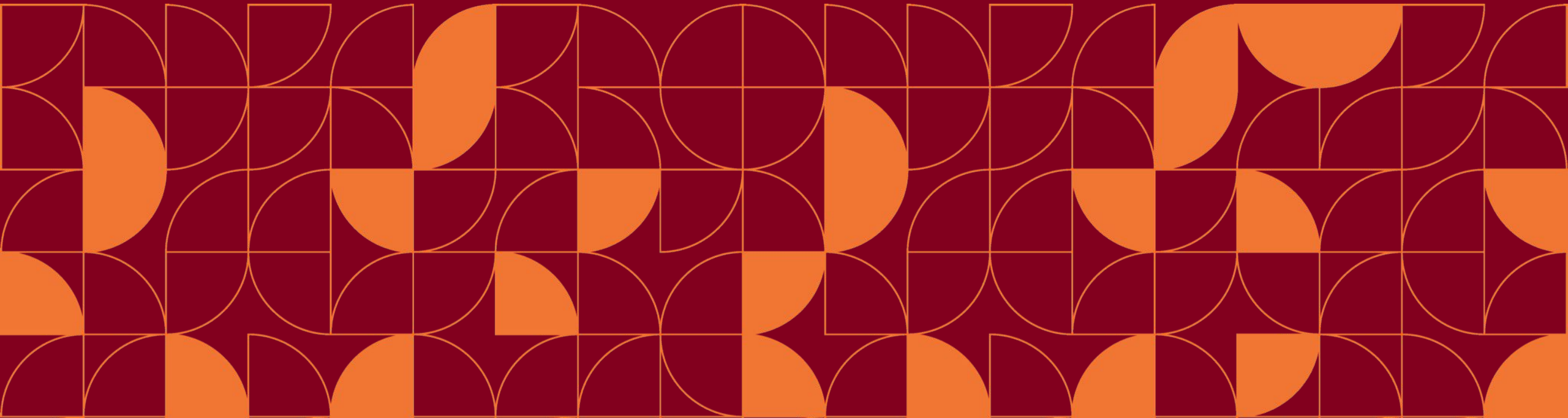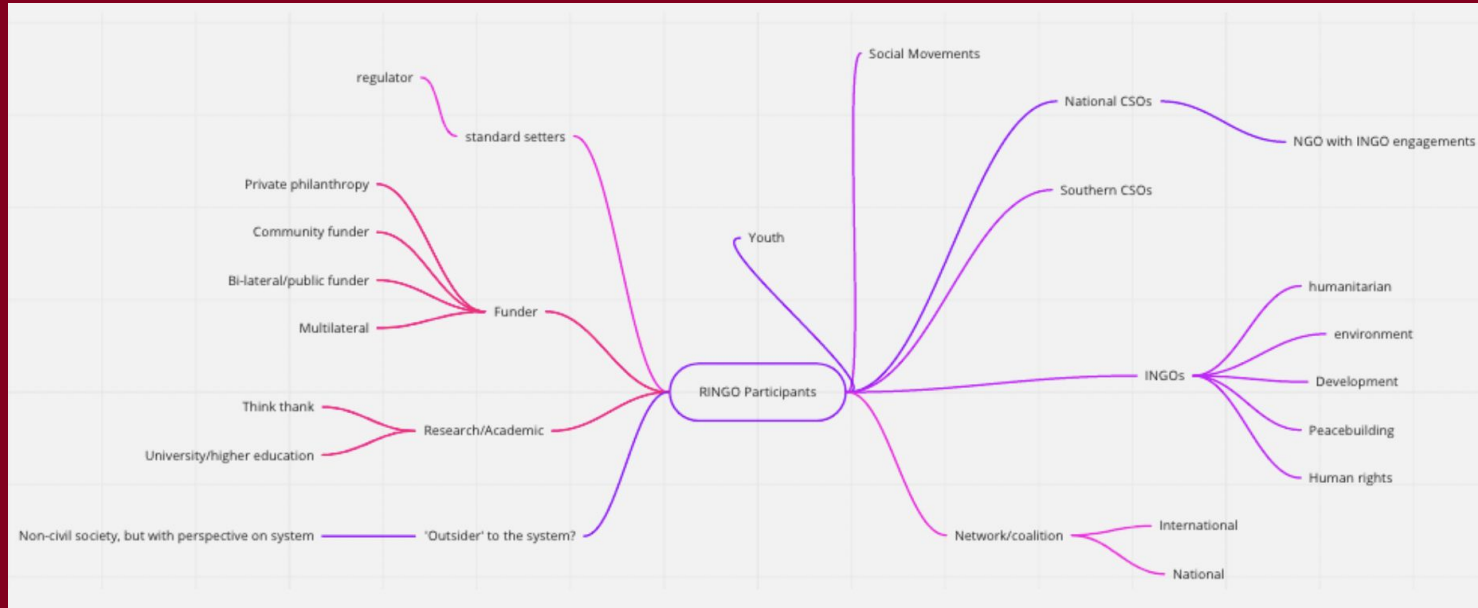
Stakeholder Selection

1. WHO?

What are the key stakeholders that need to be involved, because without their perspective at the core of the process, we will not be able to see the full picture?


