

PROCESSES FOR  
**BLACK LED**  
**SYSTEMS CHANGE**  
IN LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK

JUNE  
**2024**

IMPACT ON URBAN HEALTH



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can we accelerate equitable outcomes among Black and racially minoritized communities through participatory grantmaking? What would Black led systems change actually look like? To explore these questions and more, Impact on Urban Health (IoUH) initiated a process that engaged community leaders in Lambeth and Southwark.<sup>1</sup> The initiative, The Black Systemic Safety Fund, rallied around the shared concern of 'safety'. Through the use of the social lab methodology, facilitated by Reos Partners and The Ubele Initiative, diverse stakeholders were brought together to co-create solutions, ensuring that local and lived experience knowledge was utilized. As a result of the process, the local experts created four prototypes that were launched and iteratively tested.

This process intentionally adapted traditional systems thinking tools to be more culturally resonant. To this end, we: transitioned from individualistic to collectivist approaches, integrated African cultural elements like movement, song, and creativity, and emphasized ancestral connections and collective responsibility. Another way in which the process challenged the status quo was through the design of the project management and documentation of the process. The role of the project manager was expanded to include relational aspects, ensuring that participants were supported through the process's uncertainties. This contributed to the trust-building that was an essential part of this process. Additionally, continuous documentation and reflection facilitated collective learning and process adjustments along the way.

Experimental and fluid in nature, the process sometimes proved challenging for participants who were more accustomed to structured approaches. Messy, open-ended and truly process-orientated are a few words to describe The Black Systemic Safety Fund. However, it was through this exploratory and open state that participants were able to carve new pathways forward.

Coming back to the initial question of what Black led systems change looks like, the process highlighted several key insights: (1) Instead of making a seat at the table, create a new table, (2) Centre lived experience leadership throughout the entire process, (3) Build the cultural container, and celebrate the group's culture, and (4) Move with the speed of trust, and nurture this carefully. The Black Systemic Safety Fund initiative has provided significant insights into the value of Black led systems change processes. Key learnings include the importance of culturally relevant methods, the need for trust-building, and the power of centering lived experience leadership. Future initiatives should continue to prioritize these elements to foster effective and transformative systemic change.

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1. Impact on Urban Health employs a place-based approach in their work. This means they operate from their home – Lambeth and Southwark – where they invest, test and build up their understanding of how to improve health in cities. These learnings are then shared for learning on a global level.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Systemic Safety Fund was designed and facilitated by The Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners using a social lab approach. It consisted of seven workshops, with participant-led learning journeys, prototyping sessions, and reflective interviews in between. The overall process took 18 months and spanned from July 2022 to December 2023. Core to the initiative has been an emphasis on centring Black and racially minoritised community leaders as experts in thinking about and addressing systemic challenges. The Black community leaders were compensated for their insights, expertise and engagement with the Systemic Safety Fund process, and then given a further £500K directly to collectively develop and resource a range of interconnected prototypes, solutions and initiatives aimed at tackling the systemic barriers to safety within their local communities.

As part of the process, we wanted to learn about the value of a systems-thinking approach to funded solutions – both for the group, and in support of the implementing team to achieve their goals of devolving decision making about funds to local communities. Important questions guiding our learning included:

- What outcomes is the Black Systemic Safety Fund process contributing to?
- What about the process is leading to these outcomes?
- How do different actors experience the process?
- How might we improve future PGM and Black led systems change processes?

This document is part of a report series that applied three lenses to learning from the Black Systemic Safety Fund. Across the series in this series we highlight what was done relating to the respective focus areas, what we learned that's worth repeating and what questions can help to guide future processes. In addition to this report about black led systems change, there is a report that looks at what we learned about safety, and another at what we learned about participatory grant-making. All of the reports are drawn from a Master Learning Report.



## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1. BLACK LED SYSTEMS CHANGE

**// I think there's a lot of talk about giving voice to people and giving people ownership, but often that's not really reflected in the actual process and how you design the process, how you craft a process. How do you design a process that actually has everybody's voice into a room and where their ideas are being heard and actually are taken forward? The question for us was how do you create a safe space – a safe container within a group – where people can actually show up at their best selves, as creative human beings. //**

*Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners*

What does Black led systems change look like? What value might it bring to consider such an approach? Systems change efforts can be complex and challenging. It is therefore crucial to gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively facilitate change. Given the historical and ongoing marginalisation and systemic inequities faced by Black and racially minoritised communities in the UK, it was particularly important to assess the applicability and usefulness of these methods within minoritised communities. By understanding how to best adapt methods we can work towards cultivating an environment conducive to the thriving of Black and racially minoritised communities and experts in such settings.

Given the context of Lambeth and Southwark, implementing partners were also keen to understand more about the value of adopting these participatory and systems thinking processes within Black and racially minoritised communities. Key questions here included:

- What are we learning about truly hearing Black and racially minoritised people to speak their truth?
- Does it make a difference that the process included all Black and racially minoritised facilitators and participants?

**// Often the source of this work is attributed to white folks. They've coined theory U... I've been trained in this work... and I've only been trained by white people. But my personal stance on all of this is that this way of working is actually a Black and brown way of working in its essence and at its core. And I would love to find better language and for it to be attributed to different sources. //**

*Facilitator*

# 3. GUIDING METHODS AND THEORY

## 3.1. SOCIAL LAB METHODOLOGY

**// The only way these solutions work is when they're developed in partnership with the people actually affected by these problems //**  
**Zaid Hassan, Author of The Social Labs Revolution**

The Black Systemic Safety Fund adopted a social lab methodology. A social lab is an experimental process that brings together diverse stakeholders to tackle a complex social issue. In the lab, communities of experts explore the root causes of a selected issue, and jointly design and test prototypes and solutions to a shared challenge – both in the lab itself and beyond. As prototypes are tested in the real world, new data and insights emerge, and solutions are refined and tested further as part of a continuous cycle of improvement.<sup>2</sup>

Since the majority of local community experts were themselves Black and racially minoritised, the social lab process differed somewhat from other labs run by Reos Partners, and was adapted to meet the needs of a Black led systems change initiative. For this particular process, facilitators adopted a series of participatory methods which centred on the use of music, art, play and creativity as a means of moving through 'stuck problems'. Within residential workshops, this involved working alongside Drew Sinclair, a multidisciplinary artist and creator with a specialism in community work.

**// What we've done in this Lab is quite unique and different from other multi stakeholder processes. Often, the idea is that we work with a microcosm of the system in the room. This often means that a few minoritised voices are part of these processes. In reality, this means you often see dominant power structures still showing up in those rooms (i.e. minoritised voices not being heard, leaving the process due to a lack of a sense of belonging). I think what we've really done differently here is that we actually moved marginalised voices from margin to centre by working with a predominantly Black and Brown group of people. One of the underlying hypotheses, for me, that we're testing is something along the lines of: people who are oppressed by a system often know best how they actually work, therefore we need to centre those voices in our efforts to achieve real, systemic change. //**  
**Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners**

2. As Ilse Marschalek et al (2022) note, this process means social labs function according to a participatory action research methodology, providing a continuous feedback and improvement loop.



Core to the social lab methodology is an emphasis on creative, participatory, flexible and action-oriented approaches to solving complex issues. As such, social labs are:

## Social

- They require a team that reflects the diversity of people directly affected by and involved in the problem at hand, and the full multi-layered reality of the system.
- What does this social aspect accomplish? Among other things, it enables greater creativity and avoids the tendency to impose top-down solutions, which rarely take advantage of the full range of knowledge—including local and informal knowledge—that can be brought to bear on a problem.
- Detailed knowledge of a system comes from living in it.

