

Innovation Report 2024



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Innovation Report, developed in collaboration between ICSC and Partos, curates locally-led initiatives that innovatively challenge the power asymmetries within the international development cooperation and social justice sector and foster local innovation ecosystems across geographies.

Rooted in the ICSC's Accelerating Inclusive Power Shift project and aligned with Partos's Innovation Hub, this report aims to provide civil society practitioners with insights to advance initiatives for a power shift, inspire them to unlock their potential and explore novel strategies for meaningful change.

The report outlines nine innovative initiatives, categorised into three themes selected to reflect significant areas of interest for ICSCs. The three themes that structure the report are the following:

- ▶ **Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery,**
- ▶ **Participatory funding models,**
- ▶ **Innovative approaches to development cooperation.**

Moreover, the report offers recommendations, drawn from shared success factors and lessons learned from the portfolio of case studies.

Theme 1: Innovative approaches to development cooperation:

The cases under this theme represent organisations, all based in Africa, working to address problematic narratives and establishing a space or platform to portray those who tend to be silenced or have less exposure in a dignified manner, ensuring ethical storytelling. These organisations are the LAM Sisterhood - a feminist creative studio founded in 2019 in Kenya -, Africa Forward - an initiative created in 2023 by the African Chapters of Catalyst 2030 - and the Ascend Programme conducted by HEVA Fund in 2022, in partnership with Africa no Filter, aimed at empowering emerging media practitioners, including women and individuals from marginalised gender minorities.

Theme 2: Participatory funding models:

The cases within this theme are the Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), UHAI-EASHRI and the Change Fund established by the NEAR Network. These cases represent a departure from traditional grant-making mechanisms that aim to rebalance unequal power structures between donors and grantees. KCDF, founded in 1997, established a participatory and community-driven grant-matching model in 2011, empowering community-based organisations and individuals in Kenya

to also contribute to their projects. UHAI-EASHRI is an activist fund working in East Africa since 2009, rooted in participation and flexibility, where the sexual and gender minorities targeted by the fund are also a part of its decision-making and governance. Lastly, the Change Fund, established in 2022 by the NEAR Network, represents a more bottom-up, flexible, and collaborative approach to funding emergency and humanitarian response. The Change Fund has built-in agility and is grounded on human-centred design principles.

Theme 3: Innovative approaches to development cooperation:

The cases under this theme present innovative partnerships in research, knowledge production and political advocacy within the international development cooperation sector. These cases include Leading from the South, a consortium of women's funds reframing bilateral relations by overseeing substantial funding from its donor, the Dutch Government, to support organisations striving to enhance women's rights in the global south. Our case study focuses on the work in Latin America and the Caribbean. Next, we present Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) and their Grounded Accountability Model (GAM), showcase an example of how to build community-driven indicators that reflect local communities' experience and understanding and, at the same

time, are helpful to convey effectiveness to donors, multilateral and bilateral organisations, and governments. Our case study focuses on its implementation by two organisations - one at the local level and one at the national level - in Colombia. The last case focuses on the collaboration between GlobalGiving and YUM, an organisation based in Indonesia, as an example of an equitable partnership rooted in trust and aiming to promote community-led change.

The last part of this report presents recommendations for ICSOs for each theme:

Theme 1:

- ▶ Proactively support creative professionals from the global south in developing collaborative spaces where they have ownership to tell their narratives and present their images.
- ▶ Build media products that challenge narratives and imageries that reproduce negative stereotypes about global south actors.
- ▶ Support diverse skills development and mentorship opportunities for creatives to enhance their financial sustainability.
- ▶ Implement gender-expansive fellowships for creative individuals to foster inclusivity.

Theme 2:

- ▶ Promote novel grant-making processes. For instance, consider calls for proposals/tenders that do not require written applications (e.g., videos) and only ask for ideas, pairing successful applicants with expert proposals.
- ▶ Offer sustained support and enduring partnerships to small community-based organisations by funding core change agent salaries and operating costs.
- ▶ To foster active involvement, encourage community participation beyond financial contributions and support with local/domestic fundraising.
- ▶ Establishing inclusive governance structures: involve key fund recipients in grant decision-making to enhance community representation.

Theme 3:

- ▶ Advocate for donors to integrate community-generated indicators.
- ▶ Build the capacity of northern decision-makers to listen and practise cross-cultural communication skills.
- ▶ Assist community-based organisations with downward accountability to gather feedback from community members and avoid elite capture/corruption.
- ▶ Promote south-south learning events or communities of practice to ensure practical knowledge is shared.

INTRODUCTION

THE POWER OF (MAKING) FUTURES

The International Civil Society Centre (ICSC), founded in 2007 and owned by 14 of the largest international civil society organisations (ICSOs) active in areas such as human rights, social justice, humanitarian and environmental issues, was established to support ICSOs in maximising their impact for a sustainable and more equitable world.

Since 2019, the ICSC has been deeply committed to highlighting innovations from within and useful for the international civil society sector. Through the production of the Innovation Report series, the Centre strives to provide organisations with valuable insights drawn from the experiences and ongoing efforts of others. Partos, a key player in the “*Shift the Power*” movement, advocating for equal power relations, is also dedicated to bringing together development professionals to learn, interact, experiment, and cultivate innovation and collaboration.

THE POWER OF (MAKING) FUTURES

The 2024 Innovation Report, developed in collaboration with Partos, curates locally-led initiatives that innovatively challenge the power asymmetries within the international development cooperation and social justice sector and foster local innovation ecosystems across geographies.

The focus of this year’s Innovation Report is rooted in the ICSC’s commitment to *Accelerating Inclusive Power Shift*. This wider project seeks to promote greater inclusivity, equitable partnerships and power balance by supporting ICSOs and the broader sector with tools, best practices, and a discussion platform. The project is further dedicated to promoting learning and exchange and envisioning future-fit roles for ICSOs, beyond the North-South binary.

Likewise, the report aligns with Partos’s work through its Innovation Hub. In this space, civil society practitioners can learn, interact, and foster collaborative

and innovative approaches and solutions for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future. The aim is to cultivate a collective movement among members and their partners to amplify impact, adaptability, and resilience, ultimately catalysing systemic change and equitable partnerships within international development.

The 2024 Innovation Report aims to:

- ▶ Recognise innovators from the global south who are pioneering novel approaches that highlight their communities' resources and inherent power.
- ▶ Encourage the sharing and adoption of innovative experiences and ideas that prioritise local ownership and leadership, fostering learning and collaboration across organisations.
- ▶ Enhance awareness of diverse approaches to shifting power, encouraging the development of new initiatives both for ICSSOs and other organisations.

The ICSSC hopes this report will provide civil society practitioners with insights and actionable steps to advance their initiatives towards a power shift, inspire them to unlock their potential and explore novel strategies and

collaborations to drive meaningful change in their communities and beyond.

The report outlines nine innovative initiatives, categorised into three themes selected to reflect significant areas of interest for ICSSOs, such as partnerships, funding, leadership, and unequal power structures perpetuated through storytelling. These areas are essential when considering systemic power changes within the international development cooperation sector. In addition, efforts within the selected themes are critical to show that innovative approaches to redistributing power are feasible and effective. As such, a final section on learnings for ICSSOs is drawn out from each case study¹.

Likewise, within the three themes, the report will highlight underrepresented voices in the international civil society sector regarding the ICSSC's power shift thematic pillars: Just Governance and Equitable Partnerships - offering concrete support to ICSSOs in organisational reforms and mechanisms -, Influencing the System - enabling dialogue and exchange across the system and supporting advocacy towards change enablers - and Innovation and Future Frontiers - exploring innovative approaches, and futures-fit roles for (I)ICSSOs, looking beyond the North-South binary.

¹ The learnings included in each case study are a result of the conversations with the organisations and the consultant's reflections and analysis on the cases..

The three themes that structure the report are the following:

- ▶ **Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery,** including approaches addressing the problematic narratives of white saviours and undignified portrayal of the communities and fostering fair and ethical storytelling.
- ▶ **Participatory funding models,** exploring emerging and equitable funding approaches aiming to rebalance unequal power structures with partners in the countries where ICSOs operate.
- ▶ **Innovative approaches to development cooperation,** focusing on South-South cooperation in research, knowledge production and political advocacy.

Additionally, the report includes recommendations based on shared success factors and lessons learned from the entire portfolio of case studies.

BACKGROUND

THE POWER OF (MAKING) FUTURES

Localisation has been at the forefront of discussions surrounding the international development and humanitarian sector since 2016. Significant commitments, including the Agenda for Humanity (2016), the Grand Bargain (2016), and the Charter for Change (2015), have endorsed and championed the movement towards recognising the crucial role of local and national actors in humanitarian response, development and international cooperation.

It's crucial to note that the calls to reform these sectors and empower local and national actors are not recent. They have been echoing for years. Instruments such as the Paris Declaration (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), and the Busan Aid Effectiveness Forum (2011) highlight the key role of local organisations in development and poverty reduction and numerous commitments² among INGOs, bilateral and multilateral actors have reinforced the need for local leadership in humanitarian actions (Robillard et al., 2021).

In recent decades, global south organisations have continuously raised their voices and expressed concerns over the inequalities and inefficiencies within the international development cooperation and humanitarian sector. Such concerns merged into a loose agenda known as localisation, which was included on the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) agenda and gained strength as a central feature of the resulting Grand Bargain commitments (Robillard et al., 2021).

While there isn't a universally accepted definition of localisation, in its original framing, the concept involved strengthening the agency, decision-making, and leadership of local and national actors within the context of development and humanitarian crises so they can actively engage in matters that pertain to and impact their communities (CHL, 2021a).

² For instance, the Charter for Change (C4C), the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles.

Box 1: Localisation

We acknowledge the complexities surrounding the terminology used when discussing localisation. In this report, localisation refers to a shift in the allocation of resources and decision-making processes within the international development cooperation and social justice sectors towards the leadership of local and national civil society organisations. It advocates for these organisations based in the global south and the communities they serve to assert their autonomy, define their own needs and priorities, and participate in governance mechanisms while playing a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of power distribution within such sectors.

Van Brabant and Patel from GMI (2018) identified three rationales behind localisation:

- ▶ **The financial argument:** localisation is cost-effective since funding local and national actors and crisis-affected people is cheaper and reduces transaction costs.
- ▶ **The principle argument:** localisation shows that local and national actors are relevant and valuable contributors, and, therefore, they should be on equal terms with donors or ICSSOs.
- ▶ **The strategic argument:** localisation is a way to enhance the capacities of the beneficiaries of aid or international assistance so they can eventually handle crises by themselves.

Promoting localisation entails a paradigm shift from the global north and south organisations and power structures in the development sector. This involves promoting pathways around the sector's decolonisation. While the "decolonisation" of aid might be considered controversial in that it implies that aid is a form of colonisation, many refer to it as a call for a power shift in how resources are distributed and handled, primarily on western terms and conditions (CHL, 2021b). It is a "process of deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of western thought and approaches" (PeaceDirect, 2021, p. 13). Such a process involves leaving behind top-down and hierarchical relations between donors, ICSSOs, and national and local NGOs and CSOs for a bottom-up and local-led approach (Kapazoglou and Goris, 2021).

The 2016 WHS catalysed the discussion on localisation and shifting the power. The WHS highlighted “that persistent and unjust power distribution keeps communities and organisations most affected by crises furthest from decision-making on how to respond” (Barbelet et al., 2021, p. 9). The literature review conducted by Barbelet et al. (2021) showed that localisation is presented as a way to rethink the humanitarian and international development sector and address the power asymmetry within the sector. However, there are challenges in applying localisation, a distance between rhetoric and reality. They state that the discourse and debate about localisation continues to be led by international actors, with little attention placed on the role of local actors in transforming norms and practices (Barbelet et al., 2021)

Likewise, Baguios, King, Martins and Pinnington (2022) mention that donors’ definition of local actors capabilities and the risks associated with funding certain organisations show the persistence of a “colonial mindset” where global north donors continue to have the decision-making power while organisations from their countries are responsible for the implementation of international development and humanitarian projects. In addition, local and national organisations might receive funds directly, but there is a lack of attention to enhancing their agency and ways of being. This puts efforts for

genuine self-help at risk and increases competition between local actors, making collective action difficult. According to the authors, a key risk is promoting localisation without actually shifting power to local actors (Baguios, King, Martins and Pinnington, 2021).

In line with this, the *#Shiftthepower* Movement, which emerged from the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy in Johannesburg in 2016, is becoming increasingly relevant. Against the backdrop of growing conflicts, poverty and inequality, and increased pressure for CSOs, a movement of individuals, organisations, and networks are working on new ways of “deciding and doing” to *#ShiftThePower “around the world under the larger umbrella of movement generosity so that it can galvanise a vision of a good society and serve as a force for genuine and lasting change”*.

This movement, led by grassroots and community organisations, women and environmental funds, development foundations and CSOs, is steering away from a top-heavy and top-down paradigm towards a more equitable one of people-based development within the international development and philanthropy system, shifting power closer to the ground (GFCE, n.d.).

