

What makes a good “locally led” funder?

Stories from your partners



Local Trust

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- **Recrear:** Recrear is a community where people with a social itch come together to connect, recharge, co-create knowledge and manifest new realities within ourselves, our communities, and humanity.
- **The Local Trust:** Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to achieve their ambitions.

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Preface

This collection of stories provides concrete ideas to help design funding models that are accessible and appropriate for community-led development. In partnership with The Local Trust, and together with Recrear, we draw on stories to reflect on how community-led development initiatives, within the UK and internationally, are funded. The rich language and local concepts enable us to engage on a different, more human centred level. Instead of structured, academic case studies we want to encourage the reader to slow down, engage with the stories and reflect on their personal and institutional partnership and funding practice.

What have we learnt from the community leaders and funders through this collection of stories?

- **The stories show that the UK national and international development sector works as a system** where everyone has a role to play, from funders to national intermediaries to community activists. Playing to each other’s strengths is key, as is strengthening national or local organisations to act as intermediaries that make funding easily available for community-led efforts. The push for community-led development means that we have to focus on a human centred approach. It is about acknowledging that development is not just a career, it is about people’s right to empowerment and social justice.
- **The most significant element in each story was how, above all else, relationships matter in community-led change.** Building and nurturing relationships, partnerships and networks needs to be the first stepping stone in approaching development, and the mindset and practical changes funders and INGOs make, need to reflect this reality.
- **Community-led approaches are sustainable.** When an effort is community owned, the process of community organisation strengthens social capital. It helps build a community’s capacity and skills to collectively identify issues, to visualise a collective future for the community and mobilise resources. These resources extend beyond the financial. They include people’s time, commitment to the cause, expertise, and connections. Community-led efforts to create social change are the most sustainable approach. Funders and INGOs need to change how they work, understand and relate to the type of development that puts communities in the driver’s seat.



Key recommendations for INGOs, funders, national organisations:

- **Put humanity at the heart of your partnerships.** Move away from transactional relationships to ones that put people first, identifying windows of opportunities for you to connect with your partners and get to know them beyond due diligence.
- **Recognise knowledge is power.** Invest in learning, making sure that it supports communities to share what they have learnt beyond their own communities.
- **Shine a light on power imbalances.** Consider how structural racism shows up in your partnerships and organisation, find out how to address this by using resources such as Peace Directs' "It's time to decolonise aid".
- **Consider development as an organic process.** Make evaluation practices less extractive by using participatory approaches such as self-evaluation tools, most significant change method, and 'picture of participation' tools.
- **Embrace risk as a necessary element of social change.** Trust the efforts that are being made at a community and embrace failure - you will not learn "what works" without it.
- **Sow the seeds for investment.** Invest in communities, be there for the long-term, and avoid giving short timelines. Help communities become self-sufficient by supporting long term funding diversification strategies. Give full cost recovery to grantees so that communities can fully recover all their costs.
- **Funding is like food for the body, it should flow directly to the heart of communities.** Where relevant, give unrestricted flexible funding as this puts communities in the lead and allows them to decide where to invest the money.

Introduction

This collection of stories is designed for institutional donors, NGOs, development agencies, foundations, philanthropies - any person or institution who intends to resource development work within the UK and internationally. We are publishing these stories as an invitation to consider, remember and appreciate the impact of locally led development.

So, what exactly is locally led development?

For the purpose of this collection of stories, we used this starting definition:

"Locally led development refers to initiatives owned and led by people in their own context."¹

Yet, we are neither tied to a specific definition nor wish for the term to be used as a buzzword. Instead, we see the term as welcoming diversity and curiosity towards all sorts of initiatives, ideas, visions, solutions, and projects that are designed and owned by the people impacted by specific economic and social challenges.

The six stories below inspire critical reflections on how locally led development initiatives are funded. We invite policy makers and practitioners to observe their practices mirrored in different contexts. These stories are a practical tool. We hope that you will be able to pick up concrete ideas and inspiration to design funding models that are accessible and appropriate to enable locally led development.

To make this possible, stories are accompanied by questions to make you think about how the themes we pull out impact your work. Through these questions, we invite you to draw your own lessons. We then identify key learning and share our own tips for how you can support locally led development.

1. Adapted from Peace Direct's definition of locally led-development.



Each story brings out a specific experience and perspective:

Story 1: In the first story we travel to Kenya and Rwanda. AfriNov and TTT Rwanda, reflect on the complementary responsibilities that local partners, communities, and funders share to make locally led development possible. You'll be invited to ask yourself: what is my responsibility as a funder?

Story 2: Tewa Women's Fund, in Nepal, discusses the experience of being both a funder to grassroots women groups, and a recipient of international cooperation grants. What can you learn from a funder that keeps close to its grantees?

Story 3: Eagles (Malawi), works with faith communities towards development outcomes. They share their strategies negotiating funds for processes that are less directive and outcome oriented. Here, we'll explore the question: How do local organisations push the boundaries of traditional development when engaging with international funders?

Story 4: This story is set in Colombia, where Otra Escuela has been mobilising for over 20 years to design alternative peace pedagogies. Here, we learn the way Otra Escuela navigates sustainability by imagining itself as a living organism resilient and adaptive. What are Otra Escuela's strategies to nourish itself?

Story 5: Transferring knowledge from Latin America to the Horn of Africa, Seble, from Menged Le Sew, shares with us the experience of creating an initiative to make the streets of Addis, Ethiopia, more democratic. Here we will see how a civil society initiative can partner with local governments: what are the risks and opportunities?

Story 6: The Big Local is a large-scale experiment of community-led development. The program is set to give time and space for neighbourhoods around England to empower themselves and flourish. Read this story to learn about Stephen's reflections on why it is so important to have a 10 year period to realise a vision for community change.

Story 7: Based in the Philippines, The Center for Disaster Preparedness Foundation (CDP) understands that the first layer of response to natural disasters is inevitably in the hands of community members. The human experiences of resilience and solidarity make visible the fabric that weaves community - they can be recognised, supported, and strengthened.

These stories are by no means comprehensive of all the types of locally led development approaches out there. Instead, this is a conversation starter, preliminary research that we hope will continue to be built upon.

With these stories we want to stretch the imagination about how locally led development looks and feels. Ultimately, we hope these stories can spark connection, understanding and empathy with communities around the world.

**Gioel Gioacchino and Carolina Lopéz,
Recrear International**

01

AfriNov & TTT Rwanda: Reflections on risk and responsibility in development work.

Benard Agona, the program manager of AfriNov in Kenya, and Daniel NTEZIYAREMYE, program coordinator of TTT Rwanda, are passionate about supporting communities to heal conflicts. Yet, they feel that their organisations cannot resolve conflicts for a community. Instead, they speak very eloquently about the need to strengthen the communities’ capacities to find their own peace.

AfriNov and TTT Rwanda train communities in Kenya and Rwanda respectively, in nonviolent communication, campaigning and advocacy. Skilled professionals embed themselves into a community and train people who, according to the current leadership structure, have the greatest potential to challenge current issues and multiply knowledge.