4. Onboarding calls

„*We started with onboarding conversations in groups of 6, where people could identify where they're experiencing difficulties and start to connect with others.*"
Deborah Doane, RightsCoLab

After the first round of open recruitment, we spent a lot of time going through spreadsheets to identify a really diverse Lab team."
**Deborah Doane, RightsCoLab**

2. Application Process

Open application process with 200+ people applying to participate.
(building on agency and ownership)

3. Selection Process

Careful selection process, based on *individual criteria* to ensure leverage and expertise and *group criteria* to ensure diversity in gender, race, geography, & expertise.
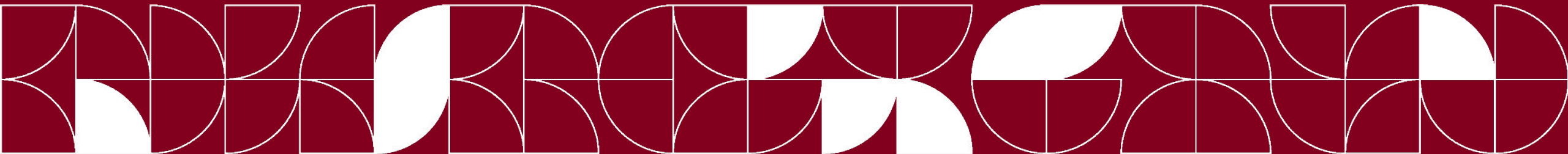
The Invitation

"The invitation isn't "we need you, please come in" but instead "why is this of value to you?"

We asked: "What is your role in this system? Where are you stuck?" And then explained how this Lab can help them get unstuck and to move away from defining the problem (which is part of the stuckness) and towards solutions.

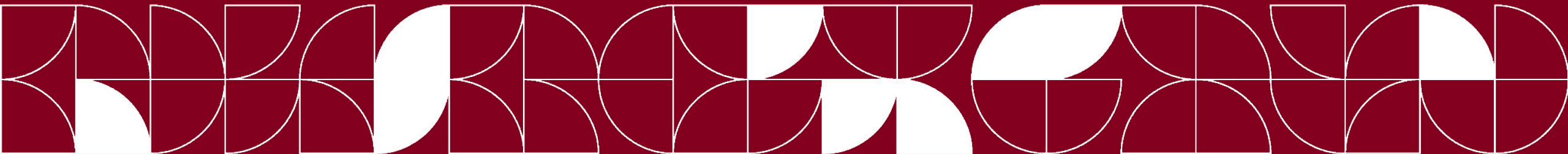*This was key: to push people towards solution building."*

– Deborah Doane, RightsCoLab
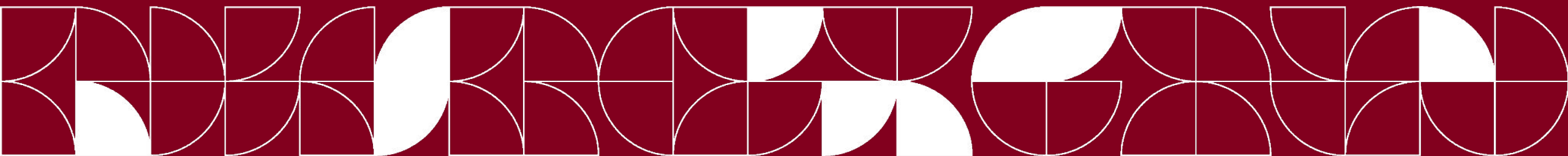
Form a Multi-Skilled Initiative

The Core Team (often called hosting team) was set up as a combination of individuals and organisations, together combining deep understanding of the INGO system, process expertise, and geographical spread.

Participants Management, Project Management, Logistics & Coordination

Coms, Newsletter, Website

Lead Convenor / Project Lead (Informally)

Visuals, Graphic Facilitation

Core Team

Research Lead – conducting accompanying studies and (demand side) surveys

Content Coaches

Process partners (constant) – responsible for designing and facilitating all interventions, workshops, innovation coaching

Rights CoLAB

WACSI

Reos Partners

Phase 3: Discover and Define

About

In essence, this phase is about identifying those places within a system where the initiative can potentially create the greatest impact.

