



**DOCUMENTARY POWER**  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

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**Beyond the Impact Report:**  
What's Really Needed to Produce and  
Sustain Social Impact in Documentary Film?

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**FILMMAKERS AND PRODUCERS 'GET REAL' ABOUT  
THE LAST DECADE OF SOCIAL IMPACT WORK**



PERSPECTIVE  
FUND

An initiative of the Documentary Power Research  
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**SPRING 2024 | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **ABOUT THE CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT (CMSI)**

The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI), based at American University's School of Communication in Washington, D.C., is an innovation lab and research center that creates, studies, and showcases media for social impact. Focusing on independent, documentary and public media, the Center bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners across media production, media impact, social justice, public policy, and audience engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and academic research; convenes conferences and events; and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter.

## SECTION 1

# A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

*Credit: And She Could Be Next  
Description: State Senator Nikema Williams, Ai-jen Poo, and descendants of Dorothy Bolden march to the polls during the 2018 midterm elections in Georgia.*

As both an outcome and a set of activities, making social impact through documentary storytelling has changed enormously over the past decade – an era dominated by the entry of commercial streaming giants, alongside new technological advancements.

It isn't an understatement to say that the entire environment in which filmmakers and impact producers create has seen fundamental change over the last few years, due to important disruptions made by rising social movements and the arrival of new funding powers, distributors, and engagement platforms. At such a juncture, it's important to raise the following key questions:

**What does social impact in documentary entail today? What are the current challenges? What lessons and models of the past are being brought forward and which ones are being overlooked? What does success look like in this work and how do we define it?**

This report centers this pursuit by engaging a diverse set of working filmmakers and impact producers in conversation around their experiences leading social impact campaigns with documentaries over the last decade. The aim is to “get real” about what their perspectives tell us about the state of the field, and to serve as a practical guide for further exploration and discussion of experiences and issues of shared concern. By creating a space for more than 50 filmmakers and impact producers to hit the ‘pause button’ and take time to reflect on current experiences and trends in the industry – and especially in their own work – this report endeavors to lift key perspectives and immediate challenges for wider deliberation and consideration for a field in rapid transition.



## One Big Problem This Report Aims to Address:




Intentional social impact efforts with documentary are challenging for a number of reasons. Adequate documentation, funding and support for social impact in the documentary space is notoriously sparse. Often, the stories behind the scenes are the most useful for shaping an understanding about how social impact work happens, how to work around challenges, and what the field needs to do this work in the future. And yet, these stories can be hard to access. This has made it difficult for the field to form a collective understanding of its shared challenges and experiences, and it has made it even harder to pass down good practices and approaches to social impact that have been successful.

Despite instances of success, there is much to improve upon. As one U.S.-based filmmaker interviewed here put it: “I have about 10 million problems with the way impact is being done.”

This study is one attempt to go beyond the standard impact report, to bring real concerns to the forefront, to lift examples of transformative impact campaigns that deserve greater recognition, and to ultimately gain a better understanding of what filmmakers and producers are really doing when they are doing social impact.

## Who is This Report For and What Are Its Key Research Questions?

Whether you are a seasoned impact producer, funder, or distributor, or new to the field, this report is designed to offer a way through the noise of documentary and social impact activities today by identifying a set of core learnings and experiences that seek to address:

-  *How are documentary social impact campaigns successful, and what are the core elements and practices that make them so (and, in the converse, what is not successful)?*
-  *What does “success” mean in the context of social impact campaign work?*
-  *What barriers are getting in the way of “success” for social impact campaigns?*



## SECTION 3

## KEY FINDINGS

*Credit: In My Blood It Runs*

This executive summary highlights the perspectives of filmmakers and impact producers who worked on 50 purposively-selected social impact campaigns with documentaries over the last decade.





From this investigation, this report lifts key practices, norms, and learnings as shared by the interview participants. It includes more than 50 one-hour interviews, and an analysis of more than 1,000 pages of documentary impact campaign reports provided by the interview participants in connection with their films and campaigns.