“We go to a community, and we find people who have the capacity to bring about change such as opinion leaders, youth organisers and activists,” explains Benard.

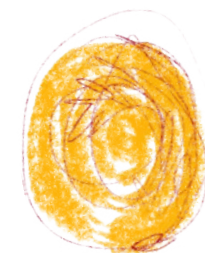
Who is responsible for what in development?

Benard clarifies that there are different levels of responsibility. Ultimately, community members themselves are the ones responsible to decide how they wish to transform their community (and responsibility is intended here as ‘the ability to respond’). Ultimately, community members themselves are the ones responsible when it comes to deciding how they wish to transform their community, and “responsibility” here is intended to mean ‘the ability to respond’. Benard explains:

“It makes no sense for an organisation to come and deliver projects if this undermines the community power and responsibility”.

Instead, AfriNov enters a community offering skills, mentoring, and coaching. They deliver the best possible training and remain in touch with the community after the training to witness how this knowledge is implemented. AfriNov is responsible for ensuring that their work values local knowledge and skills. They are also responsible for sourcing funding to enable the organisation to continue its work.

The community on the other hand has the responsibility of grasping and multiplying the knowledge. After the training, communities come up with a plan and a budget to deepen their community engagement process - they are responsible for searching for allies, which Bernard defines as people or institutions that can work with them and support their plans. If needed, AfriNov also contributes to these efforts by providing small pots of funding, which are complemented through other partnerships. Overall, the focus is on whatever change communities want to see: the skills, knowledge, and support from AfriNov are just a medium to get there.



What is the responsibility of a foreign funder in this process? According to Benard, a good funder should ensure that resources reach grassroots communities, keep in touch with local realities, visit regularly, and keep up an ongoing conversation so they can understand and learn with partners and communities. In short, the key is to behave like a partner. A good partner stays through difficult times and builds long-lasting relationships based on trust.

Benard reflects on the role of funding to enable community development:

"To invest in a community is to plant new seeds for the future. With more fruits there is the potential to accelerate social change. But the nature of this work is that some fruits will flourish, and some will rot".

Protecting activism

TTT Rwanda is an ally of AfriNov, so we interviewed Daniel, who has been creating a network of activists in the region:

"We are building a movement; we are not a structure or an organisation".

Daniel reflected on TTT Rwanda's responsibility to support and protect activism. He explained that local groups often struggle to access resources because donors ask for requirements they cannot fulfil, such as being registered as an NGO. Civil society groups may decide not to form legally, for example, in countries where registering is costly, lengthy, and overly complex. In other cases, activists want to stay off-grid if they are afraid of being a target of local government. To enable community development and local activism it is important to strengthen local organisations that act as intermediaries and make funding easily available.

"It is our responsibility at TTT Rwanda to get funding for people who cannot access them," said Daniel.

He also explained that the methodology of TTT Rwanda, which invites communities to envision and work together towards the change they want to see, acts as a form of protection for activists:

"If people are working together, it is very hard to target any specific person".

Through collective action, they protect activism and ensure people can stay anonymous.

Tips for funders

We asked Benard and Daniel what tips they can offer to funders who want to be effective in supporting locally led development.

1. Funders should invest in people.

The glorification of volunteer work and underpaid staff needs to end. When people work for years without remuneration, it is demoralising and demotivating. Benard added:

"Why is it that funders are keen to invest in machines but hesitant to invest in people? After all, machines are run by people."

2. Daniel reflected that **small groups and organisations need to be trusted and able to take risks.** Yet, funders often seem to care more about the outcome, the community change, than the people themselves:

"This comes with a lot of mistrust in people, an idea that if we are not careful enough, money will be misused. This lack of trust is a left-over of a colonial attitude".

Daniel suggested funders should be willing to take more risk and invest in supporting social actors.



Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- How do you enable your partners to try new things and experiment? What stands in the way of you being more flexible with your funding?
- “A good partner stays through difficult times and builds long-lasting relationships based on trust”. Reflecting on this comment, are you able to stay with a partner even through difficult times?
- What do your funding models say about the way you care for and trust your partners?
- How can you push back on funders requirements when they do not want you to use resources to support social actors and activists?

So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

AfriNov and TTT Rwanda enable conflict transformation by training people on participatory tools and project management skills. They support communities to analyse local issues and find the root causes of social injustice. They also train communities to advocate and create action plans to bring about social change at the local level.

This story stresses how development partners can play to each other's strengths. For example, many grassroots civil society groups and activists struggle to comply with funders' requirements. Intermediary organisations can make funds available in more accessible ways.

Working closely with communities, AfriNov and TTT Rwanda appreciate funders who are flexible and willing to establish over time close relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Finally, Benard and Daniel make an important point: not all efforts and investments made into a community will bear fruits. This is natural. Yet, it is still important to take risks. They invite funders to trust the efforts that happen at the community level. Funders can initiate and permit innovation in development work by designing funding mechanisms that invite risk and accept making mistakes.

If they are to succeed, funders and NGOs need to become comfortable with failure.



02

The Tewa Women’s Fund: Sticking with your partners through good times and bad.

In 2004, Urmila moved from another district to the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu, searching for work. She responded to a newspaper ad and first joined Tewa Women’s Fund as a volunteer program officer. Eighteen years later, having taken on different roles within the organisation, Urmila knows Tewa inside out. She is now the executive director of this foundation which is committed to providing financial and non-financial support to women groups to enable them to raise their voices collectively. These groups are active all-around Nepal.

Just like Urmila, Tewa Women’s Fund has learnt how to wear many hats. On the one hand, Tewa is a national funder. Its team fundraises within Nepal and invests in women initiatives across the country. Tewa also fundraises abroad and manages relationships with international funders.

Urmila says that being a funder comes with much power and responsibilities. Tewa acts as a women’s fund, receiving and disbursing funds. Yet, the team chooses what they value as important, such as women’s organisations needs and priorities, based on their own criteria and understanding of the local context. To build long term partnerships with funders, Tewa focuses on ensuring as much transparency as possible with their financial management.

Checking the pulse of community groups

What Tewa promises is a unique capacity to feel, see, care for, and understand the experience of Nepalese women. What they have learned is the importance of being a funder that harvests relationships with grantee partners based on intimacy.

As a local funder, the staff at Tewa understand the Nepalese context. They check the pulse for the political situation and its implications on grassroots movements, they are aware of natural disasters and how they might affect local communities, and they understand cultural codes.

“If we know there has been a landslide in a community, we don’t wait for the groups to contact us, we are the ones making the call,” explains Urmila.

Harvesting next generation leaderships

Urmila’s path within Tewa makes her particularly aware of the need to build staff capacity and harvest next generation leaderships within civil society groups.

Human relationships impact the sustainability of grassroots groups, Urmila cannot stress this point enough. She shares the following anecdote to illuminate the way relationships, sustainability, and leadership weave together:

“Two years ago, the leader of one of the women’s groups supported by Tewa died suddenly in a scooter crash. The other women involved in the initiative were in shock and unable to step up to lead the group. Tewa decided to make a mentor available as a permanent support to help grow and sustain the organisation. This move made it possible for the group to regain emotional strength and hope – the mentor also provided technical skills for the group to reorganise, find its grounds again, and develop new leadership.”