The hosting team creates a creative, collaborative space that invites different perspectives and collective sense-making in order to arrive at a joint problem definition and a set of key leverage points for change.

The collective discovery also builds new relationships and agency among key stakeholders.
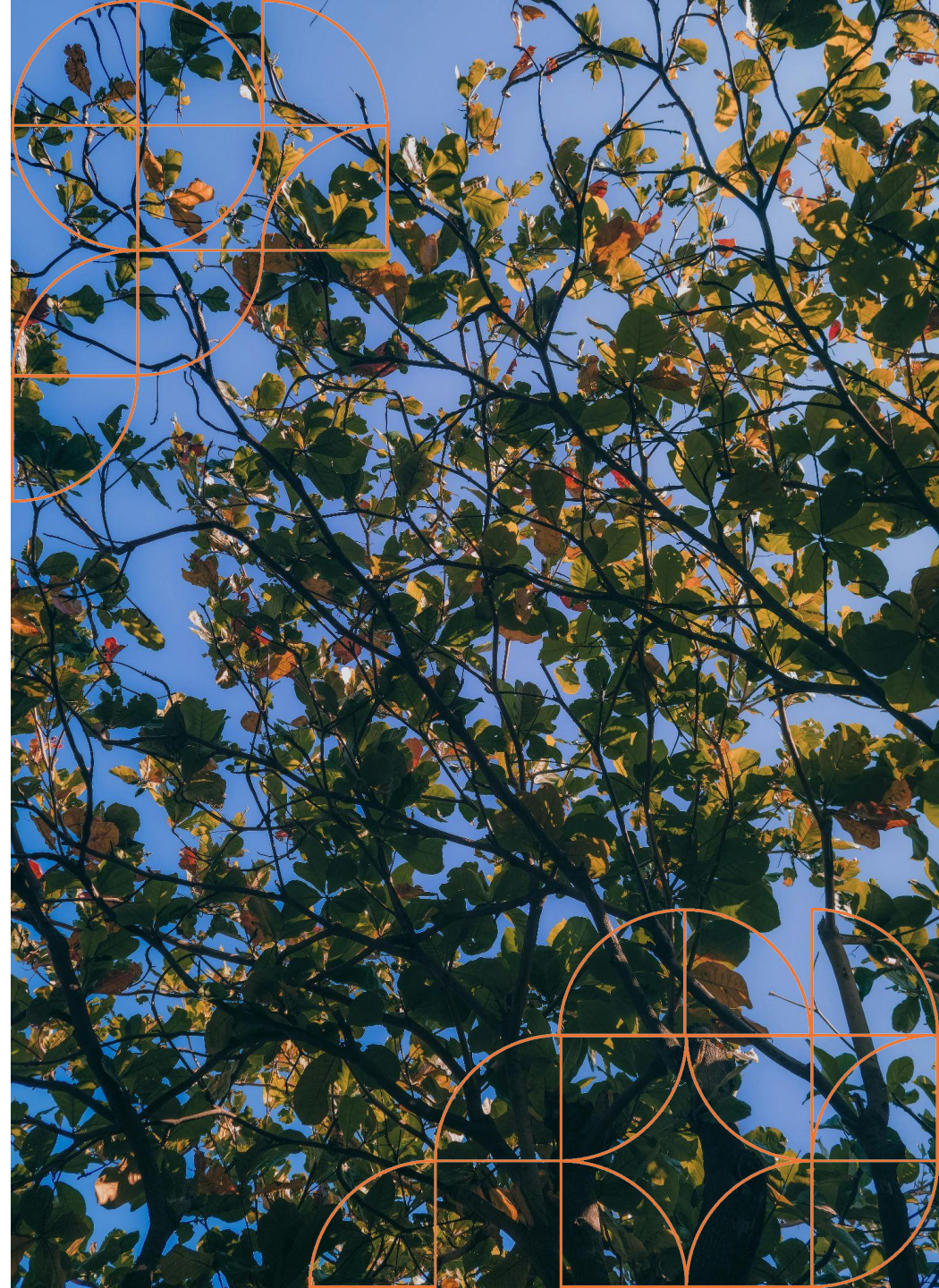
1. Identifying key leverage points for change