The enormous scope of interviews and impact reports considered in this study enables this report to pull from a wide set of experiences, without over-representing any single view of how documentary impact is or should be done. Rather, the analysis of this report is organized around an exploratory question that seeks to understand:

**What do filmmakers and impact producers say is critical to produce and evaluate the social impact of documentaries, and what issues do they feel must break through the noise of the current marketplace for wider attention and recognition?**






**Among the most common take-aways shared by these documentary professionals were strong opinions that:**

-  **With proper support and community leadership, documentary-centered conversations around traumatic issues can (and are) being transformed into healing and empowering opportunities that are driving change. But more attention needs to be given to identifying and amplifying these effective protagonist and participant wellness models for use in more social impact campaigns.** Too often, protagonists, participants, and audiences are put at risk of further trauma and harm because organizers are not anticipating the emotional and mental labor that is required of them to participate in documentary impact screenings and events. At the same time, campaigns that have done this well need to be lifted-up for recognition and modeling.
-  **There is still a looming threat to free expression around human rights ideas and content that filmmakers – across countries – face directly when they move to organize impact activities and distribute their film. But there are also communities of filmmakers who have overcome such threats and are working to create supportive precedents.** Participants said that filmmakers must not give-in to bullying threats of censorship – from government or streaming forces – and that they should find courage and precedent in the growing list of films and filmmakers who have overcome censorship threats in recent years. Interview participants said that having a compilation of case studies from films that overcame censorship threats (i.e. from films like *An Insignificant Man* and *Softie*), and an overview of the filmmakers' most effective strategies, would be of critical – and immediate – use to the field.
-  **We need to get real about the fact that the people we want to engage in movements of social progress are rarely the ones who show up to watch a documentary. Impact campaigns can help to combat this trend, but only if they are developed with thoughtful approaches to reaching beyond the choir in their audience engagement design.** For example, often the people who are committing or contributing to gun violence are not the audiences seeing a documentary about gun violence. Traditional documentary audiences are largely already the converted. Other strategies and platforms for engagement – that focus beyond traditional distribution of documentary and film festival audiences – need to be more widely popularized and used, and the field still needs to learn that traditional documentary audiences are rarely the audiences that need to be mobilized for collective change and movement building.
-  **It's time to seriously consider funding full-time impact producer positions within communities and local organizations.** While there was a disparity of opinion on whether impact producers should be funded with groups like national and international NGOs – especially given the documentary field's historic roots in colonialism and western saviorism – there was a broad sentiment that impact producers shouldn't be funded on piece-meal assignments, they should be funded to stay with communities over longer periods of time to help build movements and sustain progress around the outcomes of documentary engagement efforts. Multiple participants said that the model of *parachuting* outside specialists (often based in major cities like New York, Los Angeles, and London) into local communities – even if they are well-trained – is not working; they argue that serious and lasting community building and social impact requires producers to be based in the community – or committed to movement building and impact objectives – for longer than the life of a typical traditional impact or screening campaign.
-  **New technological and social media platforms can be revolutionary tools for engaging new and greater audiences in social impact campaigns, but only if impact producers adopt new approaches to engagement alongside them.** Several filmmakers said that the potentiality of new technologies and platforms go untapped when producers simply use them to further traditional strategies – for instance, using TikTok to spread awareness of a community screening is missing the opportunity provided by platforms like TikTok. When a producer uses strategic snippets of films or brings in celebrity voices or community leaders to spark big conversations around the



themes of the documentary on these platforms (even if the audience never sees the film) then these platforms can offer major value.