Reciprocity - Funders receiving support from grantees

Tewa also found grassroots groups are stronger when they are connected. Their focus on relationship building enables them to act as a partner with the power to bring together the feminist and women movements across Nepal.

“We are like a family, if one struggles, we make sure to take care of each other”.



According to Urmila, to bring women groups together into a community, relationships need to be built on reciprocity. For example, Tewa decided to invest in an office space. To construct this office space they reached out to their community. More than 100 women groups (their grantee partners) stepped up in different ways to help ensure the building would be completed. In other words, Tewa offers support but is not afraid to ask for support from local partners, creating stronger bonds, and more equality between different actors.

Tips for funders

Urmila encourages funders to **support funding diversification through long term investments.**

For example, Tewa’s office now acts as a feminist learning centre and co-working space. The building is part of Tewa’s sustainability strategy: They rent out the office space to other organisations and in this way manage an independent revenue stream. Urmila says that funders seem hesitant to make resources available for long term investments like the one Tewa made with the co-working space.

“There seems to be a confusion”, she reflects, “non-for-profit institutions are not supposed to generate profits that are distributed for private gain – this does not mean that they should not earn revenues that can be reinvested towards the social cause of the organisation. In fact, fund diversification strategies are so important to ensure sustainability.”

Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- What are the possible advantages of disbursing funds through national funders?
- What could you do to strengthen the leadership capacity of your partners?
- What role does reciprocity play in your work? How could you invite more reciprocity with your partners?
- What could it look like for funders to support civil society groups to become more financially independent over the long term?






So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

Tewa is a national funder that understands the social, political, and economic context of Nepal and upholds feminist values - they are in the perfect position to nourish a women-led movement composed of a tapestry of small grassroots groups.

From Tewa's story we learn about the importance of establishing close and intimate relationships with grassroots partners. Such relationships can enable local funders to design strategies that are timely and sensible to what local groups are experiencing. To make partnerships stronger, Tewa found that it is important to develop relationships with grantees based on reciprocity.

Tewa learned that grassroots groups tend to depend greatly on their leadership. For this reason, it is very valuable for funders to invest in leadership skills and support leadership transitions.

Finally, the story reminds us that it is crucial for organisations to be supported as they develop long term sustainability strategies. Long term commitments will allow for close and impactful partnerships. Funders should encourage partners to explore avenues to diversify funding and reinvest in their work. Partners should not be afraid to make a surplus as it could give them the freedom to use their money where they see the greatest needs, rather than following what a funder wants them to do.



03



Eagles: Activating communities to have meaningful impact.

Eagles Relief and Development Programme (Eagles) taps into local faith communities – they make the most of church attendance across Malawi to motivate people to care for and participate in their community.

The organisation sees churches as an entry. **"The point is not to enforce faith on anybody,"** explains Jimmy, Church Mobilisation Coordinator at Eagles.

"The opposite: the idea is to activate the communities that naturally form around churches and direct the energy towards initiatives that matter to them. There is a church in every community - we train them to work with the community".

Eagles supports people who attend churches to visualise their community, build relationships, identify the resources that they already have, and plan their initiatives.

The power of ideas and imagination is handed back to the people themselves and Eagles train them to work together to see change. They invite the fun, the responsibility, the excitement of creating something new. Then they accompany communities to make such change possible, realising a project from the beginning to the end. They don't provide funding – but they do connect people with local government and other local partners so they can access support to implement their visions.

Funding organic development

What is it like to get funding to do this type of work? **"Our relationship with funders is not so straightforward",** reflects Jimmy.

He explains how, too often, development agencies associate 'development' with something technical – a project or set of interventions with a beginning and end, achieving a desired change. Speaking to Jimmy, it becomes clear that, for Eagles, this technical understanding of development misses the point. The interview with Eagles causes us to think about how we need to think about the idea of development and what it feels like in reality, if we want to fund it right.

If you were to think about how your family, your neighbourhood, your city, or your country has transformed over the last decades, for example, you might evoke colours, smells, sounds – you might recall the way each period had a particular spirit. You might also notice the pain that might come with change. In this reflection, you might realise how development looks a lot more like a constant process of becoming and unbecoming. Effectively, the process is always alive, fluid, and nonlinear.



In this type of work, outcomes are not easily quantifiable or predictable. In other words, Eagles understands development as something organic, with ends defined by each community through community processes. Yet, funders expect predefined outcomes.

'Improved relationships', 'shared vision' – reframing development outcomes

Eagles searches for a language that might suit funders. They place emphasis on process-based outcomes, stressing the way their work enables the community to develop problem solving skills. To access funding, Eagles found a way of translating the essence of their work to speak the language of funders. In a recent article published in *Development in Practice*, they conclude that their church and community mobilisation approach (CCM) 'had the same level of positive impact on quality of life but at 4% of the cost'. This statistic is calculated compared with traditional, EU-funded projects that give direct inputs to communities such as irrigation and drought-resistant crops. It is possible to deliver this type of impact when funders believe that "even villages in severe poverty can mobilise the resources to solve their own problems".²

2. Steffie Kemp, Rob MacLennan & Rick James (2020): Sustainable value for money – a glimpse of the holy grail?, *Development in Practice*, DOI:10.1080/09614524.2020.1752152

Tips for funders

Eagles is committed to pushing the limits of development rhetoric. For example, “evaluation practices feel very extractive”, comments Jimmy, “It too often gets down to numbers that matter to funders, while making invisible the learning that comes with the process, and failing to take into account the rhythm of change”.

Make evaluation practices less extractive

The Eagles’ team are implementing evaluation practices that account for the impact they witness in their community work. Their evaluation practices are participatory, including self-evaluation tools, [Most Significant Change \(MSC\)](#) methods and a ‘Picture of Participation’ tool. The intention of monitoring and evaluating their work is to gather data and insights that serve the community. Eagle published a reflection on their monitoring and evaluation practices explaining: “If a particular piece of information is not valuable for the community, we remove it from the MEAL plan or think of a way to measure it so that it becomes beneficial”.³

The impact they have witnessed due to their community work is that people learn how to recognise their role, the things that matter to them and their power. By asking themselves what they want, people discover their own interests, what they are motivated to change, what matters most to them. Through participatory mapping, for example, people appreciate what they already have in their community, and become aware of their resources and how they can use them to address the challenges that are most pressing. By being able to analyse what is happening, they build individual confidence. By doing it with other community members, they also experience the power of their collective work – this strengthens social security safety nets that are essential to sustain change.

3. Read more on Eagles’ MEAL practices [here](#).

Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- What kind of monitoring and evaluation practices do you implement?
- What could you modify to make funding accessible to organisations that use similar approaches to development as the one Eagles shares in the story?
- How can donors shift away from funding ‘technical’ interventions towards more process-based ones?



So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

Eagles accelerates social change by tapping into already existing community engagement, people who attend churches across Malawi. The story highlights the importance of accompanying communities to realise their own potential, value their own resources, and recognise their collective power.