Lab team members went on self-organised *learning journeys*. These insights were brought into *Sense-Making Workshops* to move from a systemic problem analysis of key areas of stuckness to identifying areas of possibilities – where innovations have the potential to have significant impact on the root causes of stuckness.
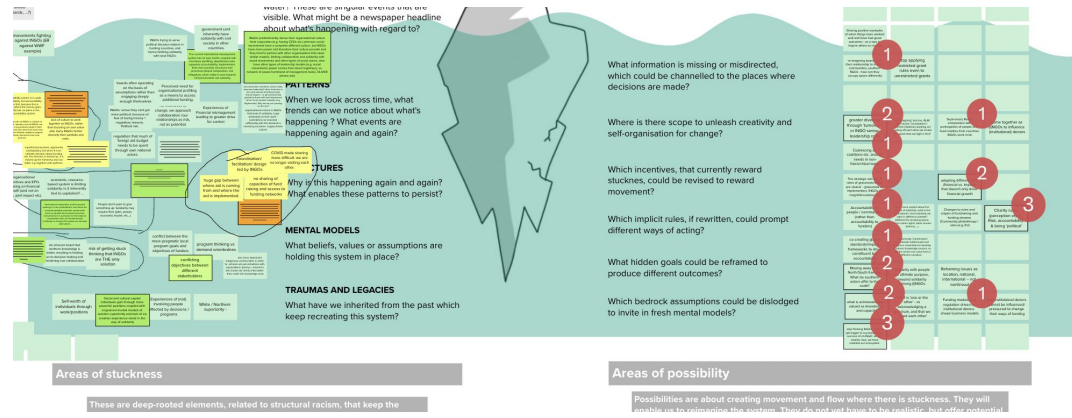
2. Ideation Sprints

Quick brainstorming sessions for lab team members to bring and ideate concrete innovation ideas. The best innovation ideas were then further developed and presented to a selection committee.
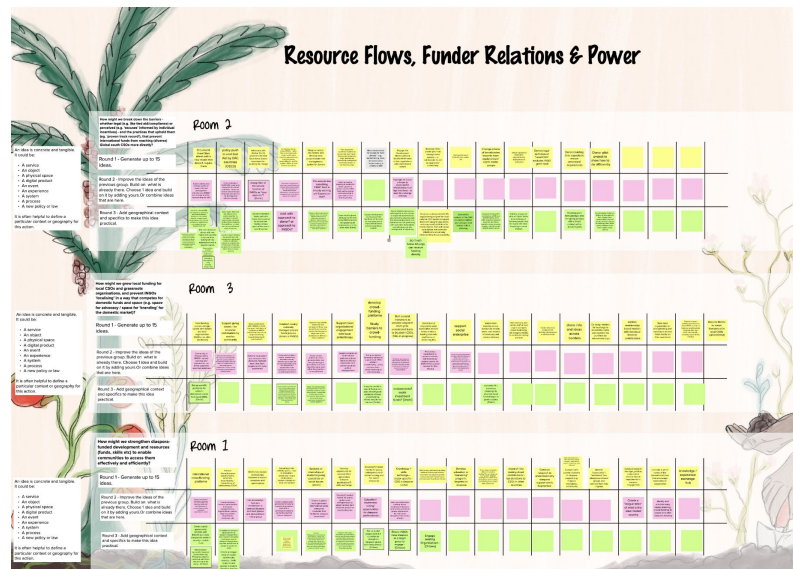
Phase 4: Develop & Deliver

In essence, this phase is about supporting multiple, parallel stakeholder teams who are developing, testing and implementing potential solutions.

