IMPACT INITIATIVE

IMPACT KENYA
KIPOK FUND

Supporting Pastoralist and Other Marginalized Indigenous Communities for a Sustainable Future

IMPACT
Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation

Background - An Indigenous-Led Approach to Community-Centered Grantmaking

This paper presents the foundational thinking, guiding principles, and grantmaking flow of the Kipok Fund under IMPACT Kenya. It outlines an approach to resourcing communities that is rooted in Indigenous systems of governance, collective decision-making, trust, reciprocity, and relational accountability, while reflecting the voices, experiences, and aspirations of Indigenous communities across the East African region on how they envision Kipok.

Rather than introducing a new model, Kipok seeks to recognize and strengthen systems that communities already use to care for land, livelihoods, culture, and collective wellbeing. The framework draws from Indigenous worldviews, locally led development practices, and international human rights instruments that affirm participation, self-determination, and community leadership. At the center of the model is a simple but powerful grounding:

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Introduction

The Kipok Fund is an Indigenous-led and community-centered grantmaking initiative grounded in pastoralist realities, collective wellbeing, and Indigenous systems of governance. Rooted in the Maa word Kipok, meaning "we shall thrive and flourish," the fund was established as a response to the growing realities facing pastoralist and marginalized Indigenous communities across Northern Kenya, including climate change, prolonged drought, loss of livelihoods, weakening cultural systems, conflict, exclusion from mainstream financing systems, and increasing pressures on land and natural resources.

Why the Kipok Fund Was Started

The Kipok Fund was established in response to the increasing vulnerabilities facing pastoralist and Indigenous communities across Northern Kenya. Communities continue to experience severe droughts, food insecurity, land fragmentation, conflict, displacement, weakening traditional livelihoods, and growing exclusion from mainstream economic and financing systems. Climate change has intensified pressure on pastoralist mobility, water systems, grazing lands, and household resilience, while many conventional funding systems remain inaccessible to grassroots and Indigenous communities. Kipok was therefore created to bridge this gap by building a funding mechanism that is trusted, flexible, culturally grounded, and rooted in Indigenous systems of participation, reciprocity, and collective ownership.

Objectives of the Kipok Fund

The Kipok Fund seeks to strengthen the ability of Indigenous and pastoralist communities to sustainably manage their own development processes while protecting land, livelihoods, culture, and collective wellbeing.

The fund specifically aims to:

- Strengthen Indigenous systems of governance, participation, and collective decision-making.
- Support communities to protect and sustainably manage land, water, grazing territories, and natural resources.
- Revitalize traditional livelihoods and pastoralist economies while strengthening resilience to climate change.
- Strengthen women's and youth leadership within community systems and decision-making spaces.
- Support Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural ceremonies, spiritual practices, and intergenerational learning.
- Build community-owned assets and institutions including savings systems, cooperatives, healing spaces, and livelihood initiatives.
- Expand access to flexible and direct financing for grassroots Indigenous and pastoralist communities.
- Strengthen locally rooted accountability, accompaniment, and community learning systems.
- Promote Indigenous-led solutions for resilience, food systems, agroecology, mobility, and territorial governance.

The Four Rs of Kipok

Guided by the foundational principles of the Four Rs, Kipok seeks to strengthen communities in ways that are holistic, culturally grounded, and community-defined:

RESTORE
dignity and hope by expanding access to opportunities and resources.

REBUILD
traditional livelihoods, local economies, and systems of mutual support.

RESOURCES
communities with financing, skills, mentorship, and accompaniment to advance locally led solutions.

RESILIENCE
strengthening through nature-based enterprises, climate adaptation, and community-led approaches that reduce vulnerability and sustain wellbeing.

Outcomes and Experience from Northern Kenya

Since its launch in 2020, the Kipok Fund has already demonstrated practical outcomes across Northern Kenya through direct support to Indigenous and community-led initiatives. The fund has disbursed more than USD 2 million to 48 community groups, including women's groups, youth initiatives, pastoralist collectives, and Indigenous community institutions.

These investments have supported watershed restoration, strengthening traditional governance systems, sustainable pastoralism, agroecology, women's economic empowerment, cultural revitalization, and protection of sacred landscapes.

Communities have restored degraded ecosystems, strengthened rotational grazing systems, expanded sustainable beekeeping initiatives, cultivated aloe vera and agroecological projects, protected cultural sites, and created locally grounded enterprises that support livelihoods while safeguarding ecological systems.

The experience from Northern Kenya demonstrates that communities are fully capable of defining priorities, managing resources collectively, and sustaining accountability when support systems are rooted in trust and accompaniment rather than extraction and bureaucracy.