The Eagles' story invites us to reflect on the organic nature of development. Working closely with communities in Malawi, they learn that it makes little sense to think of development as something technical.

Importantly, Eagles believe that grantee partners are not passive players when it comes to funders' requirements and expectations. They also have a responsibility to push the boundaries of development rhetoric. By trusting the collective power of communities, funders can provide support while permitting equality and respect. They insist that funders should expand their idea of impact so that communities themselves can define success. Eagles is also committed to using evaluation practices that are more participatory and useful to communities.

04

Otra Escuela:

Nourishing your partners to sustain peacebuilding.

For two decades, Corporación Otra Escuela has been using art and games to research, craft, create, and share new approaches to peace in Colombia. Lyda Molina, the co-founder and director of finance, and Santiago Gonzalez, the coordinator of research, say that the commitment to peace education is the heartbeat of the organisation.

To sustain Otra Escuela, the team has found it useful to visualise the organisation as a body with many systems - a creative being, able to adapt, change and root itself to the needs of a place. If peace education is the heart of the organisation, the blood running through Otra Escuela's veins and nurturing its cells is the recognition of the socio-affective aspect of peace building. They have learned that education sustains peace when we appreciate and address people's social and emotional needs.

Otra Escuela has developed a methodology which weaves together

affection, personal experiences and peace theory. Through the integration between theory and affection, people learn about managing their emotions and taking responsibility for their actions and words. Ultimately, they develop a deeper understanding of their relationship with conflict so they can creatively transform it. This moves people from a culture of violence to one of peace.

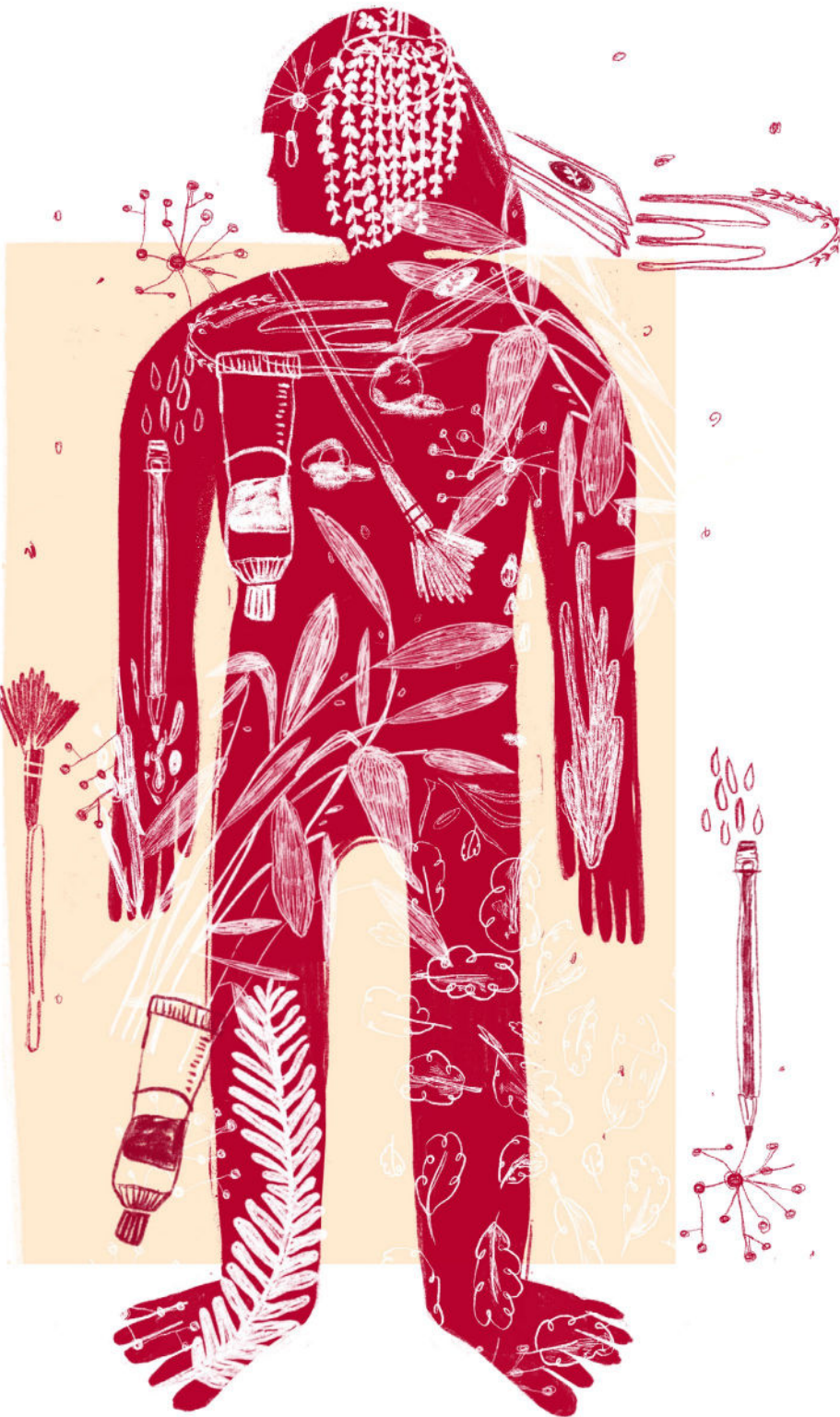
As Santiago and Lyda share the metaphor of seeing Otra Escuela as a body, we ask, what is the role of funding?

"Funding is like food for this body", they respond. "Chewing it, Otra Escuela assimilates nutrients and transforms them into new energy: activities, proposals and initiatives that are unique creations of this specific being".

The importance of diversifying revenue streams: each one has pros and cons

Otra Escuela gets its food in two ways. On the one hand, the team applies for funding calls and has experience managing international cooperation projects. They have collaborated with several organisations such as UN Women, War Child, and Plan International. On the other hand, they also deliver their own courses in which participants pay a fee or can apply for a scholarship.





Each funding stream has its pros and cons. Having their own income-generating strategy allows for flexibility. The funding they earn from courses and other educational offerings is unrestricted. They have the freedom to allocate it as needed. The funding from international partners and donors is less flexible, although they allow the organisation to invest in longer community processes which train communities in conflict areas all around Colombia. Thanks to the resources they can collaborate with partners and people that would otherwise not have the capacity to pay a fee to receive information about cultures of peace and peace transformation.

Internal strategies for sustainability

Twenty-plus years of committed work have not been sufficient for Otra Escuela to be able to afford contracting full-time staff and offering them a dignified salary. So Otra Escuela had to get creative to sustain itself. They developed internal mechanisms and learned how to sustain a continuous internal dialogue about fund allocation. The current consensus is that resources assigned to specific projects get re-allocated into a common pot. In this pot, the funds associated with individual activities get collected and distributed internally based on agreed percentages. This enables the organisation to contract a team of five that can manage the administrative and strategic work that does not get direct funding.