The hosting team supports the formation of dedicated multidisciplinary stakeholder teams around potential solutions and accompanies these teams through a creative and structured process of designing, testing, implementing and scaling solutions.
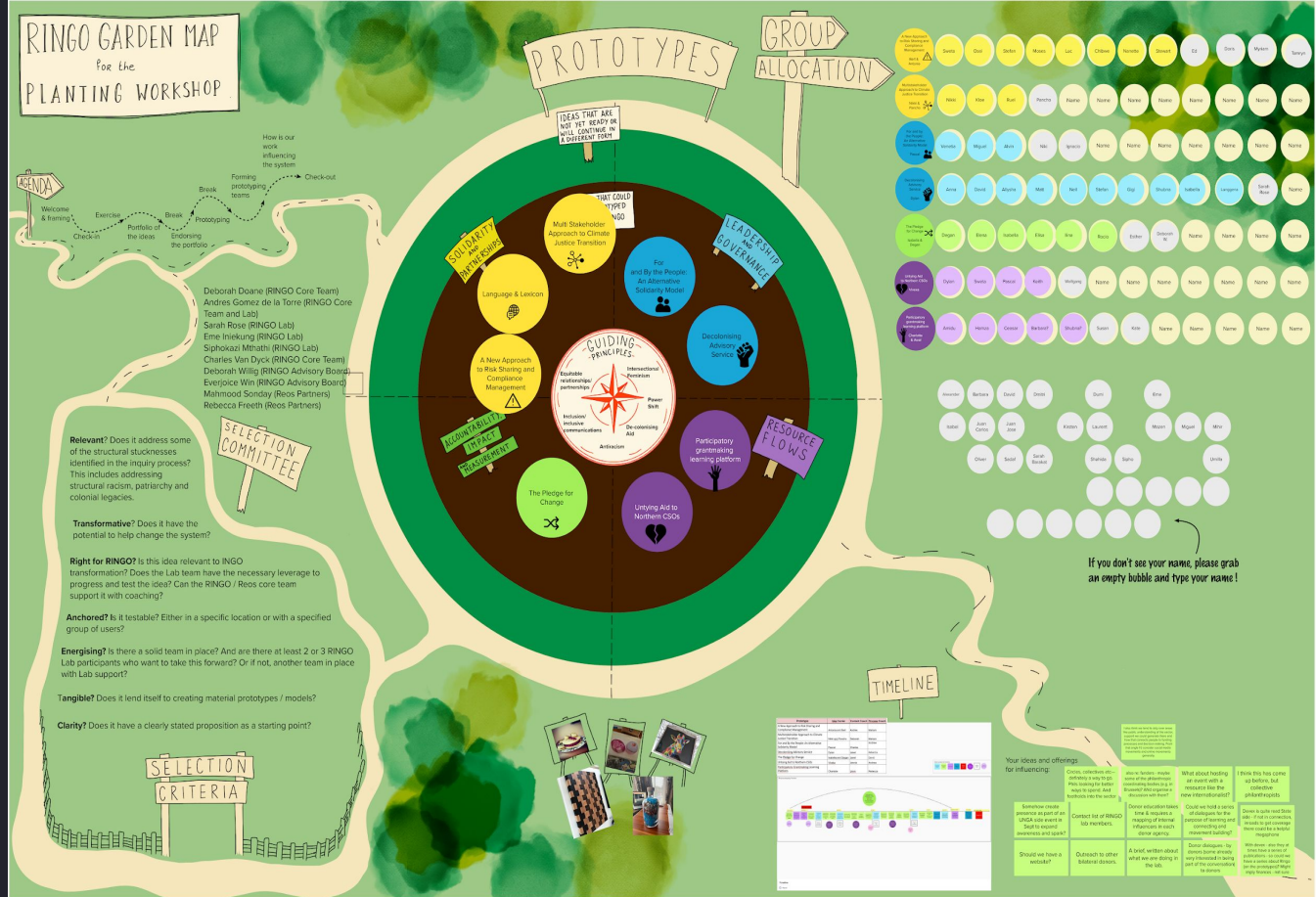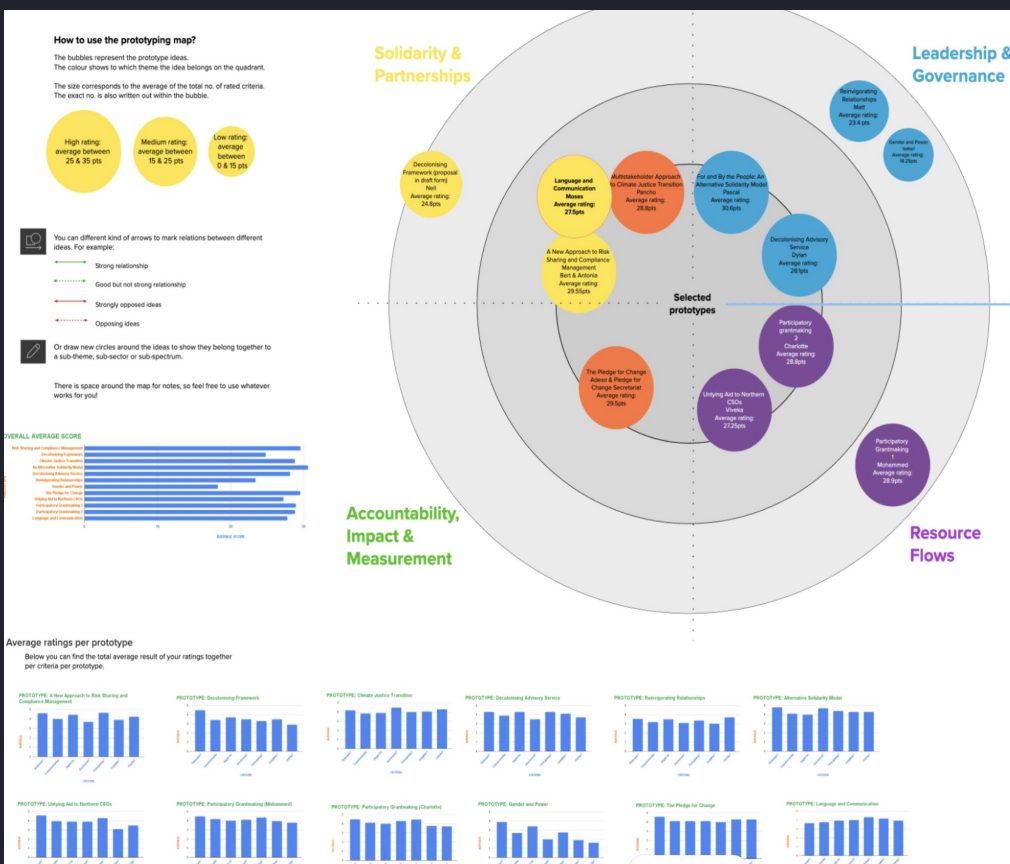
1. Portfolio approach to innovation