## Experimental

- Complex problems are not amenable to monolithic, planned “solutions.”
- The social lab methodology supports teams to devise prototypal solutions to key social issues which can then be tried out in a cycle of consultation, experimentation, assessment, and revision.
- While messy and unpredictable, this process allows a portfolio of promising ideas to be tested and developed before too much time and money is spent on them.
- When, by trial and error, the teams have discovered what works, they can then grow these solutions with greater confidence.

## Focus on root causes

- What most of us refer to as “problems” are typically symptoms. When we focus on symptoms, we produce at best a temporary improvement. At worst, we inadvertently reinforce the dynamics that are the cause of the problem.
- Through the active participation of people from every level of the system, the social lab methodology identifies and acts on root causes — thereby opening the door to real progress.

## Invite dissent

- Dissent can be uncomfortable, but the social lab methodology embraces it as an antidote to groupthink and stagnation. The friction of argument and diverse positions unleashes tremendous energy.
- When skillfully managed, that energy is creative and productive. In addition, the free expression of competing and contested claims in the structured environment of the lab reduces the likelihood of confrontation outside it.

Since the majority of local community experts were themselves Black and racially minoritised, the social lab process differed somewhat from other labs run by Reos Partners, and was adapted to meet the needs of a Black led systems change initiative.

This involved drawing on the personal and professional expertise of the team at The Ubele Initiative, an African diaspora led, infrastructure plus organisation, empowering Black and racially minoritised communities in the UK, to act as catalysts for social and economic change.

## 3.2. OUR UNDERLYING FRAMEWORK

As part of the social lab approach, and inspired by Reos Partner's change-facilitation philosophy,<sup>3</sup> Michael Hamilton (The Ubele Initiative) and Yannick Wassmer (Reos Partners), as lead facilitators of the process – adopted a series of participatory methods and facilitation approaches. These approaches centred the use of music, art, play and creativity as a means of moving through 'stuck problems' within the learning and prototyping process. Within residential workshops, this involved working alongside Drew Sinclair, a multidisciplinary artist and creator with a specialism in community work.

The participatory methods and facilitation approaches employed throughout the process were guided by Theory U, an action-research and awareness-based method for changing systems and addressing complex social issues pioneered by Otto Scharmer.<sup>4</sup> While the U-theory adopted in the process can be described quite simply – and appears neat and straightforward when depicted as a diagram or shared retrospectively in a report – the reality of applying this approach was markedly different in practice.

**“ Through music, art, play, and creativity we 'brought Africa into the room' for lack of better wording. I feel that this was of great importance in shaping the identity of the group, how relationships were formed... It brought an element of joy, pride, and connection that I haven't seen in many other processes that I've been part of. ”**  
**Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners**

**“ I think what we've really done differently here is that we actually moved marginalised voices from margin to centre by working with a predominantly Black and Brown group of people. One of the underlying hypotheses, for me, that we're testing is something along the lines of: people who are oppressed by a system often know best how they actually work, therefore we need to centre those voices in our efforts to achieve real, systemic change. ”**  
**Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners**

**“ Instead of the normal, straightforward way of dealing with complex issues, the U methodology allowed in-depth analysis of complex issues, and provided a holding space for participants to think deeply, reflect and develop solutions to safety issues. ”**  
**Local Expert & Participant**

3. Adam Kahane (2021), *Facilitating Breakthrough: How to Remove Obstacles, Bridge Differences, and Move Forward Together*.

Available at: <https://reospartners.com/resource-library/facilitating-breakthrough-book>

4. Otto Scharmer (2018) *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. Available at: <https://www.u-school.org/theory-u>



## 3.3. APPLYING THE U-THEORY

The U-theory was applied to The Black Systemic Safety Fund using a three-phased approach which involved systematically addressing and responding to:

### 1. The Internal Conditions of the Intervenor

**“ The quality of the intervention depends on the interior state of the intervenor ”**

**Bill O Brien**

Rather than jumping immediately into problem-solving mode, “the U-process begins with the idea that the best predictor for the outcome of an intervention is the internal condition of the intervenor”. This means before any discussion or action can take place, the intervenor(s) in a system – in this case, the group of participants in the Black safety process – must become more aware of themselves.

In the first phase of the work, group members focus on building awareness of their strengths, limitations, areas in which they feel stuck, and what motivates them to become unstuck and move forward. Taking this approach is very much in line with principles and approaches pioneered by systems change activists and facilitators including Bill O’ Brien, Grace Lee Boggs and Adrienne Maree Brown, for example.

### 2. A Shared Concern with Safety

Having built individual and collective awareness, the second step of the U-process emphasises becoming subject driven – identifying and collectively working to understand ‘a lack of safety’ as the shared social problem or issue, which is complex in nature, and therefore required the development of prototypes for action.

We wanted to think about safety beyond the narrow lens of violent crime and policing, which is what tends to happen when it comes to Black communities. So the discussion in the second phase of the process was: What do we know about safety? Can we very intentionally engage in learning journeys with experts who can share different perspectives on safety? Can we consider more rigorously how other people think about and approach problems associated with safety? Who else is working on or affected by this issue that we should be talking to, and who should be informing the development of our own solutions and prototypes?