In 2019, the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCE), in collaboration with colleagues from Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the U.K.,

developed the Manifesto for Change.³ This Manifesto highlights nine key messages that contribute to the *#ShiftThePower* movement. These messages reinforce the movement's core values of equality, democracy, and sustainability and the desire to move beyond restrictive international development frameworks and quick solutions to complex problems and unleash the inherent power within communities to shape their own solutions and development trajectories.

The Manifesto also emphasises the importance of shifting away from external actors' definitions of capacity building, favouring community organising and movement building. This includes ensuring that external funds recognise and build upon local assets while also placing significant value on non-financial resources, such as knowledge, trust, and networks. Lastly, the Manifesto challenges language domination and traditional ways of working and thinking and advocates for a transformative shift within ourselves to question our power and participate in alternative collaboration and partnership models.

Innovation has emerged as a critical agenda within the landscape of international development cooperation, which is largely led by western donors, United Nations agencies, and philanthropic organisations. While

research is still incipient on the role of CSOs, they have traditionally been perceived as innovators and problem-solvers in this sector (Silva, 2022).

Fisher et al. (2023) mention that one function of CSOs in the current complex scenario of social, economic, and environmental problems is to create new solutions and structures that drive change, playing an essential part in social innovation processes. Local, national and global organisations can serve as pioneers, pushing the boundaries with innovative solutions to address longstanding and emerging issues. They are therefore crucial in advancing the "shift the power" movement. They can advocate for this shift and implement novel approaches that embody its principles.

Still, mainstream literature frequently depicts innovation as predominantly originating from the west. This perception is shaped by power dynamics prioritising innovations from the global north, influencing which ones receive attention, recognition, and investment on the global stage. There's been a slowly growing interest in viewing innovation through a bottom-up approach, reinvigorating it as an alternative to western societies' view. Jimenez et al., (2022) highlight, through experiences from the global south, that while limitations exist in scaling up, it is possible to re-conceptualise and decolonise innovation thinking, focusing

³ Manifesto for Change <https://shiftthepower.org/more-than-a-hashtag/manifesto-for-change/>

on community knowledge and collective practices to address global challenges. Promoting and recognising locally-led innovations, indigenous knowledge, and community-driven solutions is an essential step in redistributing power, transforming existing approaches in the international development cooperation sector and fostering a diverse innovation landscape (Jimenez et al, 2022).

Box 2: Innovation definition

This report understands innovation as new collective processes that lead to social change by prioritising local, community-driven solutions and indigenous knowledge.

Thus, innovation challenges and disrupts traditional approaches in the international development cooperation and social justice sector and assists in redistributing power between global north and south actors.

METHODOLOGY



THE POWER OF (MAKING) FUTURES

The ICSC and Partos selected the case studies based on a comprehensive checklist that considered criteria such as novelty, intrinsic power shift, and learning. Each case study, especially concerning novelty and intrinsic-power shift criteria, was required to encompass at least two of these dimensions. The boxes below (Box 3, 4 and 5) present the criteria with its guiding questions.

Box 3: Defining Novelty

Has it identified a new problem or understanding of the problem/system/power dynamics?

Is it a new/novel solution for an existing problem?

Is there something novel about the intervention strategy/ approach?

Is there something novel about the implementation partnerships?

Is there something novel about the tools/technology or frameworks being applied?

Box 4: Defining Intrinsic power-shift

Is it fully locally led, i.e. the innovation is led by an organisation that work locally or nationally and is not implementing the respective project/area on behalf of an ICSSOs

To understand the context better, if it is partially locally led, where does the decision-making lie in the partnership of which the host organisation is part of?

Is it locally incepted?

Box 5: Innovation

Does it offer learnings, ideally innovative ideas for the target audience of the Innovation Report, namely (I)CSOs and northern based donors?

What are the main learnings for our constituencies

The selected case studies are representative of the key themes that structure the Innovation Report, as presented below⁴.

	Case studies	Location
1. Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery	LAM Sisterhood	Kenya
	Africa Forward	Across Africa
	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund	Kenya\East Africa
2. Participatory funding models	Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF)	Kenya
	UHAJ	East Africa
	The Change Fund - NEAR Network	Africa, Asia, MENA and Latin America
3. Innovative approaches to development cooperation	Leading from the South	Global (example from Latin America)
	The Grounded Accountability Model (GAM)	Global (example from Colombia)
	GlobalGiving and YUM	Global\Indonesia

Table 1: Selected case studies

⁴ While we aimed to collect case studies from across the Global South, the finalised list predominantly includes innovations from the African continent. We acknowledge this limitation.

The selected case studies were developed through an iterative process to ensure an in-depth understanding of the case study and adequate fact-checking. Such a process involved adapting the case studies throughout the research by revisiting and refining them continuously by conducting multiple interviews when possible and receiving feedback on the case study drafts from the interviewed organisations

The data collection methods included:

- ▶ Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with representatives from the organisations. The consultants conducted 13 KIIs with a total of 17 people. The interview guide's structure followed the key criteria highlighted in the innovation framework, including: 'the big idea', key summary context, outcome and lessons.
- ▶ Revision of documents provided by the organisations as background research and as a way to shape, complement and fact-check the data collected from the interviews.

Committed to disseminating the case studies to a wider audience, this report is following a mixed-media approach, combining different materials and media, including videos, podcasts, and infographics and/or graphic novels. As such, along with the written case studies, they will also be presented in another format, allowing for more versatility

and creativity in their development, incorporating images and illustrations, and the use of different communication channels for dissemination. In addition, each organisation has been invited to determine the format for disseminating each case study. Before their publication, each organisation reviewed and approved the case study.

Limitations

A number of limitations, and their mitigation strategies, should be noted:

- ▶ Co-creation workshops were initially planned to present the case studies to the organisations and facilitate discussions on how they have shifted power dynamics, lessons learned, and areas that require improvement. However, the workshops were not conducted due to timeline delays and challenges in engaging organisations in the data collection process. The team engaged organisations through written feedback and offered individual interviews as needed.
- ▶ Organisations are at different stages in the development of their initiatives. While some pilot programmes have concluded, others are still in their infancy, and results may not be as clearly defined. Similarly, while it was possible to collect data from different individuals

participating in the initiatives in some cases, most only involved conducting a single interview with one or two participants. Secondary sources were also used to complement the case studies.

- ▶ The approach to the case studies is structured around key themes, placing particular emphasis on what relates to them. On the other hand, the organisations might have not previously identified these themes as structural to their approach. A balance has been sought in the case studies between sharing the overall experience of the organisations and highlighting what relates to the themes.

CASE STUDIES



THE POWER OF (MAKING) FUTURES

4.1

Theme:

Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery

*Reclaiming narratives
and imagery through
feminist storytelling:
The LAM Sisterhood*

The LAM Sisterhood, established in 2019 in Kenya, is a content studio founded by three creative feminist women. The name “LAM” is derived from the first letters of their names. They aim to fill the world with stories for African women to feel seen, heard, and beloved.

Historically, stories about Africa and African women have been predominantly crafted from an external perspective. The LAM Sisterhood’s innovative approach is deeply rooted in their dedication to reclaiming female African stories. By actively seizing control over the portrayal of women in narratives and imagery, they challenge societal stereotypes and reshape perceptions and power dynamics that contribute to the construction of collective imaginaries.

The starting point for establishing the LAM Sisterhood came in 2018 with the staged production of “The Brazen Edition” with *Too Early For Birds*. Inspired by the women who came before them and looking to challenge the male and western viewpoint that has traditionally dominated women’s representation in historical narratives, the LAM Sisterhood shone a light on the complex and multifaceted lives of Brazen Kenyan women while seeking strength, wisdom, and power from them. This was an award-winning play whose success showed a resounding hunger within Kenyan society for these types of productions, leading to the establishment of the LAM Sisterhood. However, the COVID-19 pandemic

brought about a significant setback. The pandemic-induced lockdown restrictions drove them to change their initial plan, which mainly revolved around theatrical work. After receiving an unrestricted initial seed investment from a Kenyan woman who supported their work, they directed this investment into making the pilot episode of the Brazen podcast. This later evolved into the **KaBrazen podcast**, which shares stories of Brazen African women reimagined for children, proving their vision beyond the initial stage idea and showcasing its adaptability to the current context.

Since then, the LAM Sisterhood has continued to expand, reshaping prevailing narratives and representations by putting African women at the heart of its work. In their own words:

“In a world in which African women are either sidelined or silenced, marginalised, and only looked at as either beneficiaries or as victims, telling stories that are for them, telling nuanced stories, that allow for complexity and centre their perspective on the world [is unique to the LAM Sisterhood approach].”

(Aleya Kassam, Co-Founder of the LAM Sisterhood)

Rebalancing power in the stories and imagery they share about African

women, as well as in the way they narrate these stories, is a fundamental aspect of the LAM Sisterhood's feminist perspective. That is why they dedicate significant time and resources to their initial research process, ensuring a thorough representation of women's stories while considering the historical and political context surrounding them.

In that sense, funding is essential to the LAM Sisterhood's way of working. However, they recognise the unequal power dynamic around access to funds that undervalues the work of professionals not from the Western Hemisphere. Within the LAM Sisterhood, founders juggle numerous roles (storytellers, performers, CEOs, accountants, and business development, among others), leading to high levels of burnout and being overwhelmed by donor demands. The lack of core funding prevents small organisations from growing beyond their initial years and puts even more pressure on their founders. As mentioned by the LAM Sisterhood,

“If we were a trucking business or a transportation company, we would be the business, the company that owns the trucks, as well as the actual trucks and the end of fuel. We’re really stretched; we’re performing 1000 other roles.”

(Aleya Kassam, Co-Founder of the LAM Sisterhood)

To navigate this scenario, the LAM Sisterhood, while it carries out some grant-funded work, focuses on commercial work and ensures adequate and fair compensation. Having a commercial strategy - commissioned projects, merchandising opportunities or ticketing - gives them more control over the stories they want to tell and how to tell them. Likewise, they highlight the importance of investing in the creative process and the need for donors or clients to trust storytellers. Trust, along with fair compensation, is an enabling factor that makes innovating around narratives and imagery possible. As such, they consider it essential to partner with organisations that allow them to focus on creating powerful and compelling stories and expand creatively and recognise expenses related to their operations and management.

Moving from the rhetoric of rebalancing power dynamics to its practical implementation is not always a straightforward process. Funding for the arts and cultural spaces is still missing, and it is more present in the tech industry in East Africa than in the creative industry. In the current Kenyan scenario, where the currency is crashing and inflation grows, “moving” the money towards arts and culture is increasingly challenging. Furthermore, there are limited opportunities in the global south, even if the work being done is at par and of the same quality, along with much “lip service” around the shifting of the power movement.

However, despite the challenges, the LAM Sisterhood has developed an extensive portfolio. Since creating the pilot of the Brazen Podcast, which earned significant industry recognition - shortlisted by PRX in 2018 and the BBC in 2021 - they were selected in 2021 for the Aga Khan University Innovation Center Innovators-in-Residence Programme. Thich was instrumental in the LAM Sisterhood's growth. It allowed them to develop a universe of stories that puts African women at the centre, including creating the first season of the Kabrazen Podcast. Such a podcast deliberately steps away from the conventional white, colonial, and male gaze that often shapes the narrative around the lives of past and contemporary African women. It is also designed with imagery that empowers young children, considering the impact visual elements have on their emotions and perceptions.

The Kabrazen Podcast has been a notable success. It recently won Best African Children's Podcast of The Year in 2023. Furthermore, it has reached a broad audience, being distributed in both English and Swahili across 300 community libraries in East Africa, reaching over 10,000 children. Additionally, it is available on the "Yoto player," boasting a user base of 1.5 million worldwide.

Moreover, the LAM Sisterhood is dedicated to establishing safe spaces for African women to share and nourish themselves creatively. They hold live

events for creatives, like the sisterhood salons, and virtual storytelling and distribute the LAM letter, a monthly newsletter shared with their audience. They believe social media can often be a hostile place for African women, and they challenge this dynamic by creating their own communication channel to engage with their audience and share their creativity and artistry with them. Additionally, in collaboration with two other creative studios, they were commissioned by Aga Khan Foundation, to create a transmedia universe of children's stories, resulting in **The Mysteries of Jabali and Sauti**, with over 40 stories in the forms of storybooks, audio stories, comic books, and animations. Within this project, they had a writer's room involving six to eight different writers, with the goal to impact the creative ecosystem by enabling artists to sustain their work.

Their journey in creating and nurturing the LAM Sisterhood reflects the demand for the type of content they produce. The founders have showcased their success, learnings and storytelling process on numerous forums, from the Podcast Movement—the largest podcasting gathering in the world—to Stanford University, the Africa Leadership Centre, NYU, the Aga Khan University, and the University of Bonn. This dissemination of their experience is also an essential aspect of shifting power, as it challenges the narrative that valuable insights mainly originate from the global north.