Understanding the Kipok Fund Flow

The accompanying flow diagram illustrates how resources can move in ways that are flexible, participatory, culturally grounded, and responsive to local realities across different contexts and countries. Anchored within IMPACT Kenya, the Kipok fund reflects a grantmaking approach rooted in listening first, strengthening community defined priorities and ensuring that decision-making remains closest to the people most affected. The model also recognizes the role of community-rooted focal points in accompanying communities, strengthening trust, and supporting resource movement in culturally and contextually appropriate ways.

1 LISTENING & GROUND CONNECTION

- Advisors engage communities (elders, women, youth)
- Identify needs related to land (Emurua), wellbeing (Enkoishon), livelihoods and culture
- Build trust and relationships

→

2 INFORMING COMMUNITIES

- Barazas, small meetings, word of mouth
- Explain opportunity in local language and context
- Ensure everyone understands

→

3 COMMUNITY NOMINATION

- Communities identify groups, households or initiatives
- Women, youth, land committees and networks are included

→

4 SIMPLE EXPRESSION OF NEED

- Voice notes, conversations, simple forms or sketches
- Advisors support documentation - not writing for the community

→

5 COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING

- Community + Advisor reflection
- Prioritize based on -Fairness -Urgency -Collective benefit
- Shared power, respect and trust

→

6 ACCOMPANIMENT (NOT MONITORING)

- Advisor walks - with community-
- Sharing reflection meetings together
- Co-learning and trust

→

7 COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY & REFLECTION

- Community reflection meetings
- Storytelling, feedback and gatherings
- What we learn together shapes
- the next steps
- Social accountability rooted in trust

LEARNING LOOPS BACK - INFORMING THE NEXT FUNDING CYCLE

COMMUNITIES DEFINE NEEDS BEFORE FUNDING DECISIONS ARE MADE.

We listen first. Communities lead. Resources follow.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Community Leadership
Communities lead decisions and change

Land & culture At the centre
We respect and strengthen land, culture and ways of life

Inclusion of all voices
Women, youth, elders and marginalized voices included

Trust & Relationships
Relationships built on trust, respect and accountability

Flexibility & Context
We adapt to local realities and changing conditions

Learning & Adaptation
We learn together and keep improving

Indigenous Governance & Trust
Building on existing community systems, leadership and decision-making structures

KEY COMMUNITY PRIORITIES ACROSS CONTEXTS

Land & Territory → Livelihoods → Women's Leadership → Agroecology → Traditional Knowledge → Pastoralism & Mobility → Cultural Survival

KIPOK IS MORE THAN A FUND.

It is a bridge between resources and life. We walk together to strengthen land, culture and collective wellbeing.

COMMUNITY ROOTED FOCAL POINTS

It is a bridge between resources and life. We walk together to strengthen land, culture and collective wellbeing.

KIPOK FUND KENYA

Kipok does not move money to projects. It returns resources directly to Indigenous communities to secure their lands, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

IMPACT KENYA

Rooted in communities. Driven by Justice. Guided by Indigenous Values.
IMPACT Kenya is the home and institutional anchor of the Kipok Fund.
It provides governance, accountability, safeguarding, and backbone support to ensure resources reach communities with integrity and trust.

An Indigenous Grounded Approach to How Resources Return to Communities

Kipok Fund is not simply a grantmaking process. It is a return to an older logic where resources follow relationships, decisions are held collectively, and land, culture, and wellbeing are inseparable. In many ways, this model does not introduce something new. Rather, it restores what has always existed within Indigenous systems of care, reciprocity, accountability, and governance. The Kipok flow makes visible how resources can move in ways that respect dignity, strengthen community agency, and align with Indigenous worldviews alongside international commitments to Indigenous rights and locally led development.

The how in Kipok grantmaking matters deeply. The true power of Kipok will not only be in the resources it mobilizes, but in how those resources are channeled to communities (Elizabeth Silakan, Director of Operations Grants and partnerships at IMPACT Kenya)

At the center of this approach is the understanding that support must begin with listening. The first movement in the Kipok flow, listening and ground connection, reflects what the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms as the right of Indigenous Peoples to participate in decisions affecting them through representatives chosen according to their own customs, systems, and procedures. Article 18 of UNDRIP clearly recognizes this right, and within Kipok, participation is understood not simply as consultation, but as presence and relationship. Advisors and focal points engage elders, women, youth, traditional leaders, and community structures to understand what is emerging from the land and from everyday realities.