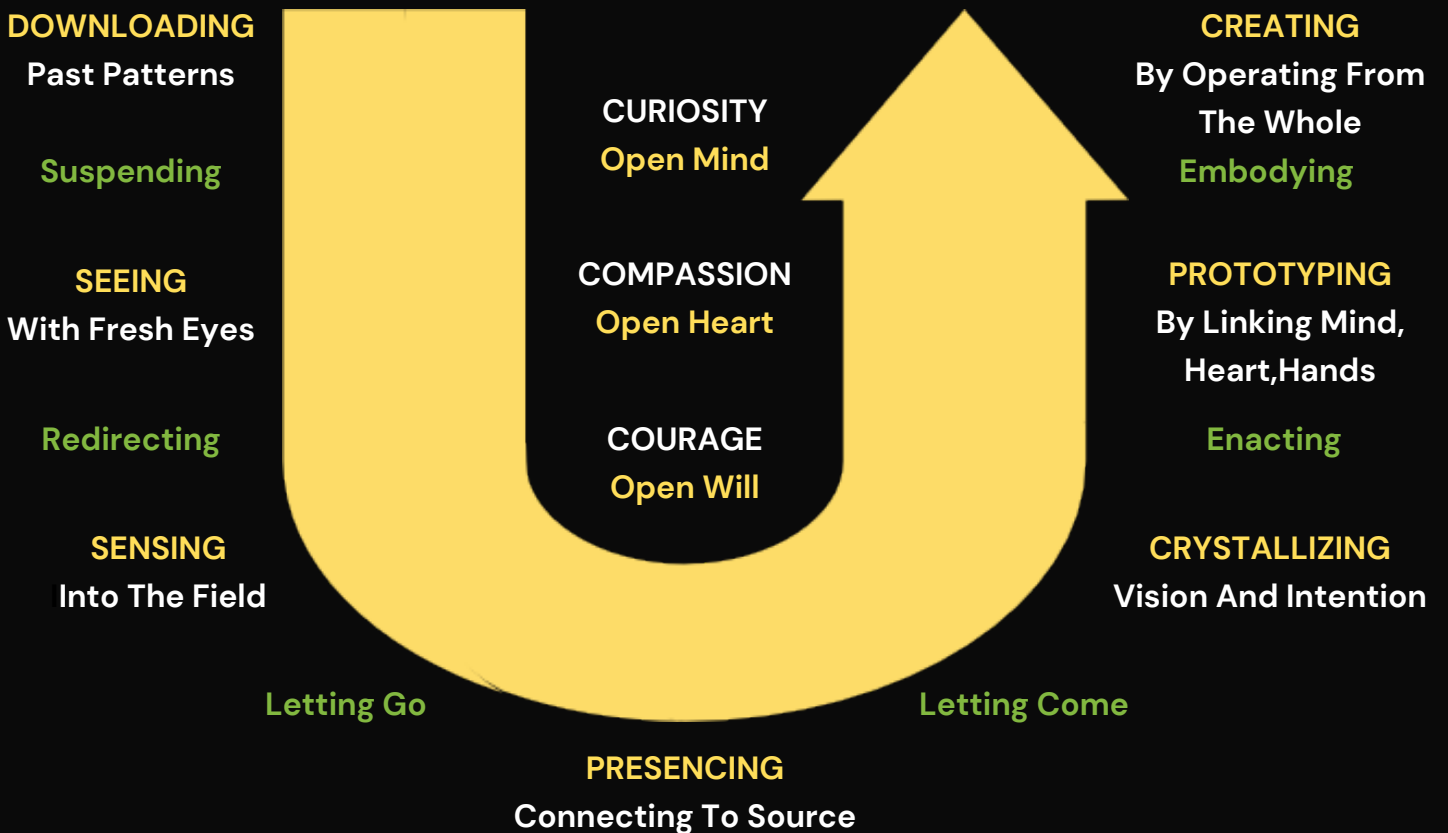
### 3. Actions to be Taken

Finally, in the third step of the U-process, participants (i.e. community experts), move into taking action to address their shared challenge using the prototypes developed in earlier phases. In this phase, community experts intentionally try not to overthink the problem or their actions, focussing first on implementing solutions, and refining their approach as they move forward and new insights emerge.

**// We try not to spend too much time considering what we're going to do. But recognise, we've done the work. And so let's trust our instincts, let's trust our belly. Let's trust that we are the expert on this problem. And the thing that we feel needs to happen is a thing that actually needs to happen because we have lived experience of the problem we're trying to address. //**

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative

# THEORY U: OUR UNDERLYING FRAME



While the U-theory adopted in the process can be described quite simply – and appears neat and straightforward when depicted as a diagram or shared retrospectively in a report – the reality of applying this approach was markedly different in practice.

Michael and Yannick, as lead facilitators of the process, were required to hold the U methodology lightly by flexibly and intuitively drawing upon a range of participatory activities and moving back and forth like a pendulum between the various phases of the 'U' as they pursued emerging lines of inquiry and responded to new insights and questions thrown up by the group.

“ What we ended up with as facilitators was an experimental approach in which we were constantly saying, what's going to work in this particular space, and with this particular group now? ...A space where we could take risks and give something new a try. Where if it works, it works. And if it doesn't work, we declared it in the group quite openly. ...We had to open people up to possibility; to take people away from certainty so they could explore new mental models and ways of being. ...Even as we've got to the prototyping stage, it's not been about saying, 'This is this is the thing that's gonna work'. It's about saying, let's give this a go! ”

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative

## 3.4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND DOCUMENTATION

“ Reflecting back on how we used theory-U now, it comes across like a really neat process. But in reality, it really wasn't. The safety project, for me, was a real demonstration of the iterative nature of the U process. It was really messy. We moved through it in cycles, getting lost along the road, having to revisit certain places to reconsider our sense of direction. ...There was just a constant sense of developing ideas and testing those ideas, and then coming back to the drawing board together. ...But I think that's how it's supposed to be. ”

Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners

Critically, the open-ended and messy nature of the process also had to be factored into the design of the process, and the approach to learning. This was where the role of the project manager, Christina Oredoko at The Ubele Initiative, became especially important in holding together, facilitating and creating the container for relationships across the implementing team and local experts. While this relational role is one that might be expected of any project manager, within the context of the social lab, the additional emphasis on acting as a host, convenor and even mediator became especially apparent during moments of uncertainty or challenge as the process unfolded. As such it required balancing pragmatic and logistical considerations of project management – the desire to create order out of complexity or chaos – with the need to remain open to new directions.

“ The role of the project manager is hugely important. Within the social lab and U theory, we call the project manager the host or convenor; the person that's holding people beyond the workshops and creating a container to deal with the kinds of issues that emerge in a process like this. ...It's absolutely critical that the project manager and convenor understands the process, and sees their role as relational. Their job is to hold people through the process of experimentation, and resist getting scared about outcomes along with funders or process participants; resist the desire to take the groups into action prematurely, which is the urge many of us have. ”

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative

Adding further support to the need to document and track the open-ended and process-oriented nature of the project, was the work of Debi Lewinson Roberts (independent consultant, storyteller and facilitator) and Veronika McKenzie (Reel Brit Productions), both of whom captured insights, learning and data related to the social lab along the way. Documenting the journey in itself became critical, since it allowed members of the implementing team and process participants alike to be 'on the same page' about progress made and learning surfaced across various phases of the work.

## 3.5. ANALYSIS APPROACH

Together, the learning partnership team took an ethnographic approach to learning work. This involved participating in and observing group processes and workshops, gathering a range of additional data, and reflecting collectively on emerging insights throughout the project. These insights were used to inform, refine, and make improvements to the work of the implementing partners – Impact on Urban Health, the Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners – over the duration of the process. The analysis took place over three key phases:

### Phase 1:

**Initial and in-depth analysis of interview transcripts to identify core and sub-themes and learning**

### Phase 2:

**Critical reflection on core and sub-themes to explore issues of power and coloniality – e.g. identifying silences, the unsaid, and other elephants or sticky issues to be surfaced**

### Phase 3:

**Sharing and facilitating a discussion of all learning and analysis with participants at the project's final workshop in order to sense-check and identify points of resonance and dissonance amongst participants**

The interviews conducted with 15 participants (60%) served as the largest source of data for this report. Apart from one interviewee, the majority that shared their perspectives at interview were involved from the beginning to the end of the process, and were generally more engaged in participant-led initiatives such as learning journeys and prototyping activities. As such, the insights shared through interviews skew towards especially enthusiastic and committed participants. Less represented are the views of those who were unable or unwilling, for a range of reasons, to remain involved and engaged with the process.



## 4. REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Overall, the social lab process – including theory U and a range of other participatory approaches adopted by the facilitation team – was received very well amongst the group, even if it was experienced as an uncomfortable and unfamiliar way of working for many in the room.

### 4.1. THE POSITIVES

**// I have quite some history of being involved in designing and implementing projects. So I pay particular attention to some of the processes that are involved, and the tools being used. ...I found quite a number of the approaches and workshop tools to be really novel. And quite a good learning experience for someone like me, because I've seen a number of projects, and there is a different dimension to this project, which I have found innovative. //**

**Local Expert & Participant**

Local community experts shared extensively how the social lab approach created a safe container in which local experts and leaders could build trust and form new relationships of solidarity. In some cases, this served to disrupt existing dynamics of competition over funding and support among local community leaders from Black and racially minoritised groups, who have been historically under-resourced – a matter already addressed in section two of this report. In addition, the adoption of theory U, which is described earlier in section one of this report, offered the group a shared language with which to track and describe the evolving and at times destabilising experimental process to which participants had committed themselves.