Tips for funders

Fund opportunities for exchange and training

Otra Escuela exists in constant exchange with people, communities, and partners, in Colombia and around the world, who contribute to a collective investigation on peace pedagogies. Collaborations bring into fruition and multiply cultures of peace. The organisation flourishes and transforms while in contact with other civil society groups". For example, in 2007, a team from Otra Escuela had the chance to train with the Institute Paulo Freire in Berlin. In 2013, a member joined the team who had been trained at the School of Culture of Peace in Barcelona. These were key growth moments for Otra Escuela to recognise its unique contribution to the conversations on peacebuilding. If funds themselves are food, opportunities for dialogue, training and exchange are the water hydrating the whole system.

So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

Otra Escuela promotes peace in Colombia, a country heavily affected by conflict, and where violence has historically been normalised.

Otra Escuela's story offers us a metaphor: an organisation is like a body, with different needs and intertwined systems. Funding is like the food that this body transforms into energy to realise its unique purpose.

This is an example of a resilient organisation that has developed internal strategies to manage scarce resources. They stress the need to diversify income-generating streams. Otra Escuela offers training courses to have resources that they can manage more flexibly. They also value international cooperation funds to develop more complex projects.

Finally, just as we grow when we speak to others and learn new perspectives, so do organisations. Otra Escuela points out that funders should be more willing to invest in knowledge exchanges, dignified salaries, training and capacity building opportunities.

Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- How might your institution support local organisations to provide dignified salaries for their staff?
- What do, or could you do, to support training and knowledge exchange between different grassroots initiatives?



05

Menged Le Sew: South-to-South knowledge sharing.

In her early twenties, Seble studied abroad in Quito, Ecuador. There, she became familiar with Latin American perspectives on mobility and public space, and got exposed to indigenous ways of understanding. Seble became involved with grassroots environmental social movements. She moved around Quito on her bike and loved the way the city transformed on Sundays, the day of the 'ciclovía' when the streets of Quito close to traffic. Instead of cars, the streets are taken over by people of all ages walking, running, cycling, skating, rollerblading.

This weekly programme was first born in Bogotá, Colombia in the 1970s and spread across various Latin American cities. Seble ended up working and living in Bogotá, where she cycled everywhere. Being a cyclist, Sundays felt like a ritual to heal and re-appropriate the otherwise car packed streets.

In 2017, Seble moved to Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, where her whole family is from. There, streets are dangerous, chaotic, and overcrowded. She is one of the few women cyclists. Although most people cannot afford private vehicles, the streets are inaccessible to pedestrians. Plus, the streets are segregated, with small pockets of rich people, the only ones who can afford a car, and the majority left navigating a busy city with no green spaces. Despite having some of the lowest ratio of people to car ownership in the world, Addis has some of the highest rates of traffic accidents and fatalities per-capita.

She was expressing her frustration with public spaces in Addis with her friend Muluken, when Seble started thinking: what if we brought ciclovía to Addis? Seble and Mule got excited and put together a project proposal to pitch the idea.

Learning from South-to-South knowledge exchange

Where do you start organising a programme like that? Searching for guidance, Seble attended a [learning exchange](#) in South Africa on the management of public spaces. Cape Town, she ended up meeting the Deputy Director of the Addis Abeba City Administration Traffic Management Agency. Jackpot. They were excited about the idea and willing to collaborate.

"The ciclovía was born in Colombia and we are adapting it to the Ethiopian context. The South-to-South exchange within the project is important - too often cities across Africa look up at European cities like Amsterdam or Copenhagen for inspiration and example. But it's impossible to compare the infrastructures of Amsterdam with those of Addis. Quito or Bogotá are much better examples."

The importance of start-up funds with few requirements

Seble and Mule applied for a small grant with the US embassy to pilot the initiative. They were very grateful that the embassy did not require them to be registered as an organisation. They could instead apply as individuals, simplifying all the bureaucracies and moving with more agility towards their vision.


With this small grant, Seble and Mule started asking themselves simple but important questions such as: to stop traffic, how many traffic cones are necessary for each kilometre of street?

At this point they reached out to the traffic office in Addis, which ended up being crucial to the implementation of the project: they took care of the 'how many cones' type of questions and mapped out the redirection of traffic.

With these technical points taken care of, Seble and

Mule could focus on the aspects that they were most excited about: mobilising civil society groups and getting people excited to get out and reappropriate the streets.





This is how Menged Le Sew, which means 'streets for the people', started. Once a month, people take over the streets of Addis Abeba. Children are amongst the most excited participants of the event. A range of civil society groups also complement Menged Le Sew: an invitation to spark dialogue around a more democratic and sustainable city.

Doing locally led development on the side

On the one hand, Menged Le Sew was possible thanks to the funding and investments of the city authorities. Given the high turnover of politicians and city employees, it would be ideal for the programme to transcend changes in administrations. Yet, for Seble it is very important that Menged Le Sew maintains its civil society spirit without being completely appropriated by the government.

Seble reflects that Menged Le Sew became a reality because she had a full-time job and did not depend financially on the project. The team put a lot of effort managing the initiative on the side: "to make it possible, I had to become obsessed with it," shares Seble.⁴

Now, Menged Le Sew is a project of Lem Ketema, an NGO that Seble and Mule

registered focused on urban sustainability. Their most ambitious initiative is a campaign to make Ethiopia plastic-free called [Ye Zembil Melse](#). We asked Seble what she would need to make the various dreams she has possible. "I have a full-time job. To realise our project I need time, and to collaborate with people who have time. Everybody is so busy and yet everything feels urgent right now!"

Tips for funders

Seble shares the following tips for funders:

1. Make funding accessible to non-registered groups:

"I think making funding available to individuals or community groups with cool and bold ideas that aren't formally registered is SUPER important. There is so much bureaucracy around NGO registration: it takes SO long and it can be very technical. This shouldn't be a limitation to access funding. We were able to co-create something so beautiful in our city because we weren't limited by this barrier. Look how much it has grown!"

2. Encourage collaboration between different civil society groups and partners:

"Collaboration between actors was crucial for this project. We originally got a small pilot grant from the US Embassy, but the city administration eventually became the main funder of the project. In Addis, we also invited other social movements and organisations that shared our vision (for example: environmental groups committed to banning plastics, groups promoting reusable menstrual cups, organisations advocating to protect the river, skateboard teams etc.). The encounter of all these groups inspired new initiatives such as [Anbesa Bike Ride](#)".

4. Read one of Seble's interviews here: <https://bycs.org/streets-for-people-with-seble-samuel/>

Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- What are the requirements your institution asks for to make funding available?
- Many civil society groups across the world face challenges registering legally as an organisation. How do you account for these difficulties?
- What could you do to promote South-to-South knowledge exchange?

So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

The story that Seble shares is a great example of how many civil society initiatives are conceived. Citizens identify problems that affect them directly and work together to actualise their vision.

Menged Le Sew is a project with the mission of making the streets of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, more democratic. Once a month, traffic stops. Streets are taken over by pedestrians and coloured by a range of social initiatives.

The project is inspired by similar initiatives across Latin America. This story stresses the importance of South-to-South knowledge exchange. Knowledge about urban development across Latin American cities, for example, is more useful to African cities than European cities.