Learnings:

Recognising and endorsing the creative processes of professionals from the global south is crucial for rebalancing power dynamics and ensuring that storytelling remains authentic and rooted in local contexts. The LAM Sisterhood explains how Africans are significantly interested in collaborating to create stories that reflect their own perspectives and interests, free from western influence.

- ▶ ICSOs can proactively engage and subcontract professionals from the creative industry in the global south to amplify their vision, content, and creations, thereby challenging the dominant values and aesthetic choices perpetuated by western-led narratives and imagery. Organisations can establish trust-based partnerships with creative professionals to shoulder administrative and fundraising responsibilities and alleviate these burdens, as a way of recognising the unequal access to resources that organisations in the west have, compared to organisations elsewhere.
- ▶ The LAM Sisterhood's innovative and multifaceted approach reflects the value of possessing diverse skills applicable across various initiatives. Organisations can support creatives and artists by helping them develop different skills necessary for producing diverse commercial

work, and ensure they are paid in the same value as Western professionals, contributing to their financial sustainability.

- ▶ ICSOs can invest time in discussing what is a safe creative space and preferred communication channels and, instead of calling for proposals, the call can be for creative ideas. The selected idea is then paired with a programme manager or proposal writer, whose responsibility is to flesh out the details and ensure the idea can be executed.

*Placing African social
entrepreneurs at the forefront
of the development narrative:
Africa Forward by Catalyst 2030*

Africa Forward is an initiative created in 2023 by the African Chapters of Catalyst 2030, primarily focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa, to promote actions placing the continent's challenges at the heart of collaborative and partnership-driven opportunities between local social enterprises and entrepreneurs. This innovative initiative acknowledges that African leadership within the social enterprise ecosystem possess the knowledge and experience to address the continent's unique problems. By doing so, it seeks to reshape the narrative that Africa needs saving and place African social entrepreneurs at the forefront of solution development and innovation. Africa Forward aims to build a novel and collaborative "social innovation space for Africans by Africans" (Oduola Osunloye, Africa Forward's Project Manager). The first step in this shift was social innovators from 23 African countries coming together to develop Africa Forward's strategy. The strategy development process led the social innovators to examine the continent's challenges collectively, rebalancing the power dynamics that see them as passive recipients of aid or support and not active agents of change.

The first seed for establishing the Africa Forward initiative comes from the African social entrepreneurs within Catalyst 2030. There was growing dissatisfaction with the decision-making process and funding distribution within

the international development sphere and the desire for more participation:

"We were tired of more of the same, where the outcomes for people on the continent's society were determined by people not based on the continent."

(Oduola Osunloye, Africa Forward's Project Manager)

Creating Africa Forward represented Catalyst's 2030 African Chapters stepping forward and moving away from silo thinking by coming together to respond to colonial dynamics in philanthropy, which decides the programmes, allocation, and opportunities established within the continent. This involved abandoning individualistic ways and putting collaboration and collective practices at the centre.

Moreover, African members of Catalyst 2030 have noted the lack of narratives about social innovators and local changemakers in Africa. Instead, prevailing stories often portray the continent solely in terms of poverty, corruption, and a lack of leadership or agency.

Africa Forward serves as a means to challenge these stories as well as the notion that ideas and projects developed by local entrepreneurs are of lesser value, insufficient or not innovative

enough to address the continent's most pressing issues. It aims to redefine the narrative surrounding the role of social entrepreneurs in the continent's development. This initiative is driven by Africans, for Africans, and with Africans.

Since its launch, Africa Forward's members have been actively involved in consolidating and establishing how to operationalise this initiative with a highly participatory approach, ensuring all members had their voices heard. The African Forward Conference in Naivasha, Kenya, was a key part of such a process. The gathering brought together members of Catalyst 2030, chapter chairs, donors and relevant stakeholders from over 23 different African countries to engage in co-creation and non-extractive exercises to develop Africa Forward's visionary strategy and action plan. Catalyst 2030 provided the backbone and the framework for Africa Forward to exist and, through a bottom-up and empowering approach, encouraged decisions to be made by people from the continent for people in the continent.

The conference was also crucial because it led to significant agreements among the members, mainly on the initiative's four pillars :

1. narrative shift,
 2. ecosystem development,
 3. funding
 4. job creation
- and the three cross-cutting pillars:

youth and gender, climate change, training and capacity development.

Africa Forward's strategy for shifting the narrative is multi-faceted. It involves highlighting the success stories of African social innovators through engaging platforms such as webinars and online café sessions. It also focuses on promoting the indigenous solutions emerging from within the continent. With this shift, Africa Forward aims to benefit social innovators and entrepreneurs by allowing them to expand their enterprises, positively influence policies regarding the social innovation sector, attract more funding, and create opportunities for collaboration and networking. More importantly, to stop relying on

“external views of, let me call them, our friends out of Africa” since “a lot of our members rely a lot on the support that comes from outside of Africa, and that support influences how Africa moves”

(Africa Forward's Co-Chair)

Africa Forward looks to promote the solutions designed by African social innovators for their own communities and equal partnerships with external actors. The latter means not only a shift in mentality but a shift in how they communicate and move forward with their partners. For example,

“Do you want to work with us? Or don’t you want to work with us? Bring your resources to support what we have already decided works for us. We are good with that. Otherwise, keep your resources; if we can reach that point, we’re good.”

(Africa Forward’s Co-Chair)

However, promoting this shift can be challenging. It is vital to African Forward’s future actions to recognise their nuances across the different African countries. The initiative is moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach,

“trying to solve problems in each country, not treating Africa as a country and solving them as one”

(Oduola Osunloye, Africa Forward’s Project Manager)

Africa Forward is a nascent initiative. Its first significant outcome is the strategy and action plan, shaped and endorsed by the members from various African chapters, a collective of over 600 individuals. The Africa Forward conference is an essential first outcome since it underlines that its members are not beneficiaries but active partners and co-creators of this initiative, strengthening this sense of community and facilitating further interactions among social entrepreneurs across the continent.

“We’ve made the network smaller for them and closer to home. It’s that shift in thinking from beneficiaries to partners; when you think of yourself as a beneficiary, you think of it as a giving relationship. But when you think of yourself as a partner, it’s a give and take.”

(Oduola Osunloye, Africa Forward’s Project Manager)

Ensuring that social entrepreneurs play a central and active role in this initiative is crucial for reshaping the narrative that depicts the continent as devoid of innovative and creative individuals capable of driving change. It would also promote more equal relations between social innovators and external organisations, ensuring everyone has a seat at the table. The initiative hopes to see a more robust and well-positioned landscape for African social enterprises, more democratisation of the funding processes, and collaboration across sectors on the continent moving forward.

Learnings:

Networking and cross-continent knowledge exchange are integral to this initiative and bring immense value. By leveraging Catalyst 2030’s established channels, members connected, paving the way for an initiative tailored to the needs of African social innovators. Partners, in each African chapter, were

essential and committed to driving the initiative forward on the ground.

- ▶ ICSOs can harness the influence of key individuals or networking champions to advocate for their innovative initiatives, redirecting focus towards addressing their specific needs.

The goal is to transform the approach to narratives by showcasing African social innovators and entrepreneurs as catalysts for change. The initial step involves ensuring that members position themselves as active partners rather than beneficiaries. In practical terms, this means providing opportunities for co-creation.

- ▶ ICSOs can invest in fostering collaborative spaces that prioritise open dialogue and creativity, devoid of predefined agendas or outcomes. This approach allows for the organic emergence of innovative ideas and long-term collaborations.
- ▶ Allocate time and resources to actively engage with partners in discussions aimed at uncovering their respective strengths.
- ▶ Africa Forward is fundamentally centred on fostering collaborative action among social innovators in Africa. However, collaboration and co-creation can pose challenges, particularly regarding consensus-building. A crucial lesson from Africa

Forward's journey is the importance of setting aside preconceived opinions and embracing the diversity of ideas emanating from its members. There might be opposing ideas when bringing people and organisations together to co-create, and this should be embraced rather than avoided.

*Empowering women and
gender minorities as media
practitioners: The Ascend
Programme - HEVA Fund*

Since its establishment in 2013, HEVA Fund, headquartered in Kenya, has actively empowered creative practitioners and entrepreneurs across diverse sectors, including fashion, digital content and television, live music, cultural heritage, and gaming. Operating in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania, the HEVA Fund has provided innovative financial models and training to foster growth and sustainability in the creative sector.

In 2022, in partnership with Africa No Filter, the HEVA Fund launched the Ascend Programme, a pilot initiative to empower emerging media practitioners. It specifically focused on cisgender women, trans men and women, and non-binary and gender non-conforming media practitioners from urban and rural areas involved in human rights activism or journalism, LGBTQIA+ activism, traditional and innovative digital media, social media, and content creation.

Women and gender minorities grapple with the significant challenge of representing themselves in an empowering manner that preserves their dignity in a context where the mainstream narratives either erase or silence them or often perpetuate misogynistic and discriminatory values. The Ascend Programme provided a learning space for marginalised emerging media practitioners - 15 participants in total - equipping them

with the technical skills necessary to tell their stories more effectively and amplifying their perspectives in a way often overlooked in mainstream narratives. Through the Ascend Programme, participants could connect with facilitators from the LGBTQIA+ community, share their lived experiences, and bring their narratives to life using forward-thinking and innovative practices. This approach fostered a community of creatives and media practitioners, encouraging mutual support and empowering them to take ownership of the narratives and imagery related to their own experiences.

The Ascend Programme fell within HEVA's ongoing OTA Strategy, which is aimed at fostering competitiveness and growth for women-owned and women-led creative businesses. Over time, this strategy evolved into an inclusive, industry-agnostic initiative, extending its focus to all dynamic business founders and owners. As such, the programme extended its reach to media practitioners from gender minorities, responding to the growing demand for the development of new media spaces that allow women and gender minorities to express themselves, share their viewpoints and shift stereotypes. To accomplish this, it offered participants a combination of masterclasses, one-on-one sessions, group presentations and networking opportunities.

HEVA Fund ensured the programme was customised to fit the participants' needs and interests. They designed the curriculum based on their applications and preferences, covering topics such as media, culture, and politics, growing your voice and audience locally and internationally, content creation, and making short audiovisuals work for you. Additionally, they provided one-on-one mentorship sessions to empower participants, helping to enhance their creative projects into innovative and sustainable businesses by increasing their potential for external investment and future-proofing them against the challenges they are most likely to face in growing their young businesses. In some cases, participants also received a stipend to support their growth in individual media engagements and practices by buying equipment and software to create and produce their own stories.

Given its brief duration, it was developed to be as interactive and participatory as possible, ensuring participants could benefit most from the experience. As its project manager explained:

“We discovered effective methods to encourage student engagement and one approach involved allowing students to create presentations for their peers and the facilitator. We also offered one-on-one sessions to help students learn how to effectively voice their ideas, fostering empowerment and confidence among participants.”

(Njeri Gitungo, Project Manager, the Ascend Programme)

Through these components, the programme gave participants valuable insights into shifting how women and individuals from gender minorities are depicted in media, planning content and crafting compelling pitches for local and international media outlets based on empowering narratives.

The Ascend Programme showcased HEVA's commitment to promoting inclusivity and fostering success and growth in individuals, especially those from marginalised communities. Likewise, its cultural sensitivity and diversity representation, with local and accessible media experts facilitating the training, played a crucial role in the programme's success despite its short duration.

Initiatives aimed at amplifying the voices and stories of media practitioners from marginalised or underrepresented groups often encounter challenges

related to competition for resources and influence. Many organisations operate in silos, despite sharing similar objectives, which hinders collaborative efforts.

There is also a general assumption that media practitioners will effortlessly connect. Still, trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming media practitioners individuals often find themselves compelled to seclude for safety. The Ascend Programme established a safe learning and networking space, promoting an environment where participants broaden their perspectives through respectful exchanges between them. Creating such a space was a vital part of the programme from start to finish:

“Safety was a primary concern when issuing the call, so we avoided making a public announcement. Instead, we leveraged our established networks and communities to reach our target audience.”

(Njeri Gitungo, Project Manager, the Ascend Programme)

This focus led to impactful knowledge sharing and networking between participants, facilitators and HEVA, paving the way for participants to develop future collaborations and a community of creatives. Since the Ascend Programme, HEVA has created

new partnerships, enabling it to further its mission.

The Ascend Programme’s interactive and participatory nature empowered participants to recognise the impact of their voices and stories. It also equipped them with writing media content and audiovisual production skills, fostering a more comprehensive approach to their media practices.

Learnings:

- ▶ ICSOs can implement gender-expansive fellowships or training programmes, supporting individuals whose gender identity expands beyond traditional binary male and female categories to generate more inclusive and safe spaces for networking and access training. This inclusivity can also be extended by targeting individuals in refugee camps or from diverse nationalities.
- ▶ Organisations should prioritise targeted programmes to foster connections and networking among emerging media practitioners, explicitly focusing on empowering women and gender minorities.
- ▶ Online training can allow organisations to reach individuals from peri-urban and rural areas to participate without travelling. Support for internet access is necessary to guarantee participation.