Listening becomes the first act of accountability. It is through this process that concepts such as Emurua, Enkishon, and Elelero move beyond language and become lived realities shaping how communities define wellbeing, livelihoods, and collective need (Mali Ole Kaunga, CEO at IMPACT Kenya)

From this grounding, the process moves into informing communities in ways that are culturally meaningful and accessible. Kipok intentionally moves away from exclusionary systems that rely heavily on written calls, technical language, and digital access, all of which often leave out the very communities most in need of support. Instead, information flows through barazas, village gatherings, local associations, religious spaces, and community dialogue. Opportunities are communicated in local languages and through trusted systems so that communities can fully understand and engage with the process. This approach strongly reflects the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent under UNDRIP, particularly Articles 10 and 32, which affirm that Indigenous Peoples must be informed in advance and in culturally appropriate ways before decisions affecting them are made. Informing communities therefore becomes more than sharing information. It becomes an act of inclusion and dignity.

The next movement in the Kipok flow is community nomination, which fundamentally shifts where decision-making power sits. Rather than positioning external actors as the sole gatekeepers of resources, communities themselves identify who should receive support. Women's groups, youth collectives, grazing committees, cooperatives, cultural associations, and local initiatives are recognized because communities themselves recognize their legitimacy and contribution. This reflects Indigenous systems of governance where authority and trust emerge from within the community rather than through external validation or institutional status. It also responds to long-standing critiques of philanthropy that have historically excluded informal groups and grassroots movements because they do not fit rigid organizational structures. Through this process, Kipok aligns closely with Article 23 of UNDRIP, which affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to determine and develop priorities and strategies for their own development.

Closely connected to this is the simple expression of need. Kipok recognizes that knowledge is not only written. It is spoken, shared, remembered, and lived collectively. Communities therefore express their priorities through conversations, voice notes, storytelling, oral presentations, sketches, and simple forms in local languages. Advisors and focal points may support documentation where needed, but they do not replace the voice of the community. This removes barriers created by literacy, language, and technical proposal systems that often silence Indigenous and grassroots communities. In doing so, Kipok reflects broader movements within Indigenous philanthropy and decolonial development practice that call for funding systems to become more accessible, relational, and culturally grounded. This also resonates with the work of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Working Group on Indigenous Populations and Communities, which continues to advocate for culturally appropriate approaches that enable Indigenous participation in development processes.

The process then deepens into collective decision-making, where communities and advisors reflect together on priorities, urgency, fairness, and collective benefit. Decisions are not extracted from communities and finalized elsewhere. Instead, they remain grounded within the social, cultural, and territorial realities of the people involved. Across many Indigenous systems within the region, whether through councils of elders, women's forums, pastoralist governance structures, the Gadaa system in Ethiopia, or village assemblies, decision-making is rooted in dialogue, consensus, and social harmony. Kipok builds upon these systems rather than replacing them. This reflects both Indigenous governance traditions and international standards related to participation and self-determination. It aligns with Article 3 of UNDRIP on self-determination, as well as Articles 20 and 21 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which affirm the rights of peoples to pursue their development freely and to manage their resources according to their own priorities.

A defining feature of the Kipok model is its clarity around how resources actually move to communities. Conventional philanthropy often excludes Indigenous and grassroots groups because they lack formal registration, bank accounts, or institutional infrastructure. Kipok instead creates multiple pathways through which resources can flow safely, flexibly, and in ways that reflect local realities. In some contexts, funds may move directly to organized groups with accounts. In other situations, trusted custodians or fiscal sponsors may temporarily hold funds on behalf of informal groups while communities themselves continue making decisions regarding their use. Flexible local disbursement systems are also recognized as legitimate and practical mechanisms. Mobile money platforms, savings groups, cooperatives, and trusted community intermediaries already form part of how communities manage resources in everyday life. Rather than imposing entirely external systems, Kipok builds on these existing structures. This reflects broader commitments to equity and inclusion found within the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 10 on reducing inequalities and Goal 16 on inclusive institutions, while also aligning with emerging trust-based philanthropy practices that prioritize flexibility and accessibility over rigid compliance.

Once the allocated resources reach communities, implementation remains community led. Kipok recognizes that communities themselves are best positioned to respond to changing realities, whether related to drought, conflict, displacement, insecurity, or livelihood pressures. This flexibility is not a lack of accountability. Rather, it reflects an understanding that communities live within constantly shifting environments that require adaptation and responsiveness. By allowing communities to shape how resources are used within agreed intentions, Kipok supports self-determination in practice. This aligns closely with Article 4 of UNDRIP, which affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to autonomy and self-governance in matters relating to their internal affairs.