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**Building community trust and partnership takes time, but there are examples of it working in the 'documentary and social impact' space. It can and is being done!** Participants shared several models of partnership building (including 'brain trust' conversations) that are working well, but they all shared an understanding that these conversations take time and they have to start early in the process.
- 
**Impact producers are finding success going beyond legacy barriers in documentary impact by taking advantage of marketing strategies and corporate/commercial partnerships to advance social progress goals and movements.** There is still an aversion to corporate and marketing strategies in the social impact space, but several participants said that the field is missing important opportunities because of it.
- 
**While there are numerous industry awards for exemplary films, there aren't many (or any) such awards for exemplary impact campaigns focused on on-the-ground transformative change (at least not at the \$50,000+ level).** Several participants noted their support for the creation of such an award, which they say should be more than a \$5,000 gift; it should be among the ranks of genius awards and other majorly funded industry recognitions, which provide transformational, longer-term support. And one participant said he is willing to fund it.
- 
**Community/movement building should be better valued as an essential driver for a successful impact campaign,** in addition to the more traditional indicators – like narrative change and awareness raising – that tend to be the primary targets of impact efforts. While community/movement building is often talked about among impact circles, several participants say that it is rarely a core focus of social impact work; community/movement building can't be rushed (it often requires developing partnerships early), and the work of social impact is too often a rush job.
- 
**There are many groups using documentaries and the language of social impact to promote goals and values that filmmakers say are antithetical to social progress and positive social change.** As reported by multiple producers: (1) there are still models of far-right movements using documentaries to mobilize communities toward agendas of hate and injustice, (2) there are still models of western saviorism in documentary film and impact campaigns that are being celebrated when they need to be addressed and changed, (3) and there are many examples of films using the language of social impact in order to get funding to attract wider audiences with their films, not to truly drive social impact goals. So it is urgently important to bring more critical conversations into the space of social impact, rather than romanticizing it.
- 
**The field needs more case studies that translate the talk around co-creation into replicable models that embody it.** The talk of co-creation – which involves placing community members and/or protagonists in leadership positions in the design and implementation of impact campaigns – is still rarely translated into practice (and the arrival of streamers hasn't changed this trend). Filmmakers and producers say it's challenging to find many examples of co-creation being done well among social impact campaigns with documentaries; and case studies of co-creation are sorely needed.

Below, we highlight a summary of the other key findings across the eight thematic sections of the report:

### On Co-Creation:

- ❖ **Co-creation takes time and often requires building trust with communities that have been betrayed and misrepresented by outsiders and media for decades – this trust cannot be earned if you start the process of co-creation late.** Beginning the process of impact campaign strategy building should start as early as possible (ideally in pre-production stages).
- ❖ **Collaboration should be seen as a process designed with specific communities, not a step-by-step program applied to every community.** While many studies and producers seek to find the ideal recipe for meaningful documentary impact work, this is not how several participants think the field should be approaching impact. Instead, they say that the focus should be on building relationships with communities, and then identifying the correct steps, goal posts, success markers, timelines, and partners through that relationship. It is about recognizing and responding to biases, ceding power, asking permission, and – at times – breaking some of the norms around filmmaking.
- ❖ **Social impact might be a relatively new arena for some filmmakers and funders, but it should be understood as part of (not stamping over) a long tradition of work and engagement models/practices.** Few impact producers understand the roots of their field which is leading to the re-creation of old problems and missed opportunities.
- ❖ **Producers are finding success working with communities to identify which local organizations and/or grants should be part of their impact work** – rather than looking for the usual grants/funders in the documentary space, producers are asking communities which organizations they have wanted to partner/work with in the past and consider approaching these organizations for funding (even if they haven't worked with docs before)
- ❖ **When balancing multiple partners and funding interests, it's helpful to always return to "how does all this connect to the issues or the solutions that our communities are working towards."** At every step of an impact campaign, include measures and points-of-pause to see if the community has taken that step with you. Beyond any screening or reach numbers, this is one of the key measures that impact teams should adopt in determining if their collaborative model was successful and in ensuring that partners are being identified based on the needs and solutions identified by the communities at the heart of the film (and not the other way around).
- ❖ **Filmmakers are expanding the formats and forms of documentary to better meet the contexts and goals of communities. Documentaries don't have to be two-hour films and they don't even have to be films** – let the story and community inform how the story should be told.
- ❖ **Universities can be ideal partners for filmmakers; they can bring technical/technological expertise, help identify and leverage funding, and honor thoughtful/ethical design.**
- ❖ **Informed consent shouldn't be viewed as an add-on obligation or optional practice; it should be integral to the design of an impact campaign** and essential to building trust and a space for collaboration to be possible. University partnerships can provide critical support and guidance in this area.