HEVA wanted to create a platform to share public-ready content from the applicants. However, given that many businesses were in their early stages with a steep learning curve, it was not possible. A longer programme duration (over eight weeks) in a potential second iteration would be beneficial.

- ▶ ICSOs should consider developing mid to long-term mentoring programmes to allow the incorporation of more practical sessions, further enhancing the participants' creative businesses.

4.2

Theme: Participatory Funding Models

*Promoting the value of
community led philanthropy:
Kenya Community Development
Foundation (KCDF)*

The Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), established in 1997, is a philanthropic foundation supporting sustainable community-driven development. As an independent entity, KCDF represents a departure from the traditional philanthropic model in Kenya. It introduces an innovative approach to grant-making by focusing on local fundraising and participatory grant-making to ensure the communities' voices are integrated into the grant.

KCDF was established in opposition to the prevailing aid ecosystem, which perpetuated colonial practices by bringing outsiders from urban areas or other countries to address community issues. This approach undermined communities' dignity, denying them the opportunity to solve their own problems and experience a sense of accomplishment. Moreover, the aid landscape was dominated by prominent ICOSOs, with smaller community-based organisations relegated to the role of service providers without direct access to funding.

In 2011, KCDF introduced its community-based grant-matching model. This model has been instrumental in creating an ecosystem that empowers community-based organisations and individuals in Kenya to raise resources for their projects, with KCDF stepping in to source the other needed portion. Central to this model is the

belief that communities, regardless of their economic status, possess resources, from funds to people and infrastructure, that can contribute to their development. KCDF acts as a catalyst, encouraging communities to recognise and leverage their resources while providing opportunities to engage them in their own development processes and embracing community-owned solutions.

Capacity-building is a crucial part of this funding model, as it enhances organisations' ability to independently gather funds or access their resources and conduct actions directly related to their communities' needs and wants. KCDF's approach to capacity building deviates from traditional top-down methods, instead prioritising experiential learning based on a participatory organisational capacity assessment.

This approach is reinforced by the KCDF's focus on long-term partnerships. Since 2011, the KCDF's funding model has moved away from competitive grants, limiting calls for proposals and prioritising long-term partnerships. They recognise that organisational growth is dynamic, and therefore, the support provided to partners needs to evolve with time. In contrast to the common practice of funders developing "exit plans", KCDF adjusts its partnerships based on the organisation's changing needs.

They consciously and intentionally seek to retain them, creating long-lasting relations and gradually allowing grantees to scale up their work. Through long-term partnerships, KCDF has discovered that they can:

“do a lot of layering. You’re able to build on gains of the first cycle instead of saying, “I have transitioned you out”. You are able to relate differently because needs and challenges are dynamic, and this leads to even greater survival, more impact and stronger organisations.”

(Caesar Ngule, KCDF’s Programmes Director)

Alongside this approach, KCDF offers a range of capacity-building initiatives focusing on local resource mobilisation, lobbying and advocacy, and financial resilience.

KCDF’s participatory funding model prioritises meaningful engagement with partners from the outset, especially during the proposal development stage. KCDF grant-making process is characterised by its openness and inclusivity. There is no one-size-fits-all approach; instead, the process is flexible and considers each organisation’s context. Community organisations act as mediators, representing their communities’ interests. Therefore, the Foundation is mindful of the

community’s perspective while recognising the valuable contribution of these organisations. Their review process

“ looks into their specific capacity, needs, and the level where they are in terms of their growth and sustainability; we don’t have a standard for reviewing.”

(Hellen Kuria, KCDF’s Coordinator of the Community Voice and Philanthropy programme)

Likewise, the grant cycle aims to demystify themes, emphasising their linkages and interconnectedness, while striving for funds that are as unrestricted as possible, which will depend on the type of funding available. KCDF negotiates with donors, advocating for leniency given the unique context of the communities they serve.

This way, even in cases where funding is topic-specific and lacks a grant-matching component, KCDF ensures community participation to strengthen ownership. This approach cultivates accountability and trust within communities. For instance,

“if KCDF gave money to a water project and I contribute 500 shillings, which might seem very little, but then based on that, I became a stakeholder; I am an owner, and I want to know what is happening.”

(Caesar Ngule, KCDF's Programme Coordinator).

However, in addition to restricted funding, large and overwhelming funds can also present a challenge for KCDF's model since they dilute community and local philanthropy efforts. They aim to mitigate this scenario by balancing external investments with communities' self-mobilisation and self-resourcing nature.

Balancing external investments with the need to sustain local self-mobilisation is crucial. The complexities of the existing aid structure and the lack of sufficient resources further contribute to KCDF's challenges. The shift towards a participatory model at KCDF is a new concept, and changing mindsets and practices takes time. There is resistance from individuals fearing job insecurity as power dynamics evolve.

The innovative and participatory funding model implemented by KCDF has yielded positive outcomes, enhancing the Foundation's credibility in Kenya. KCDF has cultivated a critical mass that trusts its grant-making approach.

It has fostered partnerships characterised by active community involvement, empowering communities to contribute their ideas, resources, and expertise as equal partners. This approach leads to greater ownership and sustainability as communities retain new capacities, a contrast to traditional grants where the departure of key stakeholders upon funding conclusion often leaves communities struggling to sustain projects. Many local organisations have benefited from the resources received, leading to their growth, enhanced organisational capacity, and the addition of more funds.

The participatory model has minimised resource waste by promoting accountability and trust, empowering communities to mobilise resources. This increased agency and problem-solving autonomy have reduced reliance on KCDF over time, thus lowering costs.

Learnings:

- ▶ Organisations providing funds to community-based organisations should consider their absorptive capacity carefully, as large funding injections can potentially disrupt the community-based approach. Determining the fund's “right size” is relative to the community's needs and interests and, therefore, requires actively engaging them.
- ▶ ICSOs can foster enduring partnerships with small community-

based organisations to provide sustained support in addressing challenges that may emerge over time, applying adaptive learning. Trust plays a crucial role in acknowledging and effectively resolving these challenges. ICSSOs can assist these organisations in proposal writing while still ensuring compliance with donor requirements.

- ▶ Explore innovative ways to fund or support communities, including local fundraising and community participation. Consider not only the financial resources they can provide, but also their knowledge, ideas and willingness to contribute with their time or infrastructure. These models should empower communities to leverage their assets beyond monetary contributions, fostering a sense of ownership in development initiatives.

*Africa's First Indigenous
Activist Fund: UHAI*

UHAI, the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI-EASHRI), has been operating in East Africa since 2009. It focuses on marginalised communities in Burundi, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia and further supports pan-African organising across the continent. The organisation mainly targets sexual and gender minorities, sex workers, and people who use drugs and the unique challenges and funding inequalities they face by leveraging their comprehensive understanding of the human rights issues affecting these communities.

UHAI was founded by the sexual and gender minority movements it currently supports. In 2009, a surge in the far-right movement created a polarised environment in the region, further marginalising vulnerable communities, who, in response, realised they needed to participate in the civil society sector actively, organising and mobilising resources to host a community that was facing cultural attacks, legal challenges, and political repression. In this hostile context, *“UHAI was formed to accommodate exclusion”* (UHAI's Director of Programmes), allowing activists to redefine how they assert control over civil society spaces and communicate their own narratives.

UHAI has pioneered an innovative funding approach characterised by participatory, flexible and accessible grant-making. In this model, the communities and activists supported by UHAI are key decision-makers instead of mere beneficiaries. Rather than prescribing solutions, UHAI actively listens to activists and allows the passion driving them and their proximity to the context and their own lived experience to inform funding decisions. This ensures that funding addresses their diverse needs and priorities. This initiative, in their own words,

“It wasn't really a solution to a problem as predetermined, but when you bring folk together to find their own solutions, they will look like them, they will not be over-thematized, they will not be over-prescriptive, and they will allow them space to innovate.”

(UHAI's Director of Programmes)

UHAI's work is organised around four key areas: grant-making and enhanced capacity strengthening, movement building and pan-African engagement, knowledge management and thought leadership, and institutional development and strengthening.

The grant-making process is dynamic and context-driven, reflecting an intersectional approach. This approach acknowledges and adjusts to the intricate layers of oppression that intersect within the context of sexual and gender minority movements.

The Peer Grants Committee (PGC) is the cornerstone of UHAI's participatory grant-making efforts. Comprised of 18 activists representing the seven countries supported by UHAI, this committee plays a key role in setting the fund's priorities and determining grant allocations. The establishment of the PGC is made possible by UHAI's commitment to meaningful participation and language justice. UHAI prioritises partners and staff being able to convene in the languages and ways reflective of how movements converse. This includes ensuring the grants and discussions about them are in languages such as Swahili and Amharic, moving away from relying only on English and French so

“everyone can bring their full voices into a room and make relevant funding decisions.”

(UHAI's Director of Programmes)

Moreover, UHAI's team, including staff, Secretariat, and Board members, consists of individuals deeply ingrained in the sexual and gender minority movements. Focal points and programme officers are

also actively engaged as activists. This environment fosters a culture of active listening and engagement within their funding model, enabling them to identify issues and priorities that partners may not have previously raised. With an open-door policy, UHAI constantly communicates and collaborates with the movement, encouraging ongoing dialogue and participation.

Participatory grant-making is coupled with capacity building and support, fostering

“a dynamic environment of mutual learning and knowledge sharing. This not only empowers activists but also facilitates their engagement in regional and global spaces”.

(UHAI's Director of Programmes)

Through exposure to various perspectives and experiences, activists engage in collaborative exchanges, sharing insights and best practices. This fosters synergies with fellow activists and frontline responders across Africa, as well as other regions of the global south and north. This mutual learning process enriches the collective knowledge base, enabling a more effective and sustainable approach to addressing shared challenges and advancing common goals.

Philanthropic advocacy is one way UHAI leverages its resources and connections to support the movements it champions. Additionally, through trauma-based philanthropy, UHAI addresses the impact of trauma on activists and communities and collaborates with donors to explore ways they can better support the movement without further exposing the already vulnerable communities they work with to harm.

UHAI acknowledges that the philanthropic sector is embracing alternative funding models. The current environment is more conducive to the funding practices proposed by UHAI, as civic space in Africa has diminished and engaging with severely attacked communities flexibly and collaboratively is now more crucial than ever. This provides fertile ground for promoting the domestic solutions proposed by the sexual and gender movements, which create lasting connections and longevity since communities implement and practise their own solutions in this supportive environment. Close collaboration with feminist movements and moving away from working in silos by sharing information enables them to cross-pollinate ideas and a more participatory and intersectional way of funding.

All funders operate differently; not everyone adopts a flexible, less prescriptive approach to funding. The most significant pushback has come

from those unfamiliar with participatory grant-making, who believe that academic expertise is necessary for effective grant-making and disqualified activist funds. The challenge lies in contesting such notions and ensuring that individuals with relevant lived experiences are included in grant-making processes. Certain funders may be unwilling to reform their funding practices to meet community needs and do not trust communities to know the solutions to their problems. That is why they believe in *“creating more spaces where our funders can interact with civil society, which helps appreciate that we are both part of the same solution doing different roles.”* (UHAI’s Director of Programmes)

UHAI’s efforts have led to activists not just being viewed as beneficiaries of funds but acknowledged as valuable contributors to discussions, decision-making, and collective problem-solving. They have the autonomy to identify their priorities and actions rather than conforming to funders’ directives and strategic goals. In addition, funders are increasingly adopting a consultative approach.

UHAI’s unique position as both an activist fund and a funder enables it to engage in various spaces and foster partnerships across various sectors, including health, emergency response, and human rights.

Learnings:

- ▶ Organisations can highlight the significance of lived experience by initiating contact with activist movements before engaging with sexual and gender minorities. This proactive step allows for the collaborative design of proposals tailored to their specific issues and needs. They can assemble teams where lived experience is also a fundamental requirement.
- ▶ Engaging key recipients of funds in grant decision-making strengthens community representation and enhances outcomes. Drawing on their lived experiences and contextual understanding, organisations could allocate funds more effectively to address pressing issues within the community.
- ▶ ICSOs can develop targeted initiatives for activists representing sexual and gender minorities, providing capacity-building in proposal writing and funds management. They can do this while incorporating a trauma-conscious approach.
- ▶ Engaging in collaborative spaces, such as feminist circles, where activists, ICSOs, and donors can share their work and learn from each other, can help foster an intersectoral approach to funding.

*Locally-led innovation for
emergency response: The Change
Fund - NEAR Network*

The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) is a movement comprising local and national non-governmental organisations from the global south, united by a shared vision of establishing a fair, equitable, and dignified aid system. To date, it comprises over 250 members across 40 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and MENA.

NEAR's work is anchored in four streams of work: Solutions, Movement Building, Building Bridges, and Learning. Implemented within the Solutions Pillar, The Change Fund represents a transformative shift in how funds are designed and managed. The locally-led fund is grounded in the understanding that those closest to the crisis are best positioned to lead emergency responses.