**// I think this [U] process does offer a sense of language... and the opportunity to turn language into a sense of possibility. //**

**Local Expert & Participant**

Especially important was the fact that the collaborative social lab approach created space in which facilitators could integrate a range of novel methods and participatory approaches to thinking about safety as a complex issue. In addition to Theory U, the adoption of 'the Cynefin framework' and 'the Yam activity' – an adaptation of systems change iceberg – stood out as approaches that were especially useful to process participants and discussed in some detail within interviews.<sup>5 6</sup>

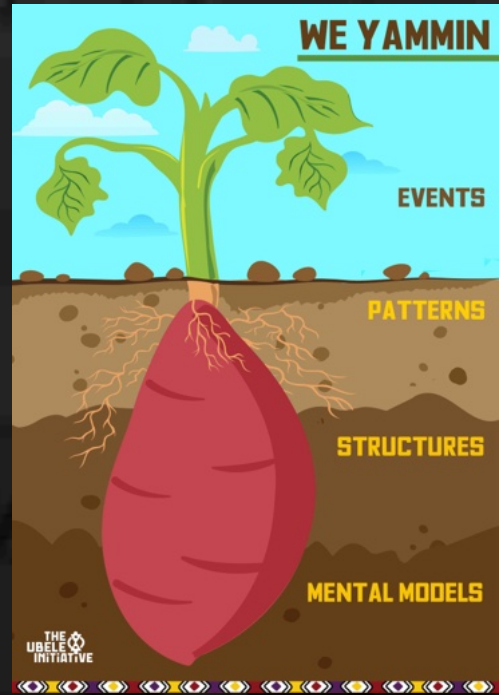
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5. The Cynefin Framework was developed to help leaders understand their challenges, and to make decisions in context. By distinguishing different domains (the subsystems) in which leaders operate, the framework recognises that our actions need to match the reality we find ourselves in through a process of sense-making. This helps leaders cultivate an awareness of what is really complex, and what is not; and to respond accordingly so that no energy is wasted in overthinking or in seeking to make the complex fit into standard solutions. For a more detailed description of the Cynefin Framework, see the link here: <https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework/>

# THE CYNEFIN FRAMEWORK



# YAM ACTIVITY



“ We used a yam activity – which was our adaptation of the systems change iceberg activity – to support the group to think about issues of safety. At the top of the iceberg is what you see on face value when you look at local community; the key events that are talked about, like knife crime stabbings, black boys going to prison, and the like. And then, in the next layer of the iceberg are those things that contribute and give rise to those conditions – the patterns, the structures, and the mental models. Having that yam activity, and a range of other activities and toys, such as the Cynefin framework and the lego activity, really gave the local experts a whole new set of eyes to look through. ...And they really enjoyed having these different eyes and ways of looking at the issue; this set of different ways to unpack old, familiar, stuck problems. Just having spaces where people can be given those ways of visioning their work of seeing the potential, the possibilities of their work, I think is, was just a really good thing for them. ...it kind of facilitated their hunger to look at what they're doing with new eyes. ”

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative

6. The systems change iceberg is a model that helps systems change activists to explore the root causes of key issues in a systems, and the complex and interrelated nature of these problems. For a more detailed insight see:

<https://bootcamp.uxdesign.cc/systems-thinking-the-iceberg-model-6294bc5346f0>

**//** I'm quite interested in the U process, this is the first time I've come across it. And I'm very intentionally wanting to learn what it is. ...How it is supposed to be used in practice. ...I have read all the books I can find on it. ...And I'm invested in knowing how effective the U theory is... and actually works in practice. **//**

**Local Expert & Participant**

All three methods equipped participants with a range of tools and frameworks with which to see familiar problems with new eyes – a critical opportunity for practitioners to exit the space of constantly 'doing' in their professional lives, and to step back and reflect on the bigger picture and context of their work. As noted by one of the lead facilitators of the process, this was critical in a context where community groups and practitioners have been stripped of opportunities to think, learn and grow together over recent decades.

The adoption of these reflective and participatory approaches were spoken of very positively by participants who commended the strong facilitation of the implementing partners, and shared how working together cultivated a joyful space in which they could be present and switch off from the day-to-day concerns of running their organisations.

**//** Specifically I've enjoyed the interactive and embodied approaches to the work. It's not just standard boring slides. It's energising activities... preparing the group and creating a container for creative work and deep thinking which is required for effective systems change. **//**

**Local Expert & Participant**





**//** ...I love how there were different types of activities. Sometimes it was writing, sometimes we were modelling, sometimes we were creating things with resources. It was nice, it was almost very therapeutic... They did really well in making me present. And I committed to myself, if I'm here, I'm going to be present. So it's kind of like phone's off, be 100% there. ...It was very joyful. **//**

**Local Expert & Participant**

This included important space to engage in reflective practice and exchange with other participants, and an emphasis on 'listening and learning sessions' in which participants were encouraged to truly hear and engage with perspectives that differed from their own.

**//** What I found really, really, really good was the prep information and the prep guidelines [before sessions]. I think when you're told explicitly to go to this space with an open mind, without assuming that you are right, just to listen... try to leave every judgement outside the door... I think that sets you up in a completely different place. It does really, really does truly help to listen, and to understand. **//**

**Local Expert & Participant**

**//** I remember having the conversation with someone: Do we have to destroy the system and create something new? And I did ask him this. ...It was very interesting for me to hear him say, I don't think we should destroy the system. ...I was like, wow, this is really interesting. And he explained very thoroughly where he was coming from. It really unlocked something within myself; this sense that every journey is different, and we're all trying to figure out this really shady context. And everyone's doing the best from where we are. And everyone can figure out something differently. So there's a lot in collective power. ...For him to say, 'No, I don't think we should destroy it. I want to teach as many people as I can how to navigate the system' had a big impact on me. ...The fact that we were invited to go to these learning journeys with an open and blank page, just to listen and take in, I think that was really, really, really good. **//**

**Local Expert & Participant**



Overall, the methods were received by the vast majority of attendees as transformative – a rare but important opportunity to step back from their busy schedules and work as practitioners and leaders of organisations, and to engage in some personal development. Better still, becoming familiar with some of these methods and approaches to systems change had additional benefits for their organisations; most took back key ideas and activities and shared them with staff and colleagues in their workplaces.

**“** *Professionals have that space and time, and training to stop and think, and do all of that kind of flowery stuff. Whereas the practitioners are concerned with: 'How do I open my centre today? How do I close? How do I make sure we've got enough money to keep the doors open?', you know. You know? And so I think, in my heart, the questions was how do we use the social lab methodology to help practitioners to do their work? How do we help people to stop and think? To spend some time exploring what they're doing? ...In general, they don't get the space to look up and to see the world. They become practitioners, and then they just kind of get lost this tunnel of doing and making sure they've got enough funding for next year. ...Often in the opening round of workshops, you'd hear people say, 'I'm really glad to be here. Because I can stop. Because I can just engage my brain in a different way in the work that I'm doing, you know. And just that alone for people is the most repeated reflection about the lab that I heard from participants throughout the process.* **”**

*Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative*

In particular, several people mentioned the yam – an adaptation of the iceberg activity – which was used as a tool to encourage systems thinking. The exercise helps group members identify patterns related to a problem, the systems structures related to those patterns and the mental models that create the structures. In addition, several others spoke about the value of the Cynefin framework for assessing and questioning problems sharing how they had applied and shared the tool with colleagues in their organisations. Key in both processes was an emphasis on agency, with each encouraging participants to recognise systemic issues, but also engage with their own capacities to influence change.

**“** *It was a really, really excellent tool for me to look things from a different perspective, like, 'Oh, this is not your traditional problem. This is a more complicated situation. So we might need to try and fail and test and try again. And that framework given from the sessions was very useful.* **”**

*Local Expert & Participant*

“ The Cynefin framework has stuck with me and I now use it in my organisation. When I do have problems at work now or we're looking at new ways of doing things. I do think about that graph, like what kind of problem is this and where does it work? ”

Local Expert & Participant //

“ The emphasis in the programme of asking "What can I do? What can we do? What could we do?" was useful. Acknowledging structural factors but also looking within... I think this is something we struggle with in the women's sector. Looking at power within self and organisation. ”

Local Expert & Participant //

## 4.2. THE CHALLENGES

While viewed positively overall by the end of the process, the adoption of the social lab method, including Theory U, the Cynefin framework, and the Yam (an adaptation of systems change iceberg), did provoke a number of challenges and anxieties – particularly in the early and middle stages of the project. The open-ended and process-oriented nature of the approach was perhaps especially jarring to practitioners who were naturally more goal-oriented, and even some of those working at the hardest end of safety issues (e.g. around criminal justice or domestic violence issues).