## On Wellness:

- ✳ **Many screening efforts include a provocative discussion guide for creating dynamic conversions, but they include little to no resources for hiring care team members (not subject experts) to be in the room;** this reflects how out of touch (even if well-intentioned) the documentary world of social impact can be from the interests of the communities they represent on screen and seek to engage in positive social change. This needs to change.
- ✳ **With proper support and community leadership, conversations around traumatic issues can be transformed into empowering and skill-building opportunities.**
- ✳ **Wellness should not be an add-on consideration of impact work, developed at the end, just before a screening panel:** discussions, planning, and considerations of wellness (and anticipating unintended consequences of a film or impact effort) must be centered from the outset of meeting the community and asking permission to share their story.
- ✳ **Panels and community events should be responsive to the needs of their ‘protagonist participants’.** For instance, a ‘participant protagonist’ (who was depicted in the film) might be willing to participate in a Q/A but they might not want the burden of staying for further audience/community interaction afterward (it isn’t always helpful – and can be traumatic/ draining – for protagonist participants to feel obligated to stay for prolonged informal discussions at the end of events). In other words, documentary engagements must not only be designed to educate external audiences; they must also center considerations of the people represented in the film – and their communities – who should also be considered as a key audience of the film.
- ✳ **There needs to be more accessible models for how to do impact campaigns with participant wellness as the focus:** there is a long tradition of impact work that has not focused on wellness and it’s harder for some producers to find the positive examples. With proper support and community leadership, conversations around traumatic issues can be transformed into empowering and skill-building opportunities; without proper support, impact campaigns can (and are) creating more trauma for the communities they intend to serve

## On Effective Strategies of Engagement

- ✳ **Leveraging platforms and narratives of community leaders can be an effective tool in creating social power.** By empowering and lifting up the stories and platforms of community leaders at the heart of the film, impact campaigns can help bring power to local movements and help to make local leaders more visible. This approach can also serve to help shift the spotlight of prevailing narratives and voices on key issues, strengthen place-based engagement strategies (even in online campaigns), and inform a media strategy (whereby stories about local leaders can be pitched to news outlets for greater recognition).
- ✳ **Use the platforms that get you in front of your audience – engage with your audience through the tools they are already using for engagement (like Instagram and TikTok). Don’t leave this for distributors or for connecting with the “usual” doc folks.** Align strategies with the audiences you want to mobilize for change (this can mean disrupting the status quo of engagement work)



- ✪ **Research can serve as effective tools before/during/after impact campaigns**, in providing evidence-based guidance on many aspects of impact work -- including identifying target communities for engagement on an impact campaign's key issue, and learning from the audience participants who attend screenings (for follow-up action)
- ✪ **In any engagement effort with communities, humility is one of the most important tools an impact producer should possess.** Across interviews, humility was a common refrain as an underestimated – and essential – tool for impact producers.
- ✪ **Cross partnerships and corporate outreach (going beyond typical funders) is an underutilized opportunity in documentary.**
- ✪ **When Political sensitivities arise among distributors, lean into these moments (don't shy away).** One strategy shared by filmmakers and impact producers across films was the encouragement to turn moments of resistance or political discomfort among distributors to the advantage of the film, when possible.
- ✪ **Screenings should no longer be seen primarily as venues for distribution, rather they should be used as spaces for strategic partnership building and community leadership.** Co-hosting screenings with organizations and partners can also help ease the burden on main organizers and allow space for partners to add additional perspectives and resources to the screenings (filmmakers should plan for this ahead of time)
- ✪ **Create discussion guides that are focused explicitly on different audiences and what might be the most strategic content for them.**

### On Defining Success:

- ✪ **Theories of change and outset objectives – like creating narrative change or institutional change – can be helpful guides, but community building is often the most important driver to achieving any lasting social impact goal.**
- ✪ **The degree to which you are able to maintain community safety protections and engagement in the framing of your film or campaign (i.e. through media coverage, social media engagement, etc.) is also a critical marker of success:** too often the community drops off at this stage, but it's imperative that safety frameworks and community collaboration is maintained to the very end.
- ✪ **Rooting films in local organizations (not Global NGOs) at the heart of the film can be a useful way to anchor success markers and objectives.**

## On Coalition Building/Sustainability/Longevity:

- ✳ Directing attention to specific power structures and key players within movements is critical in creating a roadmap of lasting engagement.
- ✳ Embedding impact campaigns (and producers) with local organizations is one way that filmmakers can ensure their impact activities (and the toolkits, partnerships, commitments, and conversations they create) continue on. It is critical to target key organizations and partners early in the process, and listen to their input on impact and social change processes before you start designing an impact campaign.
- ✳ While it's important to start the right way with communities, it's also important to know how to exit the right way.