To implement the project, Seble and her friend Mule received funding from an embassy before they were registered as an NGO. Making funding available without registration requirements can make social action more agile. Finally, the project was made possible because of a collaboration with the local public administration of Addis. The story sparks reflections on how local governments can collaborate with civil society without co-opting the independence of the initiatives.

06

Stephen and Arches Local: Reinventing community.

When he was working full-time as a financial analyst, Stephen did not see his neighbourhood much. He would wake up early, go to work and come back home exhausted. It was only when he got sick, left his job, and had the opportunity to become a stay-home dad for his three at the time young children, that he started walking Chatham. He got to know a neighbourhood rich with cultures and diversity: people from all over the world sharing the same streets, each carrying an immensity of stories.

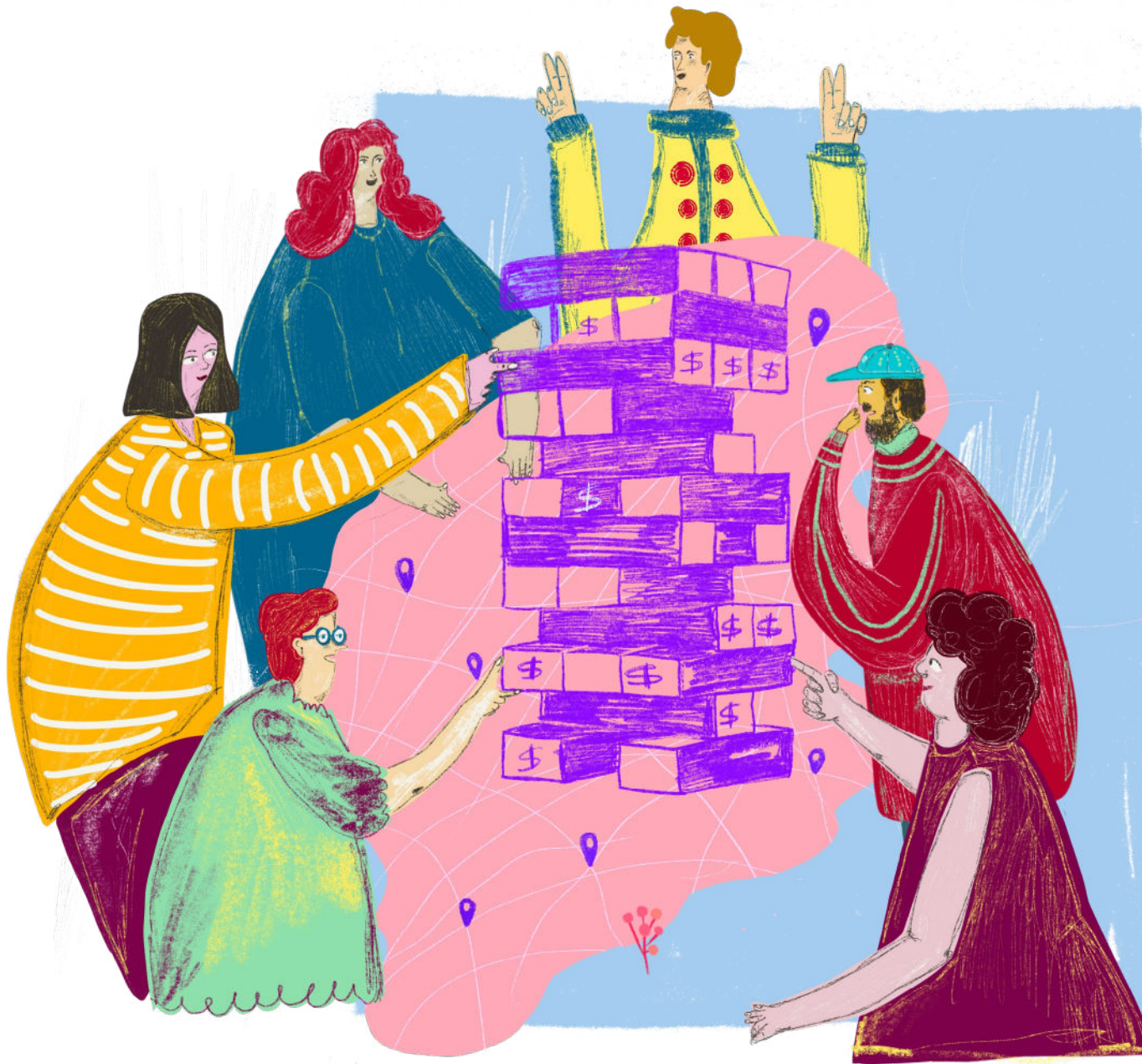
Stephen is now the coordinator of Arches Local, one of the community residential-led groups part of the Big Local programme. Funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by the Local Trust, the programme provided around £1.1 million British Pounds to 150 neighbourhoods across England. Each has a prescribed area to work in and complete freedom to invest funds to realise their own vision of community change.

The time to build trust

Stephen reflects that it took approximately two years to build a functioning Big Local Partnership. A partnership is a group of 12 to 18 people who work as an assembly and decision-making entity representing the community. "We organised a massive continuous consultation and each year we develop a plan – we have 10 to 15 years to implement our vision. It takes time to ensure people can trust each other, especially given challenges presented by our diverse community and the many languages spoken locally. As the coordinator I take responsibility for getting things done. But I don't do it all. We do it together."

Stephen shares that, at first, the community was impatient and wanted to hurry in implementing their plan. They then realised that to make some things happen it needs to be the right time. And if it's just not the right time, you need to be patient and resilient. This is why having a 10 year period to build relationships and trust is so important.

Arches Local has now created many initiatives such as building pocket parks, planting trees, summer programs, art projects, and coaching children football teams.



Share the risk

Stephen talked about the risks associated with their local development process, he said:

"We manage expectations. We can bring assurances that we will do research, talk to people, consult experts, and do our best. But we don't make promises we can't keep. When we are doing something together everybody cares more. If we all plant trees around the neighbourhood, a lot more people will be likely to notice if a tree is not doing well and contact us or say: 'let's check it out'. When people lead, people help out - it's like a restaurant where everybody is cooking. The risk is better managed by a wider number of people".

Tips for funders

1. Trust us, trust us, trust us.

"Local residents are the ones who are going to be impacted the most by the social transformation of a neighbourhood. They are the ones who should be trusted the most! Instead, normally we are not even told what is to happen in our neighbourhood and when. We are not told when or why things go wrong, so we don't get the opportunity to learn from success or failure.

An organisation often comes and says: we are going to fix the problem. And when you'd ask: 'what about the people?', they'd answer: 'oh, they are broken, don't speak to them, we know what is best, we are the experts.'

Well, do the opposite: speak to people and make sure they are part of any process."

2. Learn from other experiences

The Local Trust brings together Big Local areas for knowledge sharing and training events:

"This is what I have learned above all, if you want to create change you need to be part of it. Stand up, ask questions, take calculated risks. It's simple: be willing to do the things. We don't have a secret recipe that we hide away, like Kentucky Fried Chicken. Between Big Local areas we share information, we share knowledge, we share tips - we are not worried about somebody else doing it better or differently."