Based on pre-defined criteria, a committee selected a portfolio of the most promising innovation ideas, that together have the potential to contribute to system transformation.


2. Forming multi-disciplinary prototyping teams

Based on pre-defined criteria, a committee selected a portfolio of promising innovation ideas, that together have the potential to contribute to system transformation.

The portfolio of solutions covered different types of innovation – and most solutions are a combination of these types.

Relational and intentional innovation were extremely important to achieve the objectives. While we were using elements of design thinking, we had to adapt and use other methods to also emphasise these types of innovation.
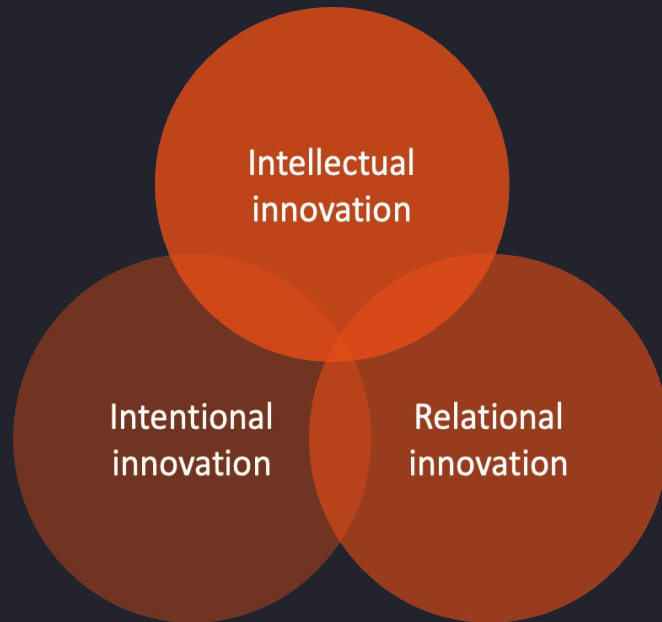
Intellectual Innovation: a new AI tool to help detect problematic language in INGO and funders strategies.

Relational Innovation: Turning the relationships on its head through reverse calls for proposals, issued by local NGOs, inviting INGOs to apply to support them. (see example slide)

Intentional Innovation: Campaign engaging funders to untie aid to Northern INGOs

Intellectual innovation

Intentional innovation

Relational innovation

RINGO Innovations

RE-IMAGINING RINGO

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Solidarity and Partnerships
- Language and Lexicon
- A New Approach to Risk Sharing and Compliance Management

Leadership and Governance
- For the people, By the people: An Alternative Solidarity Model
- Decolonising Advisory Community

Resource Flows
- South meets North in Power Shift – A Framework for Effective Participatory Grant-Making
- Untying Aid to Northern CSOs

Accountability, Impact & Measurement
- The Pledge for Change Learning and Accountability Mechanism

1. Coaching of Prototyping Teams

The prototyping teams were coached through a disciplined process of *developing* the solution, *testing*, *adapting, and implementing* it.

All 9 prototyping teams were accompanied by one *process/innovation coach* and one *content coach*.

Additionally, a hosting organisation was identified for each prototyping team to embed the solution in the sector and support scaling.

Project: _____   Team: _____

Frame

Purpose

○ Desirability (human)   ○ Feasibility (technical)   ○ Viability (business)

Why are you prototyping? What are you testing? State the question(s) that your prototype should answer.
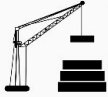
Desired Learning Outcome

What is your main objective?

○ Exploration   ○ Evaluation   ○ Communication

What do you hope to achieve? What will you be able to do after prototyping?

Focus

Which part of the idea / solution / concept will you prototype? Map out the assumptions you want to test

Build

What to build

Fidelity: Prototype format:
○—○—○

What must the prototype be able to do or show?