## On Overcoming Barriers/Challenges to Engagement

- ✳ The industry needs to understand that traditional documentary audiences are not always the audiences that need to be mobilized for collective change and movement building; the "community screening" is rarely something that "the community" attends. Therefore, marketing strategies may offer underutilized tools in helping to expand the scope and quality of community engagement and impact efforts.
- ✳ Don't give-in to bullying threats of censorship; there are communities of filmmakers that have overcome such threats before and which can be used as precedent.
- ✳ R ratings can be used as form of censorship and to limit audience reach, but there is a track-record and precedent (in multiple countries) of documentaries successfully fighting to overcome such tactics and lower initial ratings.
- ✳ Break through perceived 'issue fatigue' – when people feel like they already understand a topic because they've seen a documentary focused on that issue before – by keeping the attention on the unique and 'local' aspects of the film/issue.

## On What The Field Needs: Some Additional Reflections:

- ✪ **The field needs more spaces for community building within the field of social impact in documentaries** – including opportunities for impact producers to come together for field strengthening, experience sharing and support.
- ✪ **The field needs more examples of impact campaigns being led by people from impacted communities.** There are too many examples of the “parachute model” of impact producing, where well-intentioned producers parachute into a community to leave shortly after the screening is over. Local knowledge and expertise in a local community should be valued alongside previous impact producing experience.
- ✪ **The field needs more diverse funding sources and more funders who aren’t solely interested in stories that are directly aligned with their organizational goals.** Western funding often tries to bend stories for western audiences, and it is limiting the scope of stories and perspectives that are being offered (especially in non-Western communities).
- ✪ **The field needs to have more films translated into local languages. This doesn’t happen enough, but more resources should be dedicated to this.**
- ✪ **The field needs more initiatives and funding grants aimed at supporting filmmakers and producers who are not economically advantaged.** Filmmakers with money have significant advantages over producers and filmmakers who need to raise funds. And participants worry that this isn’t a small-scale problem, it is characteristic of a wider trend – where it’s becoming harder to raise funds for documentary-centered impact work, creating an economic barrier of entry that advantages producers and filmmakers who are independently wealthy.
- ✪ **The field might need a high-level award. While there are numerous industry awards for exemplary films, there aren’t many (or any) such awards for exemplary impact campaigns focused on on-the-ground transformative change (at least not at the \$50,000+ level).**

## SECTION 4

# WHO DID WE SPEAK TO?

## THE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS, IMPACT CAMPAIGNS AND FILMS

*Credit: Softie (community screening)*

This study analyzes 50 social impact campaigns with documentaries, alongside in-depth interviews with the filmmakers and/or impact strategists at the center of each campaign. From this investigation, this report lifts key practices, norms, and learnings as shared by the interview participants.

It includes more than 50 one-hour interviews, and an analysis of more than 1,000 pages of documentary impact campaign reports provided by the interview participants in connection with their films and campaigns.

This study's effort to include a diverse scope of films and producer experiences reflects the unique challenge and urgency of this moment in social impact and documentary film. While all of the films and producers here lay claim to being part of the 'social impact' field, the films/campaigns studied reflect a wide variety of approaches to impact. And the diversity of these experiences are meaningful. This report isn't about evaluating each film, or coming to a consensus of unified thinking; rather it aims to pull the lessons and experiences from each film for greater recognition and deliberation.

**The selection of films** was guided by a set of criteria aimed at ensuring diversity in four key areas: geographic location; year of campaign; race/ethnicity of lead filmmaker; and funding source. And in an effort to ensure that this study's sample included major campaigns/films that have been identified as valuable models of practice by other documentary impact professionals, alongside lesser known films that might not have received sufficient funding to produce major impact reports or receive wider recognition, this study grounded its selection of films and impact campaigns in direct consultation with the filmmaking community – though an advisory group, an active and invite-only curated listserv group of documentary impact producers located around the world (the Global Impact Producers Assembly, or GIPA), and by targeting a sample of important films by BIPOC creators, who have made substantial and meaningful impact in their target communities, though they might not be as well-known, publicized or well-funded through a robust impact report. A detailed overview of the methodology for film selection can be found in the full report.





The table below provides an overview of the films and interview participants engaged in this research.