Reflective questions:

- Have you recently evaluated how your partners are experiencing the timelines you propose? Are the implementation timelines that you negotiate with your partners realistic?
- What time and space do you include in your funding cycles so partners can learn how to collaborate and trust each other?
- How do you engage with your own community? What can you learn about the nature of locally led development in your own neighbourhood?

So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

The Big Local is a large-scale experiment of locally led development. It is an example of how place-based funding can be made available respecting the time and space that communities need to articulate the change they want to see.

The initiative is designed to see how funding can be rooted in mutual trust. Instead of requiring strict conditions, The Big Local created a system in which active citizens, local partners and the funder, in this case The National Lottery Community Fund managed by Local Trust, can work together to provide a support network and create community change.

This story highlights the value of long-term investments: The Big Local gives a 10-15 year implementation window. This time allows for community relationships to mature and strengthen.



Growing Equal

What does it feel like to witness a tornado?

What does the morning after a tropical storm smell like? What does solidarity feel like and who supports whom when people are left to clean up the rubble?

Based in the Philippines, The Center for Disaster Preparedness Foundation (CDP) understands that the first layer of response to natural disasters is inevitably in the hands of community members. The human experiences of resilience and solidarity make visible the fabric that weaves community - they can be recognised, supported, and strengthened.

Loreine dela Cruz, the executive director of the CDP, reflects:

“Local people don’t have the capacity to write beautiful reports, but they are the ones doing the work. This is because the people who would have the skills and education often move to the city in search of better opportunities, leaving rural communities with less visibility and capacity”.

The CDP takes local knowledge and community resilience seriously: for over 20 years it has been studying and systematising it to develop a model of Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management. Because grassroots actions are mostly led by community-based organisations which are not legally registered (and therefore less able to access resources), the CDP has been acting as an intermediary, transferring knowledge, offering capacity building, and providing community solidarity funds.

Sustainability dilemmas

Over the last few years, the CDP has had to reinvent itself, facing some existential questions about how to grow in a local and global context which is full of paradoxes. In fact, while its vulnerability to climate change is growing, the Philippines is now regarded as a middle-income country. What are the implications for those organisations supporting locally led development like the CDP? Well, for those who had been ingrained in the international development structure, it means less funding available from multilateral donors.

To become less volatile to any donor pulling out, the CDP has been diversifying its revenues streams by partnering with governments and donor agencies, while also providing capacity building and consultancy services to communities, INGOs, and private companies. Yet, each funding stream implies specific know-how:

“Sustainability is not just a matter of finances, it’s mostly about the capacity to cultivate and sustain simultaneously diverse relationships (for example, in our case with donors, partner-service providers, and local communities). It’s also about the relationships and infrastructures which enable different funding streams.”

No more subcontracting - just equal partnerships

The CDP has taken the decision they will no longer accept subcontracting. Loreine emphasises:

"We are tired of being stuck with the outputs others decide, and with partners who dictate what they want without taking our view seriously. Most of all, we are tired of projects with unrealistic time constraints. The contracts are too quick, you cannot work well with such timelines".

This is a bold choice, but it can be lonely to reinvent oneself. This is precisely why the CDP has been so enthusiastic about its partnership with GlobalGiving and its consortium members.

The partnership has been different because there has been space for real dialogue about power dynamics. GlobalGiving is enabling this by taking it to heart that they are also asking themselves existential questions: they are interrogating their role as a funder and questioning how western funders can transform their role. Most importantly, they are openly sharing these reflections with their local partners.

For the CDP, this is a breath of fresh air. It is reminding them that when two

partners are willing to listen, they can support each other by acting as mirrors – each partner can learn about itself through the other. This is only possible when two partners truly regard themselves as equals. When I asked Loreine what is so special about their partnership with GlobalGiving, she replies:

"They trust us - they know we have our track record, and they consider us experts, they respect that we understand the local culture. Simply put, they listen."



Tips for donors and INGOs

These are the tips that Loreine and Michael share to donors and INGOs who want to strengthen locally led development:

- “Funders must **dispel the notion that social organisations must not earn profit**. We want to be able to get paid for what we do – it’s a necessary step to dignify and value our work”.
- “Through dialogue and capacity building, **international donors can support local partners to step out of a mentality of dependency from international funding**. On our side, we are actively researching domestic resource mobilisation – we believe in community philanthropy and recognise communities have assets and agency, so we want to invest in local resources”.
- “Donors must **consider indirect costs as part of budgets**. Our operation costs are necessary for projects to be implemented – it’s important donors recognise when they consider budgets”.
- “Donors need to create systems that enable local partners to be funded directly. We are willing to learn, experiment, take risks, and discover new ways of working with international partners. When the localization agenda has started, we were invited by USAID to submit a technical proposal which entails submitting voluminous documents as many as around 22 supporting documents to complete the full technical proposal package. We also went through a three-day due diligence check after fulfilling fixed awards – and we made it”.

Questions for funders and INGOs to consider:

- How do you engage with the organisations that you subcontract? What could you do differently to enable a deeper dialogue?
- How willing are you to show yourself and share your inner questions with local partners?
- How do you work with partners in middle-income countries?

So, what does this mean for funders and INGOs?

The work of the CDP articulates the recognition community members themselves are the ones who manage the most immediate response to a natural disaster. These community efforts need validation and can be strengthened through knowledge sharing and preparation.

Despite its strong trajectory, the CDP risked losing funds since the Philippines is now being considered a 'middle income country'. The CDP is just one example of the many local organisations which are needing to reinvent themselves in light of the ever-changing international development trends. It's crucial for donors to accompany organisations to find new strategies for sustainability.

For example, the CDP is ensuring their sustainability by diversifying revenues. Yet, they reflect how each funding channel requires district know-how, strategies and relationships: capacity building could be very helpful to develop such skills.

Collaborating with GlobalGiving, the CDP is tasting what it means to develop a partnership in which they feel equal and respected. Meanwhile, the decision of the CDP to stop accepting subcontracting is a powerful reminder that all partnerships must observe and question power dynamics.

It is urgent to invent forms of collaborating that transcend patronising attitudes towards local partners. Are you open and willing to discover these new ways in dialogue with your partners?

Conclusions & Recommendations

What have we learnt from the community leaders and funders in this collection of stories?

Ultimately the move to development approaches which are led by communities, means a more **human centred approach** when it comes to talking about, understanding, and working in the development space. It is about acknowledging that while development is a profession for many, fundamentally it's about people's right to empowerment and social justice everywhere.

Throughout this collection, the most significant element in each story was how relationships, above all else, **matter in community-led change**. Building and nurturing relationships, partnerships and networks needs to be the first stepping stone in approaching development. The mindset of funders and INGOs, as well as the practical organisational changes they make need to reflect this reality.

We also learned about the **sustainability of community-led approaches**. As the stories show, when an effort is community owned, the very process of community-led **development strengthens** social capital and helps build a community's capacity and skills to collectively identify issues, visualise a collective future for the community and mobilise resources. These resources extend beyond the financial. They include people's time, commitment to the cause, expertise and connections. Community-led efforts to create social change are the most sustainable approach⁵⁶⁷. Funders and INGOs need to change how they work, understand and relate to the type of development that puts communities in the driver's seat.