Equally important is the shift from monitoring to accompaniment. Kipok does not position itself as an external evaluator standing above communities. Instead, advisors and focal points walk alongside communities through visits, conversations, listening, reflection, and collective problem-solving. This relational approach reflects Indigenous values of reciprocity, trust, and mutual responsibility. It also responds to growing critiques of conventional development systems that prioritize upward accountability to donors over accountability to the communities themselves. In Kipok, accountability is re-centered through relationships and collective reflection.

Community accountability and reflection therefore become living processes rather than technical exercises. Communities define success in ways that are meaningful within their own contexts and share learning through storytelling, peer exchange, community forums, local gatherings, and oral reflection. These processes strengthen transparency, ownership, and collective responsibility while creating space for learning to emerge from lived experience rather than from externally imposed indicators alone.

The final movement in the Kipok flow is the learning loop, ensuring that the process remains adaptive and responsive rather than fixed. What communities share informs future funding cycles, allowing Kipok to evolve continuously alongside the realities of the people it serves. This reflects Indigenous knowledge systems, which are inherently iterative, relational, and grounded in continuous learning from experience. It also aligns with contemporary approaches to adaptive management and locally led development that recognize the importance of flexibility and responsiveness.

Taken together, the Kipok flow represents far more than a technical grantmaking structure. It reflects a broader reorientation of philanthropy itself. It recognizes that communities are not beneficiaries waiting to receive support, but custodians of knowledge, culture, land, and future generations. It affirms that when resources are returned to communities in ways that respect their systems and priorities, they do far more than implement activities. They strengthen relationships, restore dignity, protect territories, rebuild systems of care, and sustain life itself.

Governance and Accountability

Kipok recognizes that governance differs across communities and therefore works through locally recognized leadership and respected community institutions.

Before funding is approved, the community identifies the most appropriate governance structure to oversee the grant. This may include Councils of Elders, women's leadership groups, youth representatives, traditional governance institutions, grazing committees, community resource persons, or other locally recognized decision-making bodies. These leaders collectively identify priorities, validate the proposed activities, and oversee implementation.

Proposed initiatives are screened before approval to ensure they do not cause environmental harm, infringe human rights, harm or exclude minorities and marginalized groups within communities, or contribute to inter-community conflicts.

Each grant identifies a lead community institution that is legally able to receive and manage funds. Depending on the context, this may be a registered Community-Based Organization, cooperative, community trust, association, or another legally recognized entity. Where traditional governance structures are not legally registered, they provide oversight and endorsement while the registered institution assumes legal and financial responsibility. This enables Kipok to keep administrative requirements as light as possible while meeting donor and government accountability requirements and ensuring resources can be traced to their intended purpose.

Simplified funding agreements written in language communities are confident with, are signed by the authorized representatives of the lead institution and witnessed or endorsed by the relevant community leadership. At least three authorized signatories are required for all financial transactions.

The lead institution is responsible for basic financial management, maintaining expenditure records, and submitting outcome reports of their interventions. Routine submission of detailed financial reports is not required; however, basic financial records must be properly maintained and accessible to community members, IMPACT Kenya, and funding partners upon request. Progress and information on the use of resources are also shared with the wider community through community meetings, reflection forums, or other locally appropriate processes to strengthen transparency and collective ownership.

Community resource persons, including Elders, retired civil servants, paralegals, and other trusted local knowledge holders, accompany implementation through mentoring, technical support, and periodic check-ins. Their role is to strengthen implementation, learning, and accountability rather than supervise communities.

Where disagreements arise, they are first addressed through customary governance and community mediation mechanisms. Where concerns involve financial mismanagement, safeguarding, or serious governance issues, IMPACT Kenya works with community leadership and the receiving institution to establish the facts and agree on corrective action. Where the matter cannot be resolved, further disbursements may be stopped, and any unspent funds recovered and redirected to other eligible community initiatives. Where funds have been misappropriated, the community may choose to refer the matter to the relevant authorities for appropriate legal action.

In this way, Kipok combines trust and community authority with clear safeguards for the responsible stewardship of resources.

Kipok Through the Wisdom of Knowledge Holders

Across South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, Ethiopia, and Somaliland knowledge holders shared a powerful truth: systems of care, governance and accountability already exist. What communities need is respect, relationships, recognition, trust and flexible resources that strengthen their own ways of organization and decision making and retain their dignity and ways of knowing.

SOUTH SUDAN:
"Women's groups identify local needs collectively and determine priorities together."

UGANDA:
"Needs begin at household level before moving into wider community structures."