“ It was quite mysterious, very mysterious, this U-process. But I assume that they've got their approach to how they facilitate. ...They're not over giving. They give you less information to hold you in the present moment, when I'm a person who wants to know all the information beforehand, so that I can think about it and then come up with something. ”

Local Expert & Participant //

“ A facilitator explained that there are people that are planners and like structure. He warned us from the beginning, 'you're going to struggle in this process'. And then there are people that can flow. I am from the first group. I constantly struggled with, 'Oh, my God, where are we? What is happening? What's going to come after this? When are we going to come up with something?' For me, it has been such a journey of learning to flow. I am trying to let go of that need for structure. But I'm still struggling. ”

Local Expert & Participant //

Among this latter group, which was admittedly small in number, protracted and 'time-consuming' conversations about one's personal positions and the issue of safety – and even the more participatory methods adopted in the process – were experienced as time wasted and a luxury that local experts could not afford.

**“And the approach to the sessions is very much I would describe as a kind of mind, body and soul. And it's very holistic, it's very woo woo. ...And, when you live in a busy world, like mine – I mean, for the first few times, it was lovely. It was fun. ...But it did get repetitive, because it was kind of like, 'Okay, you can move this on.' But that's just me, that's just my own way. I think I'm different from others like my colleague. ...So that was interesting. Because I've never been in a space like that.”**

*Local Expert & Participant*

A need for additional support during key transition phases in the U Process was articulated. Moving from the hands-on facilitation and what felt like a safe container in the collective exploration phase to the prototyping phase was challenging for some participants. There was a nuanced tension between participants being encouraged to trust the somewhat mysterious U Process, particularly on the left side of the process (step 1 and 2), and then being prompted to assert agency on the right side of the U Process (step 3) which felt somewhat abrupt. This highlights the need for additional resources to assist participants through a smoother transition.

**“It just went kind of like 'now you guys organise yourselves, go and do what you need to do.' Whereas we've been in this nice little safety net. ...To say 'go and do what you need to do and come back to us,' It just felt a little flat. Everyone seemed a bit confused.”**

*Local Expert & Participant*

## 4.3. A BLACK LED AND OWNED PROCESS...?

**“What I'm learning is that it really, really, matters who you invite into the room. ...Doing this work, specifically with majority Black and brown and racially minoritised people is a fundamentally different experience. Working with Black and brown people makes a difference and changes the context.”**

*Yannick Wassmer, Senior Consultant, Reos Partners*

For some, there were even deeper questions about whether the U-process was needed at all, and indeed whether its current application and attribution was itself 'colonial' and reflected coloniality of knowledge. In addition to the challenges described above, a further set of questions emerged around the applicability of the U-process for work within Black and racially minoritised communities.



At the heart of this inquiry was a concern to understand whether the process adopted could be considered truly Black-owned, and whether it made a difference to have a Black organisation and facilitation team leading the process.

This question surfaced some important, if complicated and critical learnings and insights, including:

- **How was the U-theory developed in the first instance?**
- **Who has been acknowledged in the process of developing the theory?**
- **Who gets to own and capitalise on learning from the U-process after it is applied within Black and racially minoritised communities?**

Overall, implementing partners and participants alike all agreed that having a Black led organisation and facilitation team had not only been critical, but ultimately a rare and transformative experience for all present.

“ There is something for me about working with people that suffer from racism, suffer from oppression, suffer from inequality... they often know best how systems work, because they are actually in their life experiencing how it works. ...being in learning together, around how systems change work, from that specific perspective of being oppressed by a system is different than working with people who have always been part of creating the systems and understand how systems work and all of that. ”

Local Expert & Participant

“ We are really glad to be working with a Black led organisation who really knows how to build trust and also has a deep understanding about how community organisations work, the culture that they operate from. ”

Local Expert & Participant

## 4.4. TAILORING AND ADAPTING THE PROCESS

“ Whenever I challenge other black activists about what is the difference between kind of Eurocentric thought and Afrocentric thought, the first thing that they come back with is always this idea of collective responsibility, and collective spaces in Africa.

And so I do want to explore what that means. ”

Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative





Questions were raised about the coloniality of the method, and what kinds of adaptations the process would need to work for Black and racially minoritised communities. Among the facilitation team, there was significant discussion about how to adapt a method that was adopted, initially because it was convenient to learn and important to test out.

The most important adaptations made included:

- **Moving from a more individualistic to a more collectivist approach to thinking about the internal conditions of the intervenor in step one of the U-process**
- **Adapting activities – for example, the iceberg activity – to speak more to the experiences and cultural context of local community**
- **Integrating explicitly ‘African’ forms of movement, song and creativity into the process**
- **Emphasising ancestral connection and links to the continent of Africa**

**“ We've purposefully brought song in; we've purposely brought movement; and we purposely brought African song in. So not just any song, but we've brought African song in. ...We must, when we're working with Black people, connect them back to Africa. Because I believe that to be the source of our strength. As we move forward, I don't think there can be free Black people until we have a strong Africa. And so our connection back to source is important. ...If I was taken today, and dragged off to some place, and forced to work for nothing, I would hope that when I died, my grandchildren would come back to see who I was, and where I was. There's that kind of responsibility, that I think that we have to just touch where we come from; to rest the spirits of people that went through a whole heap of shit to stay alive, so that I could be here, you know? ”**

**Michael Hamilton, Director, The Ubele Initiative**

## 4.5. A THOUGHT PIECE BY YANNICK WASSMER CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITABLE SYSTEMS CHANGE



Over the course of the last two years I've had the honor to work on a project that is called the Black Systemic Safety Fund. In many ways, this project has fundamentally (re)shaped my thinking about systems change and, more specifically, my thinking about equitable systems change. I am aware of the big, buzzy words in the subtitle and how they may need a bit of context and explanation to make sense (My Sunday league football mates would probably kick me in the shins if I uttered these words to them, but there you go). My intention with this article is to offer a reflection on power dynamics within systems change initiatives and stimulate a conversation on the notion of equity in relation to systems change.

### A theory of systems change

In order to get there it is helpful to understand a little bit more about my work. Because in many ways, the work that we did in the Black Systemic Safety Fund is similar to what I've been doing for the past decade. For lack of a better job title, I am a facilitator of collaboration to enable systemic change. In practice this means that I help people--often from very diverse backgrounds--to collaborate across their differences and find ways to move forward on issues that matter most to them. Me and my colleagues at [Reos Partners](#) and [The Ubele Initiative](#) help people to think and act systemically, learn how to befriend complexity, prototype new ways forward, and be in relationship while doing this.



There's an underlying theory of change that we, and I guess many other systems change practitioners, work towards. It roughly goes like this:

Many of the social and ecological challenges that we're facing are complex challenges. Meaning that they are fundamentally unknowable and unsolvable--they are unpredictable in nature due to the interaction of many agents within the system and the emergent behavior that follows from that. This is fundamentally different from complicated, 'ordered' challenges which are predictable and interventions will lead to repeatable and replicable outcomes. It's the difference between raising a child and sending a rocket to the moon--the difference between wicked and tame problems, between adaptive challenges and technological problems. A lot about this has been said and written by brilliant people already. I still find Dave Snowden's Cynefin framework one of the most helpful frameworks (Snowden D. and E. Boone (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. Harvard Business Review. ) in this respect.