Through the Change Fund, NEAR aims to foster a funding ecosystem that is responsive, adaptable, and equitable, with localised decision-making processes. The fund's establishment challenged some core preconceived notions within the aid system, such as the belief that local organisations have limited capacity and experience, a narrative which has fed into the loss of trust from funders. The fund is a practical solution to overcome these notions, cultivating a more bottom-up, flexible, and collaborative approach to funding and fostering trust-based partnerships over transactional ones.

The Change Fund stemmed from NEAR's membership feeling excluded from decision-making processes within the aid funding landscape, with bilateral funders or INGOs developing intervention strategies lacking inclusivity, neglecting their voices, failing to reflect their needs and priorities, and often unilaterally implementing them in communities. Recognising these systemic imbalances in traditional humanitarian funding models prompted the establishment of the Change Fund. In this sense,

“The idea to innovate, or rather, the desire to innovate, was really deeply rooted in the collective insight and aspirations of our local members and our network. The collective vision translated into creating the Change Fund, a mechanism designed with a local first approach.”

(Falastin Omar, The Change Fund's Programme Manager)

The Change Fund is, therefore, rooted in the desire to change the status quo within the aid system and show that an alternative system, where local actors are in the lead, is possible. NEAR developed a funding mechanism with built-in agility and an expedient, compliant risk management framework. Central to this innovative approach is adopting human-centred design principles, which are crucial for ensuring that the

solutions and interventions resonated deeply with the real-world contexts and lived experiences of communities at the forefront of delivering humanitarian responses.

The Change Fund employs a simplified grant-making process. Local actors submit concise 2—to 3-page proposals outlining the number of beneficiaries, targeted areas, and the coordination mechanisms in place to prevent response duplication. A needs assessment complements this information, and applicants can either present an already existing assessment conducted by the member or any UN or a country-level agency.

A defining feature of the Oversight Body, the Change Fund's governance structure, is that it is comprised only of local and national actors. The Oversight Body includes representatives from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and MENA regions (two for each region), nominated and selected by NEAR members, and is responsible for declaring crises, reviewing applications and directing the funds where they are most needed. The Oversight Body also assists in designing and improving the fund's process flow by ensuring a speedy and impactful workflow and disbursement. The Oversight Body reaches the granting decisions through a consensus and monitors the project's implementation.

This governance structure ensures

inclusive decision-making, which is essential for directing the fund's resources towards the most urgent needs identified by individuals with profound insight into local contexts since:

“Usually, INGOs will design the programs, not us. This was different because we had the liberty to submit any ideas we had in consultation with the community. It was very demand-driven from the local level.”

(CDP, Somalia)

The fund is designed to guarantee an exceptionally swift response, from the triggering of a crisis to the awarding of a grant, all within a two-week timeframe. Real-time adjustments enhance effectiveness and adaptability by allowing resource redirection and strategy adjustments without complex processes.

However, with the sector, challenges regarding the quality and quantity of funding for local actors persist. Overall humanitarian funding going to local actors for humanitarian assistance stands at 1%, according to most recent data ⁵. Short-term, unflexible funding also has a number of negative knock-on effects, such as difficulties

⁵ Development Initiatives, 2023. Global Humanitarian Assistance Report. A better humanitarian system: Locally led action |GHA Report 2023 - Development Initiatives (devinit.org)

in attracting and retaining staff, or investing in critical organisational functions like strategy and learning.

The Change Fund, which received support from the Hilton Foundation for its pilot stage, is part of wider transformational solutions being designed by local actors. Donors, international organisations, and policymakers increasingly recognise the value of local expertise and are acting to support locally-led initiatives.

Since its inception in mid-March 2022, the Change Fund, with a budget of 1.9 million dollars, reached over 239,000 beneficiaries through 13 grantees spanning 11 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, MENA, Asia, and Africa. This highlights the fund's ability to efficiently deliver impactful aid.

“The Hilton Foundation’s grant to the Change Fund has been transformative, both for NEAR, and potentially for the humanitarian sector.”

(External evaluation of the Change Fund conducted by ITAD)

The Change Fund benefited local actors at the forefront of humanitarian response in some of the most challenging contexts. Grantees appreciated the spirit of solidarity, trust, and focus on relationships promoted by the fund, and the fund

led to dynamic partnerships with and between grantees and subgrantees. Accountability mechanisms and exchanges throughout implementation are rooted in fairness and trust. These collaborative efforts positively impact grantees’ confidence, most exceeding their initial targets.

The effectiveness of the Change Fund underlines the need for donors to support emerging and transformational locally-led financing models, to play a role in creating the system of solidarity of the future. The Fund demonstrates that an alternative model is not only possible but successful.

The ongoing learnings from the Change Fund have also shaped NEAR’s work in other crisis areas, including expanding the emergency response window to include displacement related crises, and establishing anticipatory financing for climate related issues. This ongoing experience is helping to shape and expand the network’s localised funding mechanisms.

Learnings:

- The partnerships between local actors managing and implementing Change Fund grants – partnerships based on solidarity, trust, and relationships over transaction - serve as an example for international INGOs.
- Introducing flexibility into funding

models and project frameworks enables real-time adjustments in response to actual conditions and emerging needs on the ground. Shifting towards more responsive approaches can improve the timeliness and effectiveness of aid responses. By listening to community's voices and needs the Change Fund is not only saving lives but helping to strengthen livelihoods in a more sustainable way.

- Embedding decision-making processes within impacted communities can lead to more timely and culturally sensitive aid responses that are aligned with local needs.

4.3

Theme:

Innovative
approaches to
development
cooperation

A powerful South-South alliance: Leading from the South (LFS)

Leading from the South (LFS) is a feminist consortium led by four women's funds from the global South: the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), *Fondo de Mujeres del Sur* (FMS), International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI)/ AYNI Fund (AYNI), and Women's Fund Asia (WFA). Founded in 2007, FMS focuses its interventions on Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, providing support to feminist organisations with flexible and multi-annual funding. Since 2017, FMS has coordinated Leading from the South in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching over 20 countries through a collaborative model with other women's funds based in the region.

Leading from the South, currently in its second cycle - initiated in 2021 and extending until 2025 - represents an innovative approach to international development cooperation in which resources go directly to the southern-led women's funds from its main donor, the Dutch Government. This enables them to leverage their ability to exert power over them as the key decision-makers, meaning resources do not flow to organisations from the global north with offices in the south, but instead directly support southern-led women's funds. Leading from the South is putting the concept of localisation into practice, and localisation

“is much more than thinking about how funds flow from north to south, but rather to be able to generate another distribution of power, which has to do with trusting organisations in the south to define their own agendas, to manage money and to raise questions that have to do with: what are the issues that need to be addressed? What are the issues to be prioritised?”

(FMS's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning coordinator)

Leading from the South was born when the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs modified its funding priorities, which affected feminist organisations based in the global south. Feminist organisations from the global south, women's funds like Mama Cash, a feminist women's fund in the Netherlands, and Prospera, a network of feminist women's funds, advocated on behalf of southern-led women's funds and organisations, establishing a new line of support directed to them. Leading from the South is, therefore, the result of collective action involving feminist organisations and women's funds both in the global north and south supporting novel donor relations and reflects a political commitment from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The collaboration between the women's funds consortium and a bilateral donor was innovative on various fronts. It engaged non-traditional actors and dedicated a significant sum—42 million euros in the first phase and 80 million euros in the second phase—to joint endeavours, reframing bilateral relations. Although the Dutch Government has extended its support for Leading from the South for another five years and with more donors are supporting the initiative, a systematic replication of this experience elsewhere has not eventuated.

FMS works across four strategic areas: political participation, economic justice, elimination of violence and discrimination and socio-environmental and urban justice. Through Leading from the South and collaborating with other women's funds in Latin America and the Caribbean, FMS supports initiatives from grassroots, intermediate, and large organisations dedicated to advancing women's rights within these areas. In 2021-2023, they reached more than two hundred organisations in 25 countries with financial and technical support, including core funding. Many of these grassroots organisations, supported through Leading from the South, lack official registration or legal status in their countries. In practice, this entails establishing a comprehensive structure to reach such organisations, devising effective ways to disburse funds to them, and navigating countries with

numerous restrictions on such matters. This requires a deliberate decision-making process and a robust structure to support these decisions.

In addition, a crucial aspect of FMS's work within Leading from the South involves fostering a sense of community among the organisations they support. This aims to strengthen the movement and build alliances between grassroots organisations and women's funds and organisations. Coming together as a consortium, Leading from the South also reinforces the leadership of the four women's funds based in the South within the landscape of international cooperation, as they mention,

“We sit down with donors or potential donors differently than if we were alone.”

(FMS's Deputy Director)

Implementing Leading from the South through alliances across the global south facilitates horizontal learning, experience sharing, and developing a collective vision among women's funds and organisations. These alliances are key enabling factors for Leading from the South's success. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there was already a robust ecosystem (networks in place) that Leading from the South strengthened, and propelled forward. Leading from the South has enhanced leadership both at the individual

level and within the organisations, contributing to increased legitimacy within their communities. Additionally, while not establishing a direct cause-effect relationship, many organisations have increased opportunities for accessing additional resources.

On a macro level, *Leading from the South* in Latin America and the Caribbean has contributed to changes in laws, public policies, and regulations through projects presented as bills, interventions in specific public policies, or prevention of issues deemed harmful to specific groups. The capacities of women's funds and organisations to influence legislation and policymaking outcomes are commendable. Additionally, their ability to resist and provide support during setbacks related to the context, such as governments with anti-feminist agendas, is also a significant result.

There are various challenges in advancing towards a power shift and increased localisation. This includes altering how funds are distributed and adapting operational procedures, monitoring, and evaluation to be more user-friendly, participatory, and focused on mutual learning for both the funds and the supported organisations. Likewise, there is a challenge around redefining sustainability within a shared responsibility framework, and long-term funding is critical for this in a context of uncertainty about the future of cooperation dynamics, marked by

humanitarian crises and the rise of right-wing governments and anti-feminist groups. Women's funds have a role in advocating for such changes.

Another crucial factor is the role of women's funds within the international cooperation sector and their capacity to navigate the bureaucracy inherent in the logic of cooperation. They absorb donor requirements without overwhelming the partners they are supporting, especially those operating on the ground. They prioritise the need for feminist movements over donor-driven agendas.

Leading from the South has demonstrated that alternative forms of support are possible within international cooperation. Women's funds from the global south, based in the global south, can effectively manage and successfully handle large resources from development cooperation. This has influenced donor thinking on funding southern-led women's funds and southern leadership and ownership.

Learnings:

- ▶ ICSOs can foster greater South-South learning and harness the expertise of other organisations by dedicating resources to regional learning events, mirroring the approach of initiatives like *Leading from the South*.
- ▶ *Leading from the South* embodies an innovative collaboration

between women's funds and a bilateral donor, reshaping external perceptions of women's funds and resource distribution dynamics. This was achieved by implementing fair decision-making processes and maintaining direct communication with the donor through a designated focal point.

- ▶ Collective advocacy and alliances have led to the distribution of flexible and adaptable funds and trust-based partnerships. ICSSOs can model this shift in donor-grantee relations, seeking to forge partnerships with smaller grassroots organisations based on collaboration. They should refrain from imposing their own agendas and instead empower these smaller organisations to define their own priorities.

*Integrating lived everyday
experience into M&E practices: The
Grounded Accountability Model
(GAM) - Everyday Peace Indicators
(EPI)*

Within international cooperation, traditional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices often centre around showcasing a programme's success and results through knowledge production methods aiming to generate tangible, accurate, valid, and unbiased evidence. Prioritising these methods has frequently led to the exclusion of local communities, particularly in conflict-affected contexts, reducing their lived experiences to statistics or quantifiable outputs or limiting their contribution to knowledge generation. Programmes working around the issues of peace, justice and reconciliation are usually measured through top-down, expert-driven, and western-led models imposed on the global south.

The Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) project offers an innovative alternative based on community-driven indicators that reflect local experience and understanding. EPI acknowledges that while the current development cooperation system requires quantitative metrics to convey effectiveness to donors, it is possible to co-create the measurement tools needed for that purpose in collaboration with those being assessed. EPI holds significance not only in measuring impact and tracking results, but also in leveraging community-generated indicators to achieve consensus on key issues and empower communities to advocate for their needs.

The Grounded Accountability Model (GAM) emerges from EPI's efforts to tailor its methodology for CSOs and practitioners while showcasing its value and effectiveness to donors, multilateral and bilateral organisations, and governments.

“The motivation behind GAM was to try to pass on the knowledge we have gained through EPI, through applying it and developing it in the academy to the practitioner world.”