ETHIOPIA:
"The Gadaa system enables decisions are reached through consensus and harmony."

SOMALILAND:
"Communities must first be consulted and allowed to define their own needs."

Community leaders consistently emphasized that support must begin with understanding realities emerging directly from the land, livelihoods, and everyday experiences of people. This reflects Indigenous governance systems where decisions are shaped collectively through dialogue, reflection, and consensus. Across the conversations, elders, women's groups, pastoralist structures, faith leaders, youth groups, and community assemblies all emerged as critical spaces through which needs are identified and priorities are discussed.

The process of informing communities was also repeatedly described as relational rather than technical. Communities stressed the importance of sharing opportunities through trusted local systems and in local languages. Rather than relying on formal calls and written communication, information moves through village gatherings, women's forums, religious spaces, local associations, and direct community dialogue. This ensures that participation is accessible and culturally meaningful.

Another clear lesson emerging from the the indigenous leaders is that communities already possess their own systems for identifying who should receive support. Kipok's participatory approach strongly resonated because communities are accustomed to making decisions collectively and prioritizing those most affected or vulnerable. Women's groups, youth collectives, cooperatives, pastoralist structures, and traditional leadership systems were repeatedly identified as legitimate decision-making spaces that should be strengthened rather than bypassed.The process of informing communities was also repeatedly described as relational rather than technical. Communities stressed the importance of sharing opportunities through trusted local systems and in local languages. Rather than relying on formal calls and written communication, information moves through village gatherings, women's forums, religious spaces, local associations, and direct community dialogue. This ensures that participation is accessible and culturally meaningful.

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Rwanda:
"Field officers accompany communities and explain opportunities directly."

Somaliland:
"Village leaders and religious leaders help communities understand and agree."

South Sudan:
"Women are encouraged to express their ideas in their own languages."

Uganda:
"Elders, local leaders and councils of elders affirm shared guidance and decision-making."

Ethiopia:
"Communities prioritize widows and vulnerable households collectively."

Rwanda:
"Communities participate in all stages of planning and implementation."

DRC:
"Communities already identify and lead their own initiatives."

The conversations also strongly affirmed the importance of flexible and accessible systems for expressing need. Communities repeatedly emphasized that complicated proposal systems, technical donor requirements, and language barriers often exclude grassroots groups from support. In response, many organizations already use oral presentations, storytelling, dialogue forums, and community discussions to communicate priorities. Kipok's emphasis on simple expression of need therefore reflects realities already familiar to communities.

One of the strongest common themes across all contexts was the importance of flexible resource flow systems rooted in trust. Communities consistently rely on mechanisms that already exist within daily life, including savings groups, cooperatives, lockboxes, mobile money, and trusted intermediaries. These systems are often more accessible and functional than

Somaliland:
"Mobile cash transfer (EVC plus) systems are the fastest ways to reach communities."

Uganda:
"Funds move through mobile money and local savings systems."

South Sudan:
"Women manage savings through shared lockboxes and village savings loan associations (VSLAs)."

DRC:
"Mobile money works where banking systems do not exist."

Ethiopia:
"Savings groups and cooperatives remain trusted financial systems."

formal banking systems, particularly in remote, pastoralist, conflict-affected, or displaced contexts

Communities also emphasized that implementation must remain flexible and community-led. Across pastoralist and Indigenous contexts, realities shift constantly due to drought, insecurity, displacement, climate pressures, and land loss. Communities stressed that resources should adapt to these changing conditions rather than follow rigid project structures. Flexibility was therefore seen not as weak accountability, but as necessary for survival and resilience.

Somaliland:
"Pastoralism and mobility must shape intervention and resilience efforts."

South Sudan:
"Funds are released in phases so communities can adapt to changing realities."

Uganda:
"Climate change and land pressures from extractive activities require effective livelihoods."

DRC:
"Communities shift livelihoods depending on access to forest and land."

South Sudan:
“Women hold each other accountable through shared oversight.”

Somaliland:
“Imams and community leaders guide implementation and accountability.”

Rwanda:
“Field accompaniment strengthens trust and accountability.”

DRC:
“Groups report collectively through local language dialogue and reflection.”

The final lesson emerging strongly from all conversations was that accountability is relational. Communities consistently described accountability not through formal reporting alone, but through storytelling, peer reflection, public meetings, community gatherings, and collective oversight. Kipok Advisors and focal points are expected to walk alongside communities rather than monitor them from above. This reinforces trust, transparency, and long-term ownership.