The dominant Cartesian, Newtonian, and Taylorian mental model focused on separation, specialization and efficiency that still underpins to a great extent how we organize ourselves and do our work is not helpful in complexity. On the contrary, it is one of the main reasons that we're collectively creating results that nobody wants (Scharmer, O. (2007) Theory U: leading from the future as it emerges. Society for Organizational Learning.).

We therefore need to address the challenges of our times from a complexity informed mindset. A helpful articulation of complexity has been offered by Senge (Senge, P. (1990) The Fifth Discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization) where he distinguishes between 3 different types of complexity: dynamic (cause and effect are far away in space and time), social (actors have different views and interests), and emergent (solutions from the past don't apply anymore).

As a response, we need a whole systems (systemic) approach that invites the collective intelligence of a diverse group of stakeholders (participatory) to innovate and prototype new ways of thinking, being, and doing (experimental). Again, a lot has already been said and written about this approach, amongst others by Zaid Hassan in the Social Labs Revolution (Hassan, Z. (2014) The Social Labs Revolution: A new approach to solving our toughest challenges. Berrett-Koehler Publishers) and the ongoing articulation of our theory of change at Reos Partners.



The work in the Black Systemic Safety Fund in many ways ticked all of these boxes. The massively wicked issue of safety in the historically Black boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark in South London was the main starting point of the exploration (hello complexity!). A group of 20 community leaders gathered over a series of 7 multi day workshops from July 2022 to December 2023 to develop a portfolio of innovations to remove systemic barriers to safety--focusing on racial justice in education, the development of Black-owned assets and radically reimagining the relationship between funder and fundees. The process, initiated by Impact on Urban Health, was also an exploration of whether a Social Lab approach could be an interesting methodology for Participatory Grantmaking as they had set out a fund of £500k for participants to distribute amongst the different innovations they had developed in support of their exploration of safety.

Like other multi-stakeholder systems change initiatives I've been part of, it became a rich and meaningful journey together. People explored the thorny issue of safety from a multiplicity of angles, discovered systemic obstacles to forward movement, went on learning journeys to meet people and places of inspiration, found inner stillness in nature and themselves, and explored what the adjacent possible could become by experimenting their way forward. All along the road they learned, unlearned, and stayed in relationship even when things got difficult.

**// I love how there were different types of activities. Sometimes it was writing, sometimes we were modeling, sometimes we were creating things with resources. It was nice, it was almost very therapeutic. They did really well in making me present. And I committed to myself, if I'm here, I'm going to be present. It was very joyful. //**

**Participant reflection**

But there was something special, something different about this specific piece of work. As is often the case when you're working in complexity, the importance of the difference only made sense in hindsight to me. I came to realize that this insight also addresses something that has been nagging me ever since I entered the field of systems change, specifically as a color-ful facilitator.







## THE 6 BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

### MICROCOSM OF THE SYSTEM?

The picture above (The 6 blind men and the elephant) is an often used image to visualize a key aspect of the general theory on systems change. The parable, which originated from the ancient Indian subcontinent and took many different shapes and forms afterwards, tells the story of 6 blind men who have never seen an elephant and are discovering what it is by touching it. The person that is holding the elephant's trunk describes it as a snake, the person who's touching the ear says that it feels like a fan, the person who's pulling the tail thinks it's a rope, and so forth. The key takeaway is that individual perceptions are limited, others' perceptions are equally valuable as our own, and in order to see the whole picture we need to adopt different perspectives.

In systems change efforts this means that we often try to bring together a wide variety of perspectives on a given challenge and we try to gather a so-called *microcosm of the system*. When working, for example, on drug criminality in the south of the Netherlands this would mean that we would bring together high level politicians and civil servants, union representatives, police officers, business people, housing corporations, religious leaders, and youth workers, (retired) drug dealers, and motorcycle outlaw gang members. On many occasions, I've witnessed the deep personal and collective transformation that can take place when a group of people like this finds ways of collaborating with each other against all odds.

## SEEDS OR SOIL

However, over the years I've also noticed a different pattern--a potential pitfall in (multi-stakeholder) systems change efforts. What I've seen happening on different occasions--including in the project on drug criminality mentioned above--is that voices most oppressed by the system under investigation often stay minority voices within a group process. This is both due to lack of representation in numbers and due to a dominant group culture. This dominant group culture is often informed by a shared positionality and privileged experience of a system. One where the system either works in your favor or at least has not explicitly been designed against you. What, at best, tends to happen is that minority voices will be heard in the process and are seen as equal members of the team. However, often the group process becomes a fractal of the system of investigation, including historical and societal injustices and power imbalances. In practice, this means that dominant power structures (often imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal structures, following bell hooks seminal articulation of intersecting oppressive systems), (hooks, b. 2004 *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge) that exist within the group are often not or insufficiently challenged. As a result, marginalized voices often hold back from fully speaking their truth, or even worse, disengage from the process.

Outcomes from systems change initiatives, whether those are stories of the future, innovative projects or policy recommendations, tend to heavily rely on a dominant, privileged positionality of how a system works and where high-leverage intervention areas for change might be. This means that we often miss out on a lot of wisdom on how a system *actually* works instead of how it is supposed to work. Newness tends to arise at the edges of a system, and it is exactly at this periphery where the excluded and minoritized voices are most needed to help imagine the unimaginable. Unfortunately, far too often we end up staying within the boundaries of what's possible and comfortable instead of radically challenging the foundations that keep the status quo alive.

This point about the importance of your positionality within a system was beautifully illustrated in another recent project I was part of focused on co-creating the conditions for Black elderly to age with dignity in the city of London. During one of many co-creative conversations, one of the main questions was about where people could already see the seeds of the future being planted. A key insight arose that for Black communities it is often not about planting new seeds but actually having to work on improving the quality of the soil before any new initiative can really take root.





The point I'm trying to make is that your lived experience of a system matters. How you think about a system and about changing a system is greatly informed by your lived experience of a system. As a result, some questions have been accompanying me as we continue to develop this work: What if the people who are most oppressed by a system know best how to change that system? What are the conditions that are needed to center their voices? Would 6 blind women describe an elephant differently? What would this do to our understanding of our relationships with elephants? What if too many systems change efforts are focused on planting new seeds instead of cultivating a healthy, nutrient soil for all?

## FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

I think what made the work in the Black Systemic Safety Fund different from other systems change initiatives I've been part of, is that we were actually able to move lived experience leadership from margin to center. We were not trying to create a seat at the table, we were actually capable of creating a whole new table. At this table, 90 percent of the people were Black and Brown and had a lived experience of structural racism. In addition, almost all of them were working on addressing barriers to safety on the ground and in communities. People's direct encounters with systemic injustices and proximity to the challenge at hand, provided a deep and nuanced understanding of the complexities of living the system. This specific positionality allowed for an invaluable perspective on how the system of exploration works and how it should be changed.

For example, conversations about how to move forward on the topic of safety almost instantly moved away from the obvious, in-your-face, safety related issues such as gang violence and knife crimes. Because of people's work in the heart of their communities these stories did become part of the collective container as a constant reminder of the importance of the work, but they never became the focus for change. It was almost as if right from the start of the process, there was a collective understanding that when working in systems, the best way to treat a problem is seldom where the problem appears, because of the interaction of parts (Meadows, D. (2007) Thinking in Systems: A primer.).

In addition, a key principle emerged early in the process about the importance of shifting narratives. It was evident to the group that there was a strong need and opportunity for this project to challenge the dominant narrative about Black people and safety--that they wanted to focus their story about addressing the underlying systemic structures instead of the behaviors that emerge as a result of those structures as the visible outcomes. Having lived with dominant narratives of race, slavery, and colonialism, Black leaders often know far too well how important it is to shape your own narrative or reimagine an existing narrative that has been around for centuries. As an ancient Surinamese saying goes: as long as the tiger isn't heard, the hunter will always be the hero (A similar, often-cited version of this is attributed to Nigerian author Chinua Achebe: "Until the lions of their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter).