**TABLE ONE. INTERVIEW AND FILM SAMPLE**

Film/Impact Campaign	Release Year	Country	Interview Participant
"Limiar" / Threshold	2021	Brazil	Rodrigo Diazdiaz
"Unmasked" video series on mental health	2019 (created)	USA	Chris Bullard
#387 (international film title) #numbersintonames (campaign)	2019	Multiple countries (Europe and North Africa)	Madeleine Leroyer
All In: The Fight for Democracy	2020	USA	Lindsay Guetschow
Amazon Adventure	2017	USA	Marjee Chmiel
An Insignificant Man	2017	India	Khushboo Ranka
And She Could be Next	2020	USA	Tracy Sturdivant)
Backyard Wilderness	2018	USA	Marjee Chmiel
City of Trees	2015	USA	Lance Kramer
Dawnland	2018	USA	Adam Mazo
Disclosure	2020	USA	Eliza Licht
Duty Free	2021	USA release; Multiple countries	Sian-Pierre Regis
El Tema	2021	Mexico	Pablo Montaña
Ernie & Joe: Crisis Cops	2019	USA	Jenifer McShane, Kathy Leichter, John Amoroso
Escape Fire: The Fight to Rescue American Healthcare	2012	USA	Simone Pero
For Sama	2019	Syria	Sarah Mosses
Ghosts in the Machine	2015	Canada	Liz Marshall
He Named Me Malala	2017	Multiple regions (USA, East Africa, West Africa, MENA, Europe, Asia, South Asia)	Lindsay Guetschow
Homestretch	2014	USA	Erin Sorenson
In My Blood It Runs	2019	Australia	Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson, Alex Kelly
Jacinta	2020	USA	Erin Sorenson
John Lewis: Good Trouble	2020	USA	Dawn Porter
Landfall	2020	Puerto Rico	Cecilia Aldarondo
Love Free or Die	2012	USA	Macky Alston
Maria Luiza	2019	Brazil	Marcelo Diaz





Nasrin	2020	Iran	Jeff Kaufman and Marcia Ross
No Small Matter	2020	USA	Greg Jacobs and Laura Fallsgraff
Our Planet / David Attenborough – A Life On Our Planet	2020	UK release; Many countries	Liz Callegari
Pray Away	2021	USA	Anya Rous
Quipu Project	2015	Peru	Rosemarie Lerner
Roll Red Roll	2018	USA	Eliza Licht
Sands of Silence	2016	USA/Spain release; Many countries	Chelo Alvarez-Stehle
Saving Mes Aynak	2015	Afghanistan	Brent Huffman
Screenagers	2016	USA	Lisa Tabb
Screenagers Next Chapter	2019	USA	Lisa Tabb
Softie	2020	Kenya	Miriam Ayoo
Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Historically Black Colleges	2017	USA	Marcia Smith
Thank You For The Rain	2017	Kenya	Emily Wanja
Thank You For Your Service	2015	USA	Ilan Arboleda
The Armor of Light	2015	USA	Stephanie Palumbo
The Bleeding Edge	2018	USA	Stephanie Palumbo
The Interrupters	2011	USA	Tim Horsburgh
The Lucky Specials	2017	South Africa	Marjee Chmiel
The Social Dilemma	2020	USA	Julia Hoppock
This Changes Everything	2018	USA	Ilan Arboleda (Producer)
To See You Again	2020	Mexico	Merle Iliná (impact producer)
Verde como el Oro	2021	Colombia	Isabela Bernal and Felipe Macias
Voices of the River	2021	Australia	Stephanie King
When Claude Got Shot	2021	USA	Tracy Sturdivant
Youth & Gender Media project	2021	USA	Jonathan Skurnik

## Note on the benefit and notable limitation of having a diverse sample of films

In any research about documentary or impact work, it is important to recognize that there has been a long history of past work on this subject which has given special attention to bigger budget and more well-known, festival-celebrated documentaries, while missing other important work – which may have received less funding or attention, but still created a significant impact within their target communities and which stand to offer critical lessons for the field. In an effort to ensure that this study's sample included many such films, this study grounded its selection of films and impact campaigns in consultation with the filmmaking community and by including a wide scope of films in the study.

This focus on reaching beyond the typical impact films and campaigns resulted in an interview sample of films/campaigns that runs the gamut from very participatory work – grounded and created through deep collaborations with communities – to work created by one filmmaker, or small team, working in relative isolation. It includes producers with long histories and deep knowledge about the history of impact work and community collaboration, along with filmmakers and producers who are new to the field. It includes filmmakers who were swayed by impact goals of funders and others who created strong firewalls against funding influence. It also includes filmmakers and impact campaigns based in different countries around the world.