Across all these conversations, one message remained clear: communities already possess systems of governance, accountability, care, and resilience. Kipok’s role is not to impose external structures, but to recognize these systems, strengthen them, and ensure resources move in ways that remain grounded in dignity, trust, culture, and collective wellbeing. And thus, Kipok does not move money to projects. It returns resources to people, land, and life.

Assessment of Kipok Fund Grantmaking in Northern Kenya

- Kipok Fund is already operating in Northern Kenya through Indigenous-led and community-centred approaches grounded in pastoralist realities and locally led adaptation.
- Existing experiences, including the RESTORE approach, show that communities are best positioned to identify priorities, guide implementation, and collectively manage accountability.
- Communities already possess trusted governance systems through elders, women's groups, youth structures, grazing systems, savings groups, and customary leadership.
- Direct and flexible community financing has strengthened ownership, climate resilience, collective decision-making, and adaptation to drought, mobility, and livelihood realities.
- Kipok's approach demonstrates that accompaniment, trust-building, and relational accountability are more effective than rigid and heavily bureaucratic grantmaking systems.
- Flexible resource pathways such as mobile money systems, savings groups, local intermediaries, and fiscal custodianship models have proven effective in reaching remote and underserved communities.
- Kipok increasingly plays a fulcrum role by connecting:
  - o Donor-advised funds such as Reversing the Flow
  - o Unrestricted funds including JustMoney, Christensen Fund, Home Planet Fund, and others
  - o Special thematic funds focused on women, youth, disability inclusion, livelihoods, resilience, territorial governance, culture, and collective wellbeing

- The Northern Kenya experience already provides a strong practical foundation for expanding Kipok's Indigenous-led grantmaking model across the wider region.
- The assessment confirms that communities do not lack systems of governance and accountability; they require flexible, trusted, and community-rooted resource flows that strengthen rather than replace Indigenous systems.

Strengths of the Kipok Fund

Kipok Fund's greatest strength lies in its grounding within Indigenous and pastoralist realities rather than externally imposed development models. The approach recognizes that communities already possess systems of governance, accountability, reciprocity, and collective decision-making that have sustained them for generations. Rather than replacing these systems, Kipok seeks to strengthen and resource them.

Another major strength is the fund's emphasis on trust-based and participatory grantmaking. Communities are involved from the beginning in identifying needs, shaping priorities, and guiding implementation. This creates stronger ownership, legitimacy, and accountability because decisions remain closest to the people most affected.

Kipok also benefits from its flexibility. The model recognizes that communities operate within constantly shifting realities shaped by drought, displacement, conflict, mobility, climate change, and land pressures. By allowing adaptive implementation and multiple pathways for resource flow, the fund becomes responsive to lived realities rather than rigid project structures.
The use of locally trusted systems such as mobile money, savings groups, fiscal custodianship, and oral knowledge systems further strengthens accessibility. This allows the fund to reach communities that are often excluded from mainstream philanthropy due to lack of formal registration, banking systems, or technical proposal-writing capacity.

Another important strength is the regional grounding emerging from conversations across South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, DRC, Ethiopia, and Somaliland. The process has already demonstrated strong alignment between Kipok's vision and realities already practiced within communities across the region.

Kipok's emphasis on accompaniment rather than monitoring is also significant. Advisors walk alongside communities through listening, dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving rather than extractive oversight. This builds long-term relationships and trust while supporting collective learning.

Finally, the fund aligns strongly with global and regional Indigenous rights instruments including UNDRIP, FPIC principles, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and broader movements for locally led development and Indigenous self-determination. This gives Kipok both moral grounding and strategic legitimacy within international conversations on Indigenous philanthropy.

Opportunities for the Kipok Fund

Kipok enters the landscape at a time when there is growing global recognition that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are central to climate resilience, biodiversity protection, territorial governance, and sustainable futures. This creates a major opportunity for the fund to position itself as a regionally grounded Indigenous-led funding mechanism within East Africa.

There is also increasing interest within philanthropy in trust-based grantmaking, participatory funding, decolonized philanthropy, and locally led development. Many donors are actively searching for ways to move resources more directly and equitably to communities. Kipok has the opportunity to become a bridge between these global shifts and local Indigenous realities.
Another opportunity lies in the significant funding gap facing pastoralist, Indigenous, women-led, and grassroots organizations in the region. Many communities remain under-resourced not because of lack of vision or leadership, but because they do not fit conventional donor systems. Kipok can help fill this gap by creating pathways that recognize informal groups, collective governance systems, and community-based accountability mechanisms.