The stories emphasise the idea that the international development sector is a system, **where everyone has a role to play**, from funders to national intermediaries to community activists.

Civil society groups might decide not to form legally, for example, in countries in which registering is costly and overly complex. Some activists want to stay off-grid afraid of being a target of local or national governments. To enable community development and local activism, it is important to respect these choices. In some cases, we should strengthen national or local organisations that act as intermediaries and make funding easily available.

5. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/What_is_Locally_Led_Development_Fact_Sheet.pdf

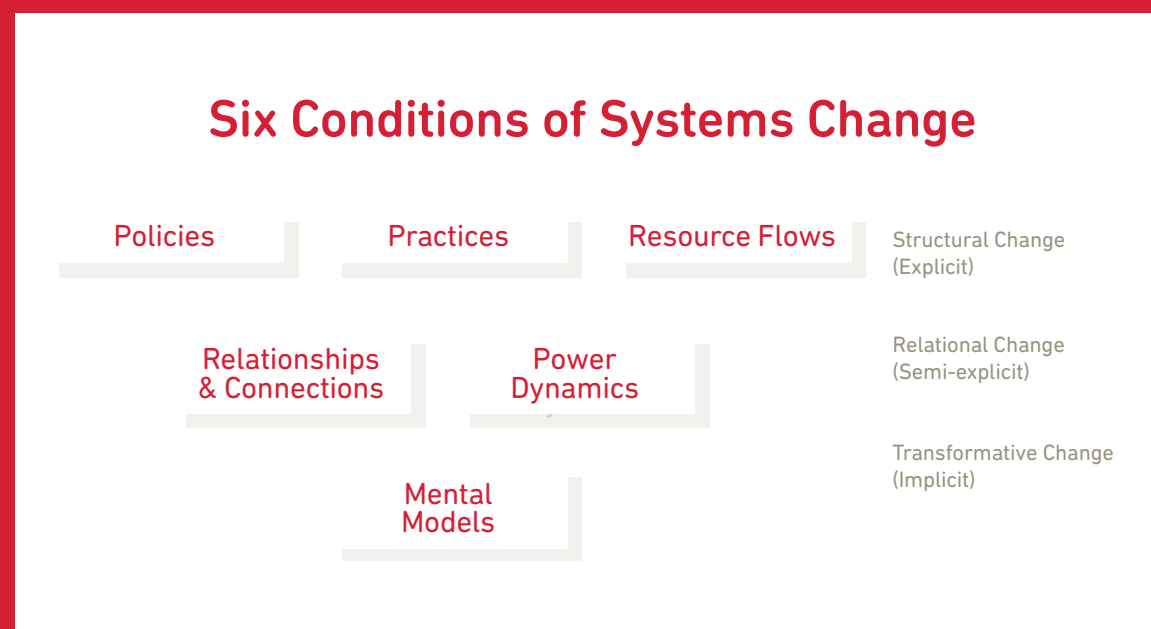
6. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment#1>

7. Coonrod, J. Development (2015) 58: 333. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-016-0008-2>

Recommendations for INGOs and funders

The following recommendations have come from the stories as well as a conversation that was held with a group of funders grappling with questions around how to better fund community-led initiatives.

We have used the 6 conditions of systems change to group recommendations for funders and INGOs. The six conditions of systems change are:



If we want to create change, we need to transform how we think about and approach development across the board, making it a more human-centred and people led approach.

1. Mental models

Recommendation one:

Put humanity at the heart of your partnerships

- Move away from transactional relationships to ones that put people first. Invest the time and resources to develop close, reciprocal, and intimate relationships with partners, building up mutual trust and respect.
- Recognise that communities are the experts and can solve their own problems, they just need resources and capacity strengthening to help them do it.
- Be a systems funder; fund with this in mind and engage with others on how to change funding.

2. Power dynamics

Recommendation two:

Shine a light on power imbalances and racism in the sector, learn and engage in conversations on transforming development and philanthropy

- Consider how structural racism shows up in your partnerships and organisation, find out how to address this by using resources such as [Bond’s Racism, Power and Truth Report](#) and [Peace Directs’ “It’s time to decolonise aid”](#)
- Review power imbalances in your partnerships using tools such as [Partos’ Power Awareness Tool](#) which enables partners to analyse and reflect on their power relations.

Recommendation three:

Recognise that knowledge is power

- Invest in learning and networking, making sure that communities share what they have learned beyond their context and are able to access further training and funding. [NOREC](#) provides an interesting model which supports learning exchanges across different geographies.
- With partners and communities, facilitate reflection on the impact of community work to better understand and recognise the power of collective efforts to bring about change.

3. Relationships & connections

Recommendation four:

Invest in people

- Build staff capacity and confidence including leadership and professional development, so that you can support the next generation of community leaders.
- Support leadership transitions in communities, civil society movements, and organisations.
- Move towards dignified salaries for organisations, basing it on an individual's expertise and not their nationality or geographical location.

Recommendation five:

Check the pulse of communities

- Build long-lasting relationships by visiting regularly so that funders and INGOs can keep in touch with local challenges.
- Provide spaces to discuss the wider socio-political context in which organisations and communities live and work so that funders and communities can build stronger equitable relationships.

Recommendation six:

Embrace risk as a necessary element of social change

- Funders, INGOs and communities should embrace failure and make commitments to talk about them publicly, as you won't learn without it as well as long term commitment to communities which will allow for overcoming failures.
- Trust the efforts that are being made at a community level.
- Funders and INGOs should design funding mechanisms that invite risk and create a safe space for making mistakes from which to learn.





- Moving away from traditional logical framework approaches as they are extractive and the data does not always serve the community.
- Look at funding models that use trust-based philanthropy such as Tewa's example, and the [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs "Leading from the South"](#), [FRIDA' feminist fund](#) and the [Local Trust's Big Local](#).

Recommendation seven:

Take on a more human centred and participatory approach to planning and evaluation

- Make evaluation practices less extractive by using participatory approaches such as self-evaluation tools, most significant change methods and "picture of participation" tools.
- Take on more participatory processes for planning, implementing and evaluating development activities.
- Build evidence on process-based outcomes. The very effort by communities to shape their own goals and work towards change is valuable in and of itself and builds collective skills and social capital.

4. Resource flows

Recommendation eight: Funding should flow directly to the heart of communities

- Give unrestricted flexible funding, as this puts communities in the lead and allows them to decide where to invest the money.
- Develop long-term funding models that enable communities and funders to develop relationships of trust and a more sustainable model of change.
- Fund directly by putting funding and decisions in the hands of communities, and where this isn't possible, in the hands of national and local organisations.
- Decentralise funding so there is greater flexibility to fund local initiatives.
- Make funding available without registration requirements so that social actors can access it.

Recommendation nine: Sow the seeds for investment and be in it for the long term

- Invest in long-term relationships with communities. Ten to 15 years of a funding relationship builds trust, strengthens capacity, allows for making mistakes and learning