## MOVING FORWARD: THREE INGREDIENTS

The question then becomes: how to do this--how do you create a space where lived experience leadership can move from margin to center? Especially in times of a polycrisis where the need for systems change is more evident than ever, it becomes even more important that we center equity in systems transformation. One of the great risks that we face is that due to the urgency of the societal problems we're facing and the pressure of finding scalable solutions to societal issues quickly, equity and justice are easily traded off.

Without assuming that we know any answers to the question above, we discovered three ingredients that we think are crucial to explore in different contexts to learn more.

### 1. Lived experience throughout

A key enabling factor in the process was the fact that lived experience leadership was found in every element of the project, not just only in the group of participants. From the team of organizers, facilitators, and participating funders, everybody had a plethora of lived experiences of racism and oppression. This collective perspective allowed for a different starting point of almost every conversation. There was no need of convincing anybody of the real, harmful, and dangerous impact of coloniality in contemporary societies as each individual involved in the project has a lifetime of experience and examples to draw from first hand. As a result, the group as a whole operated from a shared starting point that allowed for conversations to be way more radical in challenging the status quo than I have witnessed in order spaces.

The hypothesis that we, based on the learning from this process, offer is that establishing lived experience leadership throughout the whole of the systems change initiative is a key enabler for trustworthy relationships and a group's capacity to explore the edges of what is possible.

### 2. Move with the speed of trust

Another key insight that emerged from the process is that participatory grantmaking is deeply relational. Participatory Grantmaking as a concept has gained a lot of traction over recent years, especially for funders working with minoritized communities and/or those who are trying to reconcile with the sources their wealth originated from. Handing over power and decision-making to community led groups can seem like the right thing to do, however when not done well and without tending to relationships within the group it has the potential to do more harm than good.

In the Black Systemic Safety Fund the conversation about the actual allocation of the fund only took place in the final workshop. The group had been meeting for more than a year by then. In that time, we purposefully nurtured relationships between participants and invited differences and dissent at each stage of the process.



In hindsight we can say we learned how to move with the speed of trust (Brown, a. (2017) Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds. Ak Press) and only invited the conversation about the distribution of the fund when trustworthy relationships were built--not only between participants, but between participants, funders and the facilitation team as well.

The hypothesis that we, based on the learning from this process, offer is that when working with lived experience leaders trust is something that is hard to earn and easy to lose. Growing and weaving trustworthy relationships might well be the single most important outcome to design for, even more than the actual innovations or scalability of the work. In that sense critical connections are indeed more important than critical mass as Grace Lee Boggs articulated (Boggs, G.L. (2011) The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the 21st Century. University of California Press. ).

### 3. Building the cultural container

Throughout the process we consistently elevated our collective cultures. We intentionally practiced plurality in celebrating and honoring our diverse cultures. This meant that we sang Yoruba songs, ate jollof, and danced like capoeira warriors every time we met. By doing so, our collective cultures became a force for good, a source of pride, joy, and hope. It became our own little antidote to modernity's single story of progress with 'Western culture' as the highest form of achievement. We were able to find unity in our diversity, honoring the beauty of our Caribbean, African, Latin, and (South East) Asian sources.

The hypothesis that we, based on the learning from this process, offer is that especially when working with lived experience leaders, collectively spending time on shaping the cultural container is not something that is nice-to-have, but actually a fundamental enabler of learning and co-creation.

#### The invitation

As said, the purpose of offering these reflections is to open a conversation among folx who are involved in either leading, designing, inviting, or facilitating systems change processes. Now more than ever, the world requires us as a field to critically reflect on our collective practice and help steward it to its next edge. This cannot be done without thoroughly investigating to what extent we might be reproducing the very same injustices and power imbalances within our well-intended attempts of dismantling them.



# 5. CONCLUSION

## 5.1. SO WHAT, NOW WHAT?

What then can we learn about black led systems change processes? What are the actionable, key takeaways for other funders and communities seeking to engage in a similar process? We came up with a handful of ideas that can contribute to making a systems change process more culturally relevant. Systems change processes are inherently about the parts in that given system, so to move forward and unblock our complex and stuck situations, we need to be able to break open ourselves with the tools that fit best, for the collective shift to happen.

THINGS THAT ARE DONE IN MANY SYSTEMS CHANGE PROCESSES	THINGS THAT WE DID TO MAKE IT RELEVANT TO OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work socially with a collaborative team</li> <li>• Work systemically looking for root causes and solutions</li> <li>• Experiment the way forward</li> <li>• Invite dissent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When exploring the inner conditions of the intervenor, we took more collectivist approach than individualistic one</li> <li>• We adapted activities to resonate more with the experiences and cultural context of the community</li> <li>• We integrated specifically African forms of movement, song, and creativity</li> <li>• We emphasized ancestral connection and links to the continent of Africa</li> </ul>

Following our own process, we were able to decipher clear do’s and don’ts for Black led systems change processes. We hope these can act as helpful guidelines to show what’s needed for this type of work.

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a safe container</li> <li>• Create shared language</li> <li>• Provide strong facilitation</li> <li>• Provide space and time for reflective practice</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for personal development</li> <li>• Provide clarity about what to expect from the process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just apply theories and frameworks from different cultural contexts</li> <li>• Assume the approach will be comfortable for everyone</li> <li>• Underestimate the time that it will require</li> </ul>



# 4 LEARNINGS ABOUT BLACK LED SYSTEMS CHANGE

Lastly, we came up with four key learnings about Black led systems processes. These points are not exhaustive, but rather pinpoint key areas that we believe anchor and strengthen such processes:

## 1 Having a group in which everyone is Black or racially marginalized works for shifting problems rooted in racial inequity.

People who have lived experiences related to a problem and have actively worked to address it bring a deep and nuanced understanding of how systems perpetuate these issues and how they can be changed.



## 2 Celebrating the group's culture sustains energy, inspires, and creates new outcomes.

Culture can be brought in in the form of African forms of movement, song, and creativity, adapting tools and methods to culturally resonant examples and symbols, emphasizing ancestral connections, and modifying frameworks to be more culturally resonant- for example moving from individualistic to collective framings.

## 3 Centring the group's experiential knowledge generates nuanced understanding of how systems perpetuate these issues and how they can be changed.

Other forms of knowledge and experience can be part of the process, but the group's experiential knowledge can unlock unique and powerful analyses and solutions.



## Make time to build trust.

Trustworthy relationships need to be nurtured before taking difficult decisions. Trust is hard to earn and easy to lose. Taking time to create trust is more important to creating transformative outcomes than planned timelines.



## 5.2. FINAL THOUGHTS

The learning process itself has generated some important insights which we hope will inform future initiatives. Most significant for a project focussed on safety within minoritised communities of Lambeth and Southwark was the challenge of convening and identifying the right learning partnership team from the outset of the project.

Seeds have been planted...facilitating networks, building relationships, and establishing connections are crucial prerequisites for effective systems change, even before concrete solutions are identified. While the U process holds value, its significance lies primarily in its role as a tool for fostering connections and laying the groundwork for impactful work. It serves as a means of sowing seeds and creating a container for the transformative efforts that will unfold.

Cultivating fertile ground for Black led systems change initiatives requires addressing who is in the room and considering how we nurture this space beyond the room. The composition of the room holds significance; including community experts and individuals with lived experiences is essential. Equally crucial is who is facilitating and holding the process; individuals with lived experience. And finally who is on boarded as a learning partner really matters; individuals with lived experience.