(Pamina Firchow, EPI's Founding Executive Director)

Taking it a step further, GAM piloted the EPI Methodology in organisations operating at various levels, including an international NGO (Search for Common Ground), a national NGO (Asociación MINGA in Colombia), and a local organisation (COSURCA in the Cauca region of Colombia). This approach allowed them to assess whether

“it looks different if you adapt the EPI tool to a national NGO versus a community or a regional NGO, and how does that look different? How might they adapt it differently? How might they use it differently? What are the different challenges involved? And then, does it matter if they do different kinds of projects in different sectors (e.g. human rights, security, etc?)”

(Pamina Firchow, EPI's Founding Executive Director)

The first step in implementing GAM involved training practitioners from each organisation to become “EPI experts.” These experts then adjusted their learning to suit their organisations’ specific goals, aligning with their challenges and capacities. This means that GAM and its adaptation of the EPI methodology differ for each organisation. This diversity was channelled into creating a community of practice among the organisations, creating a platform for sharing insights and knowledge throughout the process.

Some challenges encountered during this process revolved around the diverse cultural backgrounds of each organisation and the communities they serve. This highlighted that while conflict is universal, its expressions vary across various contexts. It also emphasised the significance of acknowledging diverse perspectives on peace and coexistence, enriching the overall experience. An ongoing concern related to the approach promoted by EPI involves what constitutes genuine participation and whether the data collected accurately represents the community. It is crucial to ensure that the indicators created genuinely reflect the communities’ realities and are not susceptible to being easily co-opted.

That is why it was essential for practitioners to adhere to specific commitments to implement GAM effectively. Practitioners committed

to conducting a consensus-driven, inclusive and transparent process with the diverse groups representing the local community, consulting these communities on their preferred engagement methods, setting expectations, mutually agreeing on how to utilise the data and sharing its ownership, developing localised and meaningful indicators aligned with its needs and aspirations and integrating them into the organisation’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts.

Practitioners and academics in international cooperation, peacebuilding and other fields have recognised the necessity for participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation, emphasising the importance of involving every day people in developing indicators.

GAM’s implementation in Colombia

MINGA is a human rights-focused organisation working on social movements and environmental justice in Colombia. During GAM’s implementation, they engaged with leaders from a peasant organisation active in various municipalities of the *Macizo Colombiano* subregion in Nariño. MINGA adapted the EPI methodology by simultaneously drafting and verifying the indicators and streamlining the process. The participants collectively reviewed, confirmed, or discarded proposed indicators, ensuring clarity in wording and allowing participants to

vote for the best choices. The resulting indicators reflected community priorities and understanding of peace, including recognition of peasants' rights, well-maintained roads, access to land for young farmers, absence of exploitation, and university outreach to territories.

COSURCA, a cooperative of coffee bean producers in the Cauca region, was another key player in the EPI methodology's adaptation. The ASPROBALBOA association, which integrates COSURCA and comprises 174 families from the municipality of Balboa, was selected to participate. Other rural organisations (*Lirios del Campo* and ASMUSAN) not associated with COSURCA also participated as control groups. The COSURCA team had participants write their answers to the moderator's guiding questions before discussing and constructing indicators based on those responses. The information gathered from focus groups was organised into Excel tables, and participants were allowed to make adjustments or corrections. As part of the adaptation, a printed form of the indicators was provided to participants for anonymous voting. Due to logistical and security issues, this process was done in one day.

The process produced valuable insights into COSURCA's operations, informing the development of tailored evaluations and strategies

aligned with the association's specific needs and priorities. Additionally, the unexpected involvement of members from other associations facilitated the establishment of new channels for cooperation and communication.

The GAM's experience in Colombia on national and local level, as well as in an international level with Search for Common Ground, demonstrated that the EPI methodology is not a rigid tool, but a flexible one that could be tailored to the specific needs of different organisations and adapted to its unique context. All three organisations have seen tangible results, as they've integrated certain aspects of the adapted EPI methodology into their daily operations and evaluation strategies. Likewise, they have used elements from EPI in other projects' evaluations beyond GAM, meaning it is a helpful and valuable tool for organisations regarding donor accountability.

Moreover, the GAM project was able to foster a community of practice among these organisations, and this was the cohesive force for the entire project. There are ongoing plans to sustain this community of practice and growing interest in replicating this experience in other countries in the global south.

Learnings:

The GAM's adaptation in Colombia underlines its significance in community engagement. It demonstrated that ICSSOs operating in intricate environments can tailor the EPI methodology to gather data in a

participatory and culturally sensitive manner, all while upholding donor accountability standards.

- ▶ It is important to spend time discussing and agreeing on key ways of working/operating and aligning to local challenges and capacities before collecting data.
- ▶ M&E practices can prioritise meaningful dialogue and engagement with everyday people from targeted communities.
- ▶ Community created indicators are susceptible to local co-option. For them to genuinely reflect the community's realities, a consensus-driven, inclusive and transparent process with the diverse groups needs to be carefully managed (not just the outcome).
- ▶ Diverse perspectives on peace and coexistence should be openly discussed, for they enrich the overall experience, even if it slows down the measurement process. Community members need to be clear on what they are monitoring through co-created definitions.
- ▶ ICOSOs can advocate for bilateral and multilateral donors to actively support the integration of community-generated indicators into M&E frameworks.
- ▶ Fostering a community of practice proves to be a powerful method for

uniting organisations. Investing in creating online platforms enables organisations to facilitate the ongoing sharing of insights when implementing innovative practices, including investing in regional communities of practices with similar cultural backgrounds.

Fostering community leadership: Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work

GlobalGiving is a non-profit based in Washington, DC, with offices in the UK and China. It works with organisations in 175+ countries and connects non-profits with donors and companies while also supporting non-profits in accessing funding, tools, and training needed to serve their communities.

Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work is a non-profit organisation dedicated to empowering communities in West Java and Central Kalimantan in Indonesia to overcome poverty by addressing the multidimensional challenges they face. This organisation focuses on three key areas: education, health and community development. In 2011, YUM became a grantee of Global Giving. Currently, they have five projects displayed in the Global Giving platform.

Partnerships between southern and northern organisations frequently perpetuate unequal power dynamics. Donors from the global north commonly dictate funding terms and priorities, which may not align with communities' actual needs. They often impose strict reporting requirements, exacerbating the power imbalance and making innovative solutions almost impossible to develop. Partnerships that promote more equitable relationships between donors and grantees are essential for more effective collaborations.

This case study highlights an empowering and innovative way of collaboration between GlobalGiving, in line with its mission to promote community-led change, and YUM.

A cornerstone of YUM's approach is implementing projects tailored to and reflecting their local communities' needs. This strategy not only promotes the enduring stability of community-based initiatives but also cultivates collaboration among members, showcasing the potential achievements attainable through collective efforts. While YUM adjusts to donor requests that align with the needs of their beneficiaries, they highly value partnerships that enable them the autonomy to set their own priorities and decision-making processes.

GlobalGiving has been actively working to establish such partnerships. Since taking on the project to develop a **community-led assessment tool**, the organisation has embarked on a highly participatory process to strengthen its commitment to community-led change and understand the needs of the communities they are serving. This process fostered new initiatives and internal changes within the organisation, while also demonstrating their dedication to establishing equitable and innovative partnerships and fundraising mechanisms within the international development cooperation sector.

Such an approach facilitates a direct connection between community-based organisations and donors. Acting as an intermediary, GlobalGiving ensures that these organisations retain control over their initiatives, enabling them to address their needs and priorities and establishing no strings attached funds with donors.

YUM's collaboration with them started with their voluntary participation in their online fundraising platform after being vetted. From there, this partnership has facilitated various engagements, from nominations for corporate grants to being a part of GlobalGiving's Disaster Response group in Indonesia and becoming one of the first organisations they directly contact when a crisis occurs.

The contrast between partnering with GlobalGiving and other funders is described as significant. With GlobalGiving, they benefit from remarkable flexibility in utilising donations. Unlike other funders, there's no strict deadline for allocating the funding, enabling them to use it until the project fulfils its objectives. Additionally, they can modify the project team and goals once they achieve them. This flexibility empowers them to respond dynamically to evolving community needs, allowing them to introduce new initiatives as required rather than being restrained to repetitive activities, as they exemplified:

“For example, we had a project called COVID-19 support. Last year, we realised that COVID-19 was already over, and the people that we wanted to help no longer needed help, so we changed the project to become the Empowering Women to Prevent Stunting project, and that is not a problem with GlobalGiving. That kind of flexibility really stands out when you become a GlobalGiving grantee.”

(Yolanda Nilasari, YUM's Education Programme Coordinator)

This flexibility empowers them to modify their projects while staying connected with their donors. Through GlobalGiving's innovative platform, they can easily reach out to donors, update them about the new project, and ensure a smooth transition, preserving a strong connection with them. Moreover, GlobalGiving's reporting is manageable, with YUM submitting a report every three months through the website and Global Giving sending it to every donor supporting their work.

GlobalGiving is “more than an online fundraising platform; it is also a learning platform” (Yolanda Nilasari, YUM's Education Programme Coordinator) since they provide numerous insights into organisational development and improvement and enhancing project implementation, including community mobilisation.

The partnership model advocated by GlobalGiving respects that those closest to the ground, working daily with the community, hold significant power. This shift means that decision-making power is no longer solely with the donor, but also in the hands of the grantee. The collaboration with GlobalGiving empowers YUM to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in reaching beneficiaries and engaging with community leaders and representatives, fostering greater buy-in of their work and participation. Key elements enabling this include flexibility, trust, and long-term support.

YUM also emphasises the availability of human resources within its organisation, including capable Board Members who are receptive to innovation and responsive to the evolving needs of the communities. This stands in contrast to members from other organisations who may hesitate to innovate due to concerns that donors might withdraw their support. Furthermore, a common challenge for YUM is the time constraints in meeting demanding donor requirements, unlike their experience with GlobalGiving, and negotiating with conservative donors, unaware of community needs.

Learnings:

- ▶ ICSOs can strategically diversify their funding sources by exploring innovative partnerships, facilitating online fundraising, and capitalising on the various learning opportunities such approaches offer. This can also provide increased recognition within the international development field.
- ▶ Flexible online fundraising can allow organisations to adapt rapidly to their changing environments, particularly in emergency response, and increase effectiveness.
- ▶ ICSOs could prioritise partnerships that offer more than just financial support and provide opportunities for discussions about addressing emerging challenges and adapting projects and the flexibility to change the course of the project when required.

CROSS-ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
Description/ understanding of the problem/system/ power dynamics to be shifted	Narratives and imageries about Africa and African women dominated by external perspectives, leading to a stereotypical portrayal of African women as victims or beneficiaries and lack of representation.	Persistence of narratives about Africa as needing saving and Africans as beneficiaries rather than actors of change, innovators and entrepreneurs.	Marginalised emerging media practitioners have fewer opportunities to network and access training to build their creative business format, raise their voices and have a sense of ownership over the narratives and imagery related to their experiences.
New/novel solution or strategy for what specific problem	Established a content studio that follows a feminist approach and puts women at the centre of their work to reclaim their stories.	African chapters from Catalyst 2030 co-created Africa Forward to promote collaboration and partnership between social entrepreneurs, highlighting their ideas and projects to address the continent's pressing issues and shift the narrative regarding their role in the continent's development.	The Ascend programme provided a learning space for marginalised emerging media practitioners to learn technical skills and network according to their interest while engaging with facilitators from the LGBTQIA+ community.

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	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
<p>New/novel partnership or inclusion approach</p>	<p>Partnerships with a wide range of organisations, from individuals to artistic organisations and creative businesses to universities, such as the Aga Khan University. The partnership approach was partly based on “investing in ideas to see if they work”, mimicking the tech sector.</p>	<p>The initiative is capitalising on the partnerships from the African Chapters of Catalyst 2030, as well as the network from larger organisations funding this initiative (Ashoka and the Mastercard Foundation) and the access to the social entrepreneurs and innovators working within those organisations’ ecosystem.</p>	<p>The programme was implemented with Africa No Filter, an organisation committed to supporting storytellers and organisations working to shift stereotypical narratives of Africa by developing nuanced and contemporary stories.</p> <p>The programme was deliberate in its inclusive targeting strategy, aiming to include participants from underrepresented groups by considering factors such as gender, age, and place of residence. HEVA fund targeted participants from sexual and gender minorities through their networks as a way to ensure their protection and recruited facilitators with expertise in content development and media practices, some of whom were human rights activists and members of the LGBTQIA+ community.</p>

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
Tools/ technology/ methodology/ framework applied	They apply a multifaceted and feminist creative approach, including innovative and current formats such as podcast production, social media, and artistic performances. Their feminist approach to storytelling acknowledges the power dynamics inherent in the historical representation of African women and empowers them to challenge and reshape the narrative.	They applied a participatory process with different consultative steps to develop the Africa Forward strategy, culminating with the Africa Forward Conference, where they engaged in non-extractive co-creation exercises. The goal was not what they could take from participants, but how they could reflect and create together to shift the narrative about the social innovation space in Africa.	They developed an 8-week online course on media, culture, and politics, growing your voice and audience locally and internationally, content creation, and making short audiovisuals work for you. This involved a participatory learning methodology.
Uniqueness of the funding model and how it helps	They are not reliant on donor funding. Instead, they undertake commissioned work and charge commercial rates and some grant-funded projects. This funding model aims to give them greater control over the narratives they wish to communicate and how they choose to do it.	Both initiatives are receiving external funds. Africa Forwards is funded by the MasterCard Foundation. The Ascend Programme was funded by a grant offered by Africa No Filter.	