The inclusion of geographic diversity in the study sample is important to discuss further. While this study's endeavor to include a diverse selection of films allows it to pull together a broad overview of perspectives and concerns about the field, it also brings one important limitation:

**the progress, contexts, challenges and experiences of impact within documentary film varies considerably across countries.**

And while this report notes many of these differences throughout, a notable limitation of this study is that it cannot fully account for the vast differences between or across countries. There are different languages, history, funding arrangements, terminology, social-political influences, and levels of progress around different issues that all influence the contexts of impact work across the countries included in this study.

For this reason, this report does not aim to compare each film, nor does it come to a consensus of unified thinking about the “one right way” to do impact in documentary film; rather, it aims to pull a broad sampling of lessons and experiences – shared by filmmakers working around the World – for greater deliberation, and it calls on the field to avoid one-size-fits-all thinking when it comes to impact.

## A Closer Look: Interview/Film Population Demographics

While a total of 73 films/impact campaigns were identified for this project, the filmmakers or impact producers for 50 of these films responded to our interview requests. This section provides a reporting of the demographics of these 50 films and the 46 interview participants engaged in this study.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a difference between the number of films and interview participants because some filmmakers were interviewed for multiple films, and, in a few occasions, multiple people were interviewed for a single film/campaign. In the data represented here, only the “senior” interview participant for each film (defined as the individual with the highest title or earliest involvement) is counted, in order to reflect an accurate representation of the participants without over-representing the demographics of any single film team. For comparability, the two film series projects are not included in the participant demographics reported below.

## Demographics and Representation – of FILMS/IMPACT CAMPAIGNS

### FOCUS COUNTRY OF PRIMARY IMPACT CAMPAIGN

About 56% of the films were US-centered, and 44% of the films were based in countries outside of the U.S.

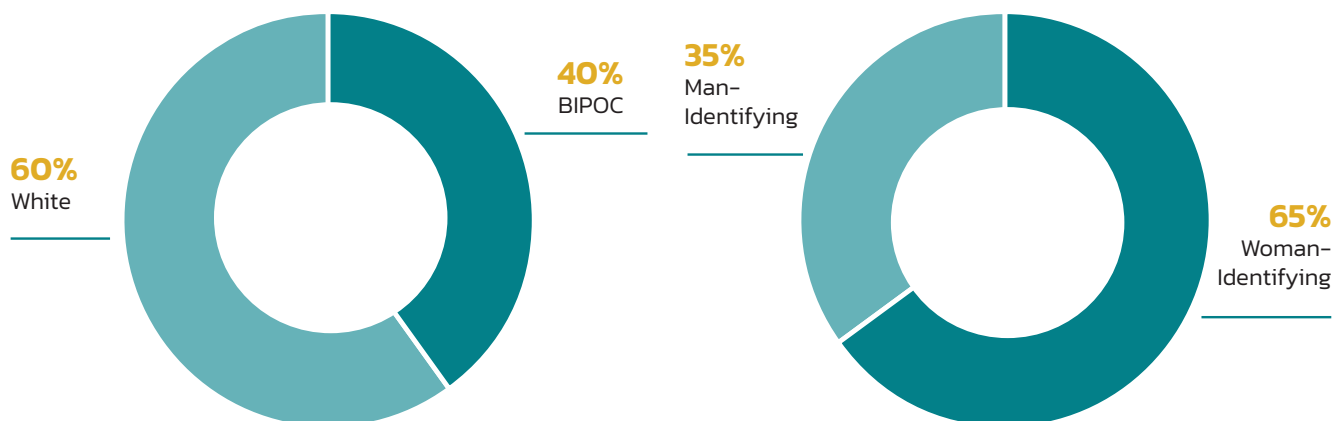
**Note:** This breakdown of “focus country” speaks only to the country where the film was based. However, it is important to note that not all the producers/creators of these films were from the countries where their film was based. This difference is important. For more information on such disparities within documentary film (i.e. “Who is Telling Whose Stories”) please see the recently released [“Lens Reflected”](#) study.



## Demographics and Representation – of INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

### RACE AND GENDER OF “PRIMARY” INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT

Of the interview participants, 60% were White and 40% were BIPOC, and they predominantly identified as Women (65%) rather than Men (35%). None of the participants identified as nonbinary.





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