To tackle issues rooted in generations of systemic injustice the focus needs to extend beyond addressing singular issues, such as safety, to encompass broader objectives like sowing seeds, facilitating connections, community power, agency, and networks and relationships that will exist and generate returns beyond the life-cycle of a single project.



# APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

The concepts used throughout this learning report have mostly been defined according to Sanjiv Lingayah and Nina Kellys "[A Guide to Talking About Racism](#)" (July, 2023).

## Anti-racism

Anti-racism is the practice of identifying and ending racism by changing the values, structures and behaviours that enable it (Lingayah and Kelly 2023).

## Black vs black

Most race scholars – especially those focused on anti-black racism – capitalise when referring to Black people of African descent. This is to distinguish people of African descent from other racially minoritised people who identify as politically black (lower case) as part of historical struggles for recognition by the state and systems (Meer 2014: 13).

## Coloniality

'Coloniality' is a concept first defined by Aníbal Quijano and later developed by Walter Dignolo. Quijano described coloniality as an encompassing political, cultural, epistemological, and symbolic condition (Quijano, 2008). He illustrates coloniality of power as the inter-relationship between modern forms of exploitation and domination, and coloniality of knowledge as the influence of colonialism on domains of knowledge production.

## Ethnicity

A related concept to 'race' is ethnicity – used to describe people who share a common history, geography and culture. Ethnicity can be self-selected, whereas 'race' is more usually imposed by others to classify groups in a hierarchy. However, ethnic categories are also socially constructed. And they can be intertwined with or become racial categories, e.g., African-Caribbean, Indian and Muslim, and can also be a basis for racist discrimination (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).

## 'Race'

'Race' is a socially constructed concept used to group humans, often based on physical appearance. 'Race' was constructed as a hierarchal system of classification to identify and differentiate some groups, in order to elevate some and marginalise others (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).



## Racialisation

A dominant concept used to describe the processes through which people come to be seen as members of particular racial and/or ethnic groups (Delgado and Stefancic 2014:8; Meer 2014:125). Processes of racialisation serve as the mechanisms through which individuals are “socialised into a socio-systemic hierarchy” (Suyemoto et al. 2020), in which positive and/or negative attributes and values (i.e. stereotypes) can be ascribed to particular groups, based on their real or imagined shared characteristics, values and attributes. Dominant groups claim possession of superior qualities, corraling power and privilege in ways that uphold their interests, while asserting the inferiority of Others, who remain subservient, marginalised and oppressed (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011).

## Racially Minoritised

The term ‘Minoritised’ points to the active processes of marginalisation involved in racist practice, including the unequal allocation of power, resources and status (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).

## Systemic Racism

Systemic racism describes the ways that individual (interpersonal), institutional and structural racism jointly produce harms to Black and racially minoritised people relative to white people. These systems are so deeply set that to reset them requires fundamental, transformational change (Lingayah and Kelly, 2023).



# APPENDIX 2: LEARNING METHODOLOGY

Learning from the safety project was led by Ravenna Nuaimy Barker and Sarah Samaha at Reos Partners, an organisation working globally to steward systems change initiatives, and Dr Tamanda Walker, an independent consultant and researcher specialising in race, decolonial theory and Black led systems change efforts.

## Sources of Learning

Key insights presented in this report were derived from:

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Four In-Person workshops	A series of four in-person participatory workshops run with a group of community leaders from Lambeth and Southwark in March, May, June and November 2023. These workshops were facilitated by Michael Hamilton (The Ubele Initiative) and Yannick Wassmer (Reos Partners) and systematically documented by Debi Lewinson Roberts (independent consultant).
Five Learning Journeys	A series of five participant-led learning journey sessions with invited experts, including David Bryan, Derek Bardowell, Dr Mahamed Hash, Dr Yansie Rolston and Dr Ariel Breaux Torres, and Dr Joe Montgomery.
Prototyping Sessions	A series of prototyping sessions within and beyond facilitated residential in which participants developed innovative models to address Black safety issues in Lambeth and Southwark.
15 one-on-one interviews	A total of 15 one-on-one interviews that include the perspectives of 13 project participants.

ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION
Reflection Sessions	A total of two shared reflections on learning from the project with participants – one at the final in-person workshop in November 2023, and a second following an initial draft and write up of the project learning in March 2024. Both sessions were facilitated by Dr Tamanda Walker.
Video transcripts on participant reflections	Transcripts from participant reflections on the process documented in videos on <u>the project</u> and its <u>associated methodologies and processes</u> by Veronica McKenzie of <u>Reel Brit Productions</u> .
Surveys and evaluation	Participant surveys and evaluations undertaken in the middle and at the end of the process.
Periodic reflections from the organising and implementing team	Reflections on the process by members of the Organising, Facilitation and Learning Partnership Teams at Impact on Urban Health, the Ubele Initiative and Reos Partners over the duration of the process.



# APPENDIX 3: IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

## Impact on Urban Health

Impact on Urban Health focus on improving health in inner-city areas, which have some of the most extreme health outcomes. Alongside their vibrancy and diversity sit stark health inequalities. Impact on Urban Health, want to change this. They believe that we can remove obstacles to good health, by making urban areas healthier places for everyone to live. IoUH focus on complex health issues that disproportionately impact people living in urban areas. They partner with others to make the biggest impact. And are a part of Guy's & St Thomas' Foundation, working to support health in Lambeth and Southwark.

## The Ubele Initiative

The Ubele Initiative, is an African diaspora led, infrastructure plus organisation, empowering Black and racially minoritised and Minoritised communities in the UK, to act as catalysts for social and economic change. To achieve this, they work with community leaders, groups, and organisations in the UK and beyond to strengthen their sustainability, resilience, and voice.

Ubele is taken from Swahili meaning 'the future'.

## Reos Partners

Reos Partners, established 2007, is an international social enterprise that helps people move forward together on their most important and intractable issues. Reos leads processes that enable teams of stakeholders—even those who don't understand or agree with or trust one another—to make progress on their toughest challenges. Reos' approach is systemic, collaborative, and creative.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Tamanda Walker (independent consultant) and Sarah Samaha (Reos Partners) with the support of Kathryn Gichini and Ravenna Nuaimy-Barker (Reos Partners), however, the contents and learning reflected within it have been arrived at collectively by all those involved in the 'The Black Systemic Safety Fund' process. This report was designed and laid out by Drew Sinclair.

We are especially grateful and indebted to members of the implementing team, who provided invaluable insights, expertise and feedback in the drafting of this report. Special thanks to: Radhika Bynon, Stephanie Woodrow, Kamna Muralidharan, and Rianna Raymond-Williams at Impact on Urban Health; Michael Hamilton, Christina Oredoko, Ali Ahmed, and Aisha Khan at The Ubele Initiative; Yannick Wassmer, Ravenna Nuaimy Barker and Sarah Samaha at Reos Partners and Dr Tamanda Walker (independent consultant).

Our thanks is also extended to Drew Sinclair, Debi Lewinson-Roberts, Adrian Jones, Dr Celestin Okoroji, and Veronika McKenzie, all of whom made significant contributions to documenting and unearthing learning associated with this project.

Finally, our deepest gratitude and thanks is reserved for the local experts and community leaders who have put their trust in the implementing team, and invested valuable time and energy into the social lab and its associated learning processes. Process participants include: Adrian Jones, Angie Herrera, Candice James, Chris Dusu, Duro Oye, Georgia Reynolds, Hillna Fontaine, Ira Campbell, Joel Dunn, Josephine Namusisi-Riley, Juliana Rondon, Katrina Thomas, Margaret Pierre, Sadam Garad, Shani Joseph-Mitchell, Suzann McLean, Winston Goode.