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
Intrinsic power-shift/ outcome	<p>They are rebalancing power dynamics by creating stories that challenge the stereotypes around African women and the lack of representation. This is done in different creative formats: it includes initiating the KaBrazen Podcast, establishing safe spaces for African women to share and nourish themselves creatively, developing the LAM letter, a monthly newsletter challenging the hostility African women face online and sharing their storytelling process and learnings on numerous forums, including educational centres based in the global north (challenging the unequal power dynamic that undervalues professionals not from the Western Hemisphere).</p>	<p>They are promoting collaboration among members as equal partners, collectively seeking solutions to Africa's challenges from within the continent. By leveraging social enterprises, they aim to shift the narrative regarding the origin of solutions, emphasising Africa's capacity to innovate and address its own problems.</p>	<p>They provided a secure networking and learning space for historically silenced marginalised communities to share their creative stories and gather skills in writing media content and audiovisual production to amplify their voices and challenge dominant narratives.</p>

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
Challenges	<p>They have experienced the burden of managing donor funds and fulfilling their requirements without core funding, low compensation for professionals in the arts and creative sector, and limited opportunities for global south creatives.</p>	<p>Establishing joint actions and collaborations can be challenging due to the specificities of the various African countries and the need to engage and mobilise social entrepreneurs at different tiers while steering away from a one-size-fits-all narrative and amplifying the role of entrepreneurs.</p>	<p>Those working to amplify the voices and stories of media practitioners from underrepresented groups operating in silos, difficulties in collaborative initiatives and increased networking.</p>

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
<p>Learnings for ICSOs</p>	<p>ICSOs can proactively engage professionals from the creative industry in the global south to amplify their vision, content, and creations. This can include paying for software licences and photobanks or subcontracting southern-led communication firms.</p> <p>Organisations can establish trust-based partnerships with creative professionals to shoulder administrative and fundraising responsibilities and alleviate these burdens, allowing them to concentrate on their creative endeavours.</p> <p>The LAM Sisterhood's innovative and multifaceted approach reflects the value of possessing diverse skills applicable across various initiatives. Organisations can support creatives and artists by helping them develop different skills necessary for producing diverse commercial</p>	<p>ICSOs can harness the influence of key individuals or networking champions to advocate for their innovative initiatives, redirecting focus towards addressing their specific needs.</p> <p>ICSOs can invest in fostering collaborative spaces that prioritise open dialogue and creativity, devoid of predefined agendas or outcomes. This approach allows for the organic emergence of innovative ideas and long-term collaborations.</p> <p>Allocate time and resources to actively engage with partners in discussions aimed at uncovering their respective strengths.</p> <p>A crucial lesson from Africa Forward's journey is the importance of setting aside preconceived opinions and embracing the diversity of ideas emanating from its members.</p>	<p>ICSOs can implement gender-expansive fellowships or training programmes, supporting individuals whose gender identity expands beyond traditional binary male and female categories to generate more inclusive and safe spaces for networking and access training.</p> <p>Organisations should prioritise targeted programmes to foster connections and networking among emerging media practitioners, explicitly focusing on empowering women and gender minorities.</p> <p>Online training can allow organisations to reach individuals from peri-urban and rural areas to participate without travelling. Support for internet access is necessary to guarantee participation.</p>

	The LAM Sisterhood	Africa Forward	The Ascend Programme - HEVA Fund
Learnings for ICSOs	<p>ICSOs can invest time in discussing what is a safe creative space and preferred communication channels and, instead of calling for proposals, the call can be for creative ideas.</p>	<p>There might be opposing ideas when bringing people and organisations together to co-create, and this should be embraced rather than avoided.</p>	<p>ICSOs should consider developing mid to long-term mentoring programmes to allow the incorporation of more practical sessions, further enhancing the participants' creative businesses.</p>
Hindsight changes	<p>To spend more time evaluating the studio's global value and adjusting budgets, as they were lower than they should have been at the beginning.</p>	<p>Encouraging greater engagement with governments for a more rapid scaling up of this initiative.</p>	<p>More support needed to be allocated for participants from peri-urban and rural areas. A potential second iteration or another round with a longer programme duration could incorporate more practical sessions to enhance participants' creative businesses.</p>

Participatory Funding Models			
	KCDF	UHAI	The Change Fund
Description/ understanding of the problem/system/ power dynamics to be shifted	Funding models within the development field often lack the active participation of the communities they aim to serve, following a top-down approach in their distribution. Communities' own resources are frequently undervalued.	The sexual and gender minority movements face hostile political, social and cultural environments, posing challenges in accessing or reaching funding. Traditional funding models do not recognise the value of lived experiences and activism, making them restrictive and less adaptable to the evolving needs of these movements in such contexts.	The aid and humanitarian system often perceives local organisations as having limited capacity and lacks trust in directly distributing funds to them. Decision-making regarding funding tends to be top-down, with a limited engagement of those closest to the ground. NEAR's membership expressed their desire for more decision-making and participation in the international aid system.
New/novel solution or strategy for what specific problem	KCDF has developed a philanthropic funding and capacity-building model that prioritises flexibility and lack of restrictions as much as possible. The model encourages increased community participation, with community-based organisations serving as intermediaries or acting on behalf of their communities. These organisations and communities are considered partners and contribute in-kind or financially to the grants.	African chapters from Catalyst 2030 co-created Africa Forward to promote collaboration and partnership between social entrepreneurs, highlighting their ideas and projects to address the continent's pressing issues and shift the narrative regarding their role in the continent's development.	The Ascend programme provided a learning space for marginalised emerging media practitioners to learn technical skills and network according to their interest while engaging with facilitators from the LGBTQIA+ community.

	KCDF	UHAI	The Change Fund
New/novel partnership or inclusion approach	<p>KCDF's participatory funding model emphasises meaningful engagement with community-based organisations and philanthropists. This involves cultivating collaborative partnerships and establishing trust-based accountability. In cases where external donors contribute funds, a negotiation process takes place to maximise flexibility and reduce restrictions, even within the inherent limitations of external funding. There is a focus on developing long-term partnerships.</p>	<p>UHAI is an open-door fund with a collective vision. They participate and promote the growth of an ecosystem of similar funds for continuous learning, sharing experiences, and engaging in philanthropic advocacy to encourage more funders to adopt participatory grant-making. UHAI's dual role as both an activist fund and funder has enabled it to navigate various spaces effectively.</p>	<p>Partnerships are grounded in community engagement and driven by local needs. The established collaborations enhance local organisations' capabilities and ensure they have the tools and resources to lead effectively.</p>
Tools/ technology/ methodology/ framework applied	<p>They adopt a tailored approach in their calls for proposals, avoiding a one-size-fits-all strategy. The organisation assesses partners' capacity and needs, adapting the grant cycle accordingly. They use a participatory organisational capacity assessment tool to establish a plan to address organisational gaps and encourage communities to leverage their own resources.</p>	<p>UHAI's grant-making follows a participatory and feminist approach to funding. UHAI's Secretariat and Board include individuals from the movement, which also informs their overall funding framework. The PCG annually makes funding decisions and ensures diverse perspectives are considered in four languages (English, French, Swahili, and Amharic).</p>	<p>The Change Fund adopts a participatory model in which local actors submit concise 2-to-3-page proposals and needs assessments, either their own or from UNOCHA or national agencies. The Peer Oversight Body, comprising local actors from various regions, reviews and awards the grants. Accountability mechanisms include regular calls during the grant lifecycle, internal monitoring and evaluation, and compliance checks. The rigorous financial monitoring ensures transparency and adherence to grant objectives.</p>

	KCDF	UHAI	The Change Fund
Uniqueness of the funding model and how it helps	<p>KCDF's funding model reduces the complexity of the grant cycle and focuses on long-term partnerships, with the foundation focusing on adding value to organisations. This involves including capacity building beyond the technical requirements of the organisations' programmes to strengthen CSOs so they can successfully innovate and learn as well. The funding they provide, whether restrictive or unrestricted, influences the nature of calls for proposals, which may include targeted</p>	<p>UHAI's participatory funding model allows for flexibility in navigating the restrictions that LGBTQIA+ movements often experience. As an activist fund, multi-year grants are decided in consultation with the PGC, aiming for trust-based partnership, where both parties are equal partners. UHAI's funding aligns with its strategic planning, mostly from private funders and is accountable to the UHAI's Board.</p>	<p>The Hilton Foundation funded the pilot of the Change Fund that developed an innovative and agile funding mechanism for global emergencies, ensuring responsiveness to local actors' needs. The fund is designed to respond rapidly, from crisis triggering to grant awarding. Its participatory governance structure consists of selected local actors by the NEAR membership.</p>
Intrinsic power-shift/ outcome	<p>The funding model promotes equal partnerships with community-based organisations, emphasising a horizontal grant-making process where organisations contribute resources and focus on their specific needs. This approach fosters increased autonomy, ownership and capacities within these organisations, leading to project sustainability, enhanced organisational capacity, and the attraction of additional funds from other sources.</p>	<p>Activists are increasingly recognised as active contributors to decision-making and collaborative efforts. They have the autonomy to determine their actions, and funders are moving towards a more consultative approach, showing a willingness to listen and engage with activists in shaping strategies and priorities.</p>	<p>The Change Fund developed trust-based relations, positioning NEAR as an advocate and learning partner rather than a traditional donor. The fund's participatory approach challenged bureaucratic top-down methods, showcasing the effectiveness of an alternative model based on a localised mechanism.</p>

	KCDF	UHAI	The Change Fund
Challenges	<p>Restricted funding or large and overwhelming funds that dilute organisations' community and local philanthropy efforts. Other challenges include the complexities of the existing aid structure, the lack of sufficient resources, and resistance from individuals fearing job insecurity as power dynamics</p>	<p>Some donors are unfamiliar with participatory funding, don't include individuals with relevant lived experiences in grant-making processes, and lack trust in communities to identify solutions to their problems.</p>	<p>Challenges include limited funding and difficulties retaining key staff, resulting in temporary hires during grant periods and impacting crucial organisational functions like evaluation and monitoring.</p>
Learnings for ICSOs	<p>Organisations providing funds to community-based organisations should consider their absorptive capacity carefully, as large funding injections can potentially disrupt the community-based approach.</p> <p>ICSOs can foster enduring partnerships with small community-based organisations to provide sustained support in addressing challenges that may emerge over time.</p> <p>ICSOs can assist these organisations in proposal writing while still ensuring compliance with donor requirements.</p> <p>Explore innovative ways to fund or support communities,</p>	<p>Organisations can highlight the significance of lived experience by initiating contact with activist movements before engaging with sexual and gender minorities.</p> <p>Engaging key recipients of funds in grant decision-making strengthens community representation and enhances outcomes. Drawing on their lived experiences and contextual understanding, organisations could allocate funds more effectively to address pressing issues within the community.</p> <p>ICSOs can develop targeted initiatives for activists</p>	<p>ICSOs can promote such partnerships by actively engaging local actors in decision-making and establishing participatory peer committees or inclusive governance structures.</p> <p>The Change Fund's experience highlights the significance of securing buy-in from network members when implementing innovative solutions. ICSOs should actively seek this backing to replicate success.</p> <p>Financial and technical capacity-building initiatives can benefit both ICSOs receiving and delivering funds. They ensure the efficient and effective management of the fund while empowering grantees</p>

	KCDF	UHAI	The Change Fund
	including local fundraising and community participation. Consider not only the financial resources they can provide, but also their knowledge and willingness to contribute with their time or infrastructure. These models should empower communities to leverage their assets beyond monetary contributions, fostering a sense of ownership in development initiatives.	representing sexual and gender minorities, providing capacity-building in proposal writing and funds management. Engaging in collaborative spaces, such as feminist circles, where activists, ICSOs, and donors can share their work and learn from each other, can help foster an intersectoral approach to funding.	with increased autonomy. This training is particularly beneficial for ICSOs with small teams, helping them avoid becoming overwhelmed by their responsibilities
Hindsight changes	KCDF acknowledges that prioritising the development of long-term partnerships could have started earlier. Currently, they are proactively and intentionally working towards retaining their partners.	No information available	The challenge of relying on outdated data from OCHA or other organisations' needs assessments is a concern. One potential solution is exploring alternative methods, particularly continuous assessments conducted by the affected communities themselves, considering the constraints within the funding window.