The regional conversations also reveal strong potential partnerships with community-rooted organizations willing to serve as advisors, facilitators, fiscal custodians, or learning partners. This creates opportunities for a decentralized model rooted in trust and regional accompaniment rather than centralized control.

Kipok also has the opportunity to become a learning and influencing platform within Indigenous philanthropy globally. By documenting how Indigenous governance systems, pastoralist mobility, oral accountability systems, and collective decision-making function in practice, the fund can contribute important lessons to broader conversations on reimagining philanthropy.

The growing urgency around climate change, extractive pressures, displacement, and land rights further increases the relevance of a fund that supports resilience, territorial governance, livelihoods, women's leadership, and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Finally, there is an opportunity for Kipok to nurture emerging Indigenous organizations and movements that currently lack donor access, technical capacity, or institutional visibility but remain deeply trusted within communities.

Barriers Facing the Kipok Fund

One of the major barriers facing Kipok is the dominance of conventional donor systems that prioritize rigid compliance structures, written proposals, formal registration, and institutional bureaucracy. Many Indigenous and pastoralist communities operate through collective and informal systems that do not align easily with these requirements.

Language and literacy barriers also remain significant. Many grassroots communities express themselves more comfortably through oral dialogue, storytelling, and local languages rather than technical written applications. Without intentional adaptation, these barriers can continue excluding communities from access to resources. Infrastructure limitations pose another challenge. Across many target regions, communities have limited banking access, weak internet connectivity, and poor transport systems. In conflict-affected or remote areas, even communication and physical movement can become difficult.

Insecurity is another major barrier, particularly in contexts affected by conflict, displacement, extractive industries, or political instability. Communities in DRC, South Sudan, and parts of Somaliland continue operating under fragile conditions that complicate both implementation and resource transfer.

Another barrier is limited trust between communities and external funding actors due to historical experiences of extractive development, broken promises, and donor-driven agendas. Building trust requires time, consistency, and long-term relational investment.

There is also the challenge of balancing flexibility with donor expectations around accountability and reporting. Many donors still operate within systems that may not fully recognize community storytelling, oral reflection, and collective accountability mechanisms as legitimate forms of reporting.

The diversity of contexts across countries also creates operational complexity. Governance systems, legal environments, cultural structures, security realities, and financial systems differ significantly across the region. Kipok will need adaptive and context-sensitive approaches rather than a standardized model.

Lastly, there may be internal capacity limitations during the early stages of building the fund, particularly around regional coordination, accompaniment structures, learning systems, and sustaining long-term operational support.

Risks Facing the Kipok Fund

One of the biggest risks facing Kipok is the possibility of unintentionally reproducing the same power imbalances it seeks to challenge. If advisors or focal organizations become too centralized or donor-driven, decision-making could gradually shift away from communities themselves.

There is also the risk of donor influence reshaping the fund's priorities over time. As funding relationships grow, there may be pressure to prioritize measurable outputs, visibility, and short-term project cycles at the expense of Indigenous values, flexibility, and long-term relationship-building.

Security risks are another major concern. Operating in conflict-affected and politically sensitive environments may expose communities, focal points, or partner organizations to threats, surveillance, or political pressure.

Financial risks also exist, particularly where communities rely on informal systems, mobile money, or fiscal custodianship arrangements. While these systems are often trusted locally, they may be perceived as risky by external actors unfamiliar with community-based accountability structures.

Another risk is overburdening community organizations that already operate with limited capacity and resources. Without adequate accompaniment and support, local focal points could become overstretched while trying to manage donor expectations alongside community realities.

There is also the risk of token participation, where consultation occurs superficially while real decision-making remains elsewhere. Kipok will need to remain intentional about ensuring communities genuinely shape priorities, resource allocation, and implementation processes.

Cultural and political sensitivities also require careful navigation. Indigenous governance systems may at times intersect with state structures, local politics, religious leadership, or inter-community tensions that require thoughtful and context-specific engagement.

Finally, there is the long-term sustainability risk. If the fund grows too quickly without building strong governance, learning systems, and community ownership, it could lose the very relational grounding that makes it unique.

For Kipok to remain true to its vision, it will need to continuously return to its central grounding.

Examples of Indigenous-Led Funds Globally

Ereto Fund (Kenya & Tanzania)
Ereto is grounded in Maasai concepts of mutual support and collective wellbeing. The fund and broader organization focus on community-driven development, natural resource governance, climate resilience, and strengthening marginalized frontier communities through Indigenous-led approaches. The Ereto Solidarity Fund was launched in Tanzania to support Maasai and other Indigenous communities in shaping their own development priorities.

NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund
Samburu Women Trust (Kenya)- The NAAPU Indigenous Women Fund is an Indigenous women-led, feminist, trust-based grantmaking mechanism hosted by Samburu Women Trust (SWT). It provides flexible grants, mentorship, and capacity support to Indigenous women-led organizations, informal collectives, and grassroots groups across Kenya and Africa. The fund centers Indigenous women's leadership, climate resilience, movement building, cultural preservation, and community self-determination.

Pawanka Fund
Pawanka Fund is an Indigenous-led fund committed to intercultural philanthropy rooted in ancestral practices of solidarity and reciprocity. Established during the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, the fund supports Indigenous Peoples' initiatives that protect traditional knowledge, wellbeing, rights, and self-determined development. The word "Pawanka" comes from the Miskitu language and means "growing and strengthening." Pawanka demonstrates how Indigenous-led philanthropy can centre spirituality, culture, traditional governance, and collective wellbeing rather than narrow project outcomes alone.

International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) – AYNI Fund
The AYNI Fund, led by the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI), is one of the most recognized Indigenous women-led funds globally. Founded in 2008, the fund supports Indigenous women across Latin America, North America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.
The concept of "Ayni" comes from Indigenous Andean systems of reciprocity and collective support. The fund centers Indigenous women's leadership, healing, movement-building, and collective wellbeing while strengthening self-determined community processes.
Its work strongly reflects the understanding that philanthropy should restore relationships, dignity, and collective care rather than reinforce dependency.

Keepers of the Earth Fund – Cultural Survival
Keepers of the Earth Fund is an Indigenous-led fund within Cultural Survival managed by Indigenous staff and designed to support Indigenous Peoples' self-determined development initiatives. Since its establishment, the fund has provided direct small grants to Indigenous communities, collectives, organizations, and traditional governments.

The fund prioritizes projects rooted in Indigenous values, including language revitalization, traditional governance, cultural preservation, territorial protection, and community resilience. Cultural Survival also supports Indigenous community media through the Indigenous Community Media Fund, strengthening Indigenous-controlled communication systems and narrative power.

Fundo Podaali – Indigenous Fund of the Brazilian Amazon
Fundo Podaali is an Indigenous-led fund created by the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB). Established in 2017, the fund supports Indigenous territorial governance, environmental protection, and community mobilization across the Brazilian Amazon.

The fund emerged directly from Indigenous movements themselves and reflects the growing shift toward Indigenous-controlled financial mechanisms that support territorial defense and environmental stewardship.

Nusantara Fund – Indonesia
Nusantara Fund is Indonesia's first direct funding mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It was established through a partnership between Indigenous and agrarian justice movements, including AMAN, the Consortium for Agrarian Reform, and WALHI.

The fund was launched in 2023 with major support from philanthropic partners and focuses on strengthening Indigenous territorial governance, ecological stewardship, local livelihoods, and grassroots organizing.

Nusantara demonstrates how Indigenous-led funds can operate at national scale while remaining deeply rooted within local community realities.

Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund.
The Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund support Indigenous movements and grassroots organizing across Asia through solidarity-based grantmaking approaches grounded in Indigenous rights, self-determination, and territorial defense. The fund emphasizes movement accompaniment, regional solidarity, and strengthening Indigenous leadership across highly diverse political and cultural contexts.

NDN Collective and NDN Foundation Turtle Island (North America)
NDN Collective is one of the most prominent Indigenous-led institutions in North America, advancing Indigenous self-determination, climate justice, land back movements, and community organizing. Through the NDN Foundation and Climate Justice Campaign, the organization supports Indigenous communities working to protect territories, challenge extractive industries, and revitalize Indigenous systems of governance and ecological stewardship. Their approach emphasizes that Indigenous Peoples are not simply stakeholders within climate solutions, but leaders whose traditional ecological knowledge and governance systems are essential to planetary wellbeing.

Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
Founded in 1977, Seventh Generation Fund is one of the longest-standing Indigenous-led philanthropic organizations globally. The fund supports Indigenous nations and grassroots communities through community-driven grantmaking rooted in Indigenous values, sovereignty, cultural continuity, and intergenerational responsibility. Its work reflects the principle that decisions made today must sustain the wellbeing of future generations.

Swift Foundation
Swift Foundation supports Indigenous and local communities working to protect biological and cultural diversity. While not exclusively Indigenous led, the foundation strongly centers Indigenous leadership, biocultural rights, territorial protection, and traditional ecological knowledge within its grantmaking. Its work reflects the increasing recognition within philanthropy that Indigenous stewardship is central to environmental protection and climate resilience globally.

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