What does it not need to do or show?

Build Plan

How will you make the prototype?

Which resources do you need? Which limitations exist?

Test

Test Plan

Who will use, see or engage with the prototype?

How will you test the prototype?

Results

What data will you collect from the test? How?

When is the test successful? Define acceptance criteria.

THE PROTOTYPE
Build and test the prototype. Show it here.

Act

Insights

Which new insights and ideas did you get?

Actions

What conclusions and decisions can you make from these insights?

Evaluate Process

Effort   Success
○-○-○-○-○   ○-○-○-○-○
Low   High   Low   High

Is further testing needed?

What changes will you make for the next test?

Template created based on prototyping planner

The Challenge

Majority of funding for local civil society organisations is determined by strategies and programmes developed in INGO headquarters without sufficient understanding of local assets and needs. INGO put out a **call for proposal** to invite local CSOs to apply for implementing and receiving funding on the priorities set by the INGO.
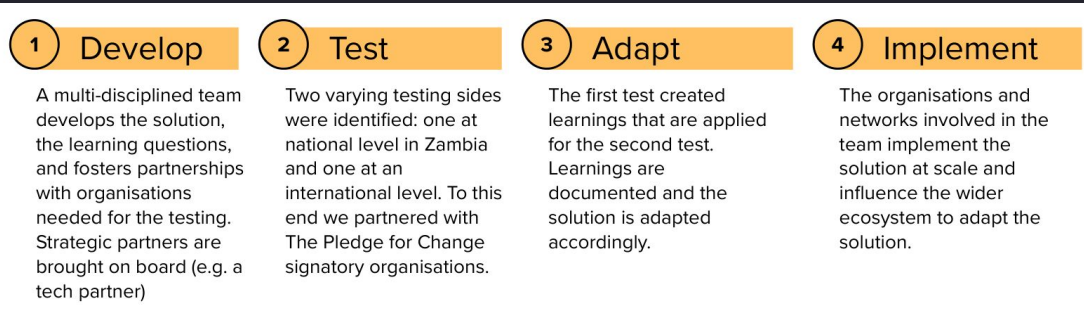
The Idea

The RINGO prototype 'a Reverse Call for Proposals' is reimagining the fundamental way in which local civil society actors secure funding, by putting them in the driving seat for change.

The Reverse Call for Proposals

- local civil society organisations define priorities with their constituencies
- local civil society organisations issue a Reverse Call for Proposals
- INGOs & funders express their interest to provide this support
- local civil society organisations choose their preferred supporter

The Prototyping Process

1 Develop

A multi-disciplined team develops the solution, the learning questions, and fosters partnerships with organisations needed for the testing. Strategic partners are brought on board (e.g. a tech partner)

2 Test

Two varying testing sides were identified: one at national level in Zambia and one at an international level. To this end we partnered with The Pledge for Change signatory organisations.

3 Adapt

The first test created learnings that are applied for the second test. Learnings are documented and the solution is adapted accordingly.

4 Implement

The organisations and networks involved in the team implement the solution at scale and influence the wider ecosystem to adapt the solution.

Impact

- First contracts are signed that bring local communities in the driver seat
- Growing awareness among INGOs
- New capabilities among CSOs

More info in this innovation case study:
https://ringoproject.org/case-study-the-reverse-call-for-proposals/

Phase 5:
Closure and Exit

The essence of this phase is for the convenors to exit well.

The hosting team manages stakeholders expectations regarding its continued involvement and brings its contribution to a clear closure.

The success, failures and learnings of the initiative are celebrated and made available to a wider ecosystem.

RINGO was designed as a time-bound project, not an organisation

The RINGO lab was designed originally for two years. After this first phase, a second phase of another two years was designed, focusing on influencing the wider system based on the solutions developed in the first phase.

Collaborating with other existing initiatives

From the start, RINGO was collaborating with other key initiatives in the system like The Pledge for Change, Peace Direct, Shift the Power Movement, ...

Sharing insights consistently and broadly

Through a website, regular newsletters, a podcast series, Open House sessions, community gatherings, speaking engagements and Learning Festivals, emerging insights and progress was shared throughout.
https://ringoproject.org/

Embedding Solutions in hosting organisations

For all prototyps, *hosting organisations* were identified, which would support efforts to embedd and scale out the tested solution beyond the livecycle of the RINGO project.

Hosting organisations included the International Civil Society Center (Berlin), the West-African Civil Society Institute, The Pledge for Change Secretariat and others.

Throughout:
Measure Impact

In essence, this process element is about measuring success and ensuring continuous learning and improvement.