Innovative approaches to development cooperation			
	Leading from the South	The GAM Model	Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work
Description/ understanding of the problem/system/power dynamics to be shifted	Resource distribution in international cooperation often reproduces unequal power structures between the global north and south actors, limiting those in the global south ability to set their own agenda and determine their priorities.	Traditional Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices in international cooperation often prioritise showcasing programme success through expert-driven, top-down, and western-led models, excluding local communities and reducing their experiences to quantifiable outputs	Partnerships between southern and northern organisations frequently perpetuate unequal power dynamics. Donors from the global north commonly dictate funding terms and priorities, which may not align with communities' actual needs. They often impose strict reporting requirements, exacerbating the power imbalance and making innovative solutions almost impossible to develop.
New/novel solution or strategy for what specific problem	LFS represents an innovative approach to international development cooperation in which resources go directly to the southern-led women's funds from its donor and the key decision makers. LFS demonstrates the viability of global south-based women's funds managing development cooperation resources effectively. FMS, based in Latin America, partners with	African chapters from Catalyst 2030 co-created Africa Forward to promote collaboration and partnership between social entrepreneurs, highlighting their ideas and projects to address the continent's pressing issues and shift the narrative regarding their role in the continent's development.	The Ascend programme provided a learning space for marginalised emerging media practitioners to learn technical skills and network according to their interest while engaging with facilitators from the LGBTQIA+ community.

	Leading from the South	The GAM Model	Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work
New/novel solution or strategy for what specific problem	<p>other funds and organisations in the region to ensure the resources reach grassroots organisations working on enhancing the rights of women in the continent.</p>		
New/novel partnership or inclusion approach	<p>Women's funds play a crucial role as advocates for grassroots organisations, and LFS effectively demonstrates this pivotal function. It is a global alliance formed at the consortium level, and in Latin America, it includes regional alliances involving FMS, local women's funds and networks. The approach prioritises the need of feminist movements over donor-driven agendas.</p>	<p>The EPI project invited organisations to pilot the Grounded Accountability Model (GAM). This collaborative effort involved building a community of practice among diverse partners, including Search for Common Ground at the international level, MINGA nationally, and COSURCA locally. The participating organisations, situated in both the United States and Colombia, implemented varied adaptations of the methodology. The establishment of this community of practice provided a platform for these organisations to come together, share insights, and collectively enhance their learning experiences.</p>	<p>Acting as an intermediary, Global Giving ensures that partner organisations retain control over their initiatives, enabling them to address their needs and priorities and establish no-strings-attached funds with donors. Non-profit organisations can voluntarily display their projects on Global Giving's online platform.</p>

	Leading from the South	The GAM Model	Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work
Tools/ technology/ methodology/ framework applied	FMS, through LFS, supports grassroots, intermediate, and large organisations within a framework based on localisation and horizontal learning. FMS demonstrates the capacity to navigate the bureaucracy inherent in cooperation logic, absorbing donor requirements without overwhelming the supported partners, especially those operating on the ground.	EPI develops indicators using a participatory approach within a positivist framework. It integrates a more nuanced interpretation and a bottom-up approach, recognising the importance of local perspectives in assessing impact and tracking results. During the GAM project, this methodology was adapted to fit the needs of the different organisations.	Global Giving promotes online fundraising with easy and flexible mechanisms, focusing on community led initiatives.
Uniqueness of the funding model and how it helps	The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds LFS. FMS, through LDS, has a double role: it is a partner and funder simultaneously, and it strives to foster a sense of community among supported organisations, strengthen the feminist movement on the continent, and build the capacity of local organisations. There is funding specifically allocated to core support and strengthening organisations for sustainability and resilience	The GAM was funded by Humanity United and, in its last phase, by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour (DRL) of the Department of State.	Funds come from corporate or individual donors who are subscribed to Global Giving's platform.

	Leading from the South	The GAM Model	Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work
Intrinsic power-shift/ outcome	Women's funds from the global south have proven their ability to manage and handle resources from development cooperation effectively. This demonstration has influenced donor perspectives on funding southern-led women's funds and contributed to a shift in southern leadership and ownership perception.	There is a desire for alternative measurement approaches. The experience showcases the flexible applicability of the EPI methodology. All three organisations incorporated aspects of the adapted EPI methodology into their work and evaluation strategies.	This type of partnership is different from the traditional south-north partnership as it promotes more equal relations in which grantees hold power and autonomy and are empowered to respond dynamically to evolving community needs.
Challenges	Redefining sustainability within a shared responsibility framework presents challenges, and securing funding in a world where the feminist agenda is challenged raises uncertainties about the future of cooperative dynamics. Changes need time and are not immediate.	Navigating diverse cultural backgrounds within the participating organisations and establishing a genuinely meaningful participatory environment that accurately represents the communities becomes a key consideration.	Challenges relate to a lack of human resources receptive to innovation and responsive to the evolving needs of the communities and conservative donors.
Learnings for ICSO	ICSOs can foster greater South-South learning and harness the expertise of other organisations by dedicating resources to regional learning events, mirroring the approach of initiatives like Leading from the South.	It is important to spend time discussing and agreeing on key ways of working/operating and aligning to local challenges and capacities before collecting data.	ICSOs can strategically diversify their funding sources by exploring innovative partnerships, facilitating online fundraising, and capitalising on the various learning opportunities such approaches offer

Leading from the South

The GAM Model

Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work

Learnings for ICSO

Leading from the South embodies an innovative collaboration between women's funds and a bilateral donor, reshaping external perceptions of women's funds and resource distribution dynamics. This was achieved by implementing fair decision-making processes and maintaining direct communication with the donor through a designated focal point.

Collective advocacy and alliances have led to the distribution of flexible and adaptable funds and trust-based partnerships. ICSOs can model this shift in donor-grantee relationships, seeking to forge partnerships with smaller grassroots organisations based on collaboration.

M&E practices can prioritise meaningful dialogue and engagement with everyday people from targeted communities.

Community created indicators are susceptible to local co-option. For them to genuinely reflect the community's realities, a consensus-driven, inclusive and transparent process with the diverse groups needs to be carefully managed (not just the outcome).

Diverse perspectives on peace and coexistence should be openly discussed, for they enrich the overall experience, even if it slows down the measurement process.

ICSOs can advocate for bilateral and multilateral donors to actively support the integration of community-generated indicators into M&E frameworks.

Fostering a community of practice proves to be a powerful method for uniting organisations.

Flexible online fundraising can allow organisations to adapt rapidly to their changing environments, particularly in emergency response, and increase effectiveness.

Organisations could prioritise partnerships that offer more than just financial support and provide opportunities for discussions about addressing emerging challenges and adapting projects and the flexibility to change the course of the project when required.

	Leading from the South	The GAM Model	Global Giving and Yayasan Usaha Mulia (YUM) - Foundation for Noble Work
Learnings for ICSO		Investing in creating online platforms enables organisations to facilitate the ongoing sharing of insights when implementing innovative practices, including investing in regional communities of practices with similar cultural backgrounds.	
Hindsight change	No information available	No information available	No information available

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section presents a review of the common success factors and lessons across the portfolio of case studies, offering insights for potential recommendations.

Theme 1: Rebalancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery

The case studies, which focus on balancing power dynamics in narratives and imagery, highlight various initiatives working to amplify African stories, experiences, and knowledge, aiming to reclaim and reshape narratives. These organisations are actively challenging stereotypes and assumptions entrenched in colonial and discriminatory perspectives. Interestingly, while all three case studies are rooted in Africa, they represent various types of organisations:

- ▶ A feminist content studio
- ▶ An initiative stemming from a global movement dedicated to advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.
- ▶ A fund dedicated to supporting creative businesses.

Nevertheless, there is a common focus on fostering collaborations within the creative and social innovation sectors and networking to effectively implement initiatives. This entails harnessing the power of collective and collaborative efforts and placing value on equitable partnerships. ICSSOs striving to rebalance power dynamics in narratives and imagery enhance their effectiveness through collaboration,

expanding their reach to a broader audience. This collaborative approach is crucial for challenging and replacing dominant narratives regarding social issues, the economy, history, and cultural influences.

Additionally, the case studies underscore the importance of empowering marginalised communities and promoting alternative perspectives, reclaiming narratives from the dominant Western viewpoint and within the continent. Leveraging existing African assets, such as media practitioners, creatives, and social innovators, is crucial for ICSSOs. These organisations can further strengthen power shifts by providing opportunities for training and capacity building around new ways to present and frame African narratives and imageries.

Overall recommendations for theme 1:

- ▶ Proactively support creative professionals from the global south in developing collaborative spaces where they have ownership to tell their narratives and present their images.
- ▶ Build media products that challenge narratives and imageries that reproduce stereotypes about global south actors and depicts them in negative, harmful or passive manner.
- ▶ Support diverse skills development and mentorship opportunities for creatives to enhance their financial sustainability, including targeted

online training for professionals in rural areas, with support for internet access.

- ▶ Implement gender-expansive fellowships to foster inclusivity. These fellowships might emphasise the importance of creating safe spaces to enable creative individuals and media practitioners from marginalised communities to make the most of new opportunities.

Theme 2: Participatory funding models

The case studies under participatory funding models highlight common key concepts, including trust-based relations, flexibility, and adaptability within funding mechanisms, while acknowledging their specificities. These cases illustrate that involving local and national actors in decision-making processes beyond the scope of service delivery enhances the effectiveness of funds and ensures they serve the needs of those they represent. ICSSOs as well as funders and grantmakers should advocate for partnerships that enable their direct involvement in grant allocation processes beyond mere implementation.

The adoption of participatory funding models highlights the historical top-down nature of grant-making. These models advocate for including communities and social movements in the grant-making process, fostering

more just systems and stronger relations between funders and grantees. Alongside this approach, these initiatives emphasise the importance of capacity-building, which is vital in ensuring long-term sustainability and enhancing accountability.

Overall recommendations for theme 2:

- ▶ Promote novel grant-making processes. For instance, consider calls for proposals/tenders that do not require written applications (e.g. videos) and only ask for ideas and pair those who are successful with expert proposal writers to turn the idea into an executable project/plan.
- ▶ Offer sustained support and assistance and enduring partnerships to small community-based organisations through funding core change agent salaries and operating costs. For instance, fund a monitoring and report writer who empowers grantees with greater autonomy and supports them with compliance and learning.
- ▶ Foster active involvement, encourage community participation beyond financial contributions and support with local/domestic fundraising.
- ▶ Establishing inclusive governance structures: involve key fund recipients in grant decision-making processes to enhance community representation, address specific/local needs and develop trust-based relations.

Theme 3: innovative approaches to development cooperation

The case studies within the theme of innovative approaches to development cooperation challenge the unequal power dynamics inherent in partnerships between organisations from the global north and south. Leading from the South, EPI and the partnership between Global Giving and YUM present alternative approaches that aim to restore power to southern organisations and their communities and foster their leadership. This also tackles stereotypical narratives about the leadership of southern-led organisations and their capacity to perform such a role when executing funds from bilateral agents or deciding accountability mechanisms suited to their context. A crucial aspect of this transformation involves adapting organisational processes, notably in areas such as monitoring and evaluation.

Overall recommendations for theme 3:

- ▶ Advocate for donors to integrate community-generated indicators that reflect local realities through inclusive and transparent processes and community engagement into M&E frameworks.
- ▶ Build the capacity of northern decision-makers to listen and practise cross-cultural communication skills so they can nurture trust-based partnerships.
- ▶ Assist community-based organisations with downward accountability to gather feedback from community members and avoid elite capture/corruption.
- ▶ Promote south-south learning events or communities of practice to ensure practical knowledge on fundraising, project management, collaboration and advocacy is shared.

Our final thoughts

The case studies presented in this report showcase organisations seeking and implementing alternative and innovative approaches that yield positive results. They demonstrate organisations' eagerness to reshape traditional ways of working and top-down and rigid frameworks within the development and social justice sectors. Likewise, they show experiences that put into practice aspects of the localisation theory and shift the power. In such experiences, there is a strong emphasis on issues affecting both day-to-day operations like funding, coordination mechanisms and processes, as well as local actors and community leadership and gaining influence and power in decision-making.

Likewise, the case studies highlight the establishment of more equitable relations among various stakeholders, whether between actors from the global south and global north, funders and grantees, or organisations and communities. These relations are built on trust and flexibility, demonstrating the effectiveness of bottom-up and people-centred approaches.

Moreover, they show the strength of narrative change in redistributing power. This includes not only those directly engaged in reshaping narratives and imagery, but also all the cases, since they are challenging the assumption that innovation originates solely in the global north.

Most importantly, together they illustrate that these efforts are not isolated cases but part of an active and growing movement. This collective movement is pushing for change, and ICOSOs are integral to it. We hope these case studies provide insights that inspire organisations to challenge the status quo within their field of action and collaborate to strive for more fair and equal relations between the global north and south actors, leading to meaningful impact.

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The International Civil Society Centre, founded in 2007 and owned by 14 of the largest ICSSOs active in areas such as human rights, social justice, humanitarian and environmental issues, was established to support ICSSOs in maximising their impact for a sustainable and more equitable world. Since 2019, the ICSSC has been deeply committed to highlighting innovations from within and useful for the international civil society sector. www.icscentre.org

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