Based on a clear understanding of the results, the initiative aims to achieve, the hosting team is monitoring and evaluating the implementation and the systemic change created continuously in order to learn how to improve its work and maximise impact.

1. Measuring Process Quality and Progress

- Participants evaluation surveys after each significant workshop / phase
- Strategic review meetings in the hosting team to review progress, learnings and how the plan for the next 3 months needs to be adapted
- In-depth interviews with selected participants after 2 and 4 years

2. Measuring Impact

- Comprehensive impact evaluation at the end of Phase 1 with surveys and in-depth interviews with prototyping team leaders and hosting organisations. Report shared widely.

- Surveys with the wider ecosystem at the end of phase 2 to assess the contribution of the project to system shifts (final synthesis outstanding).
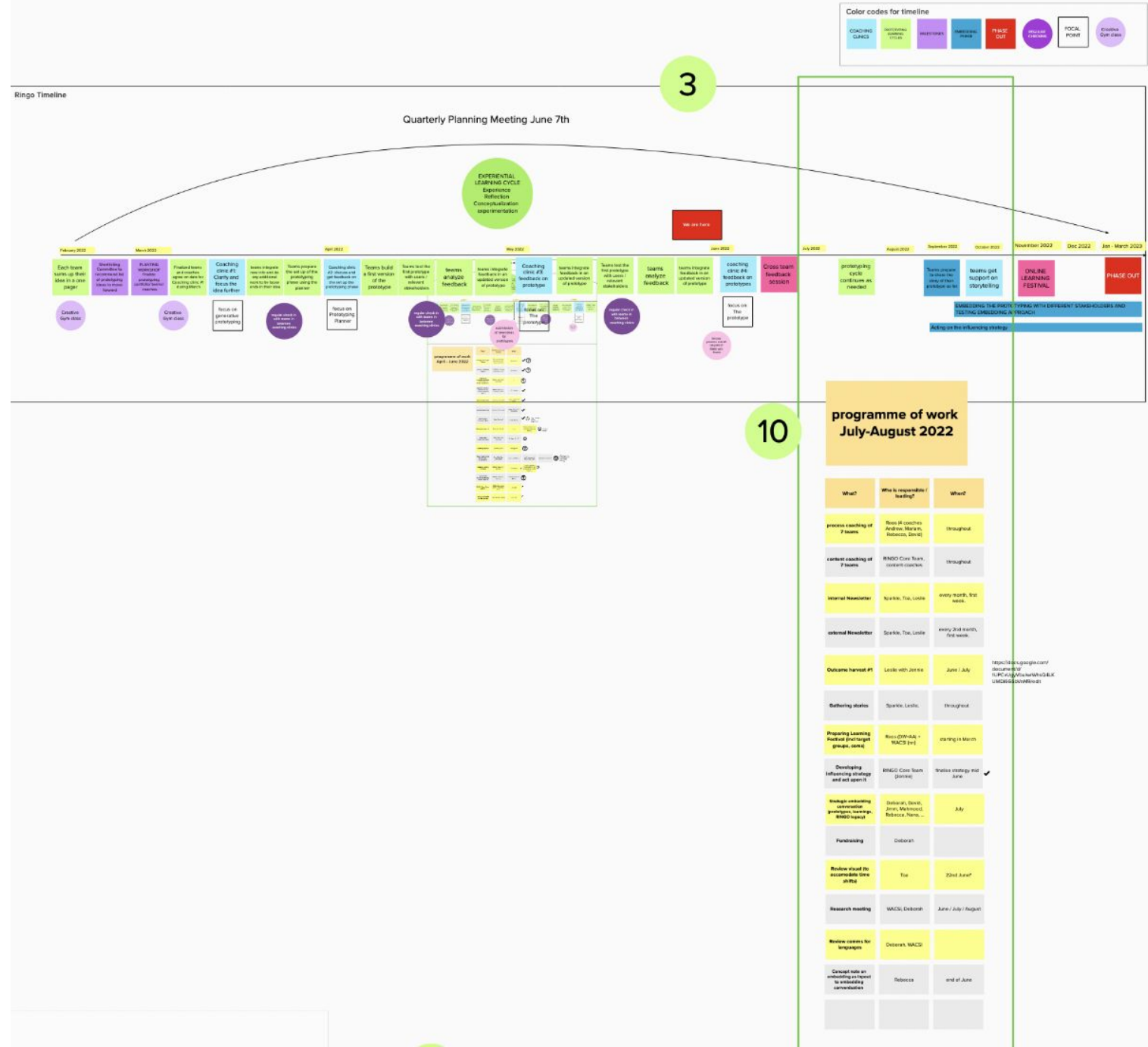
We welcome a conversation with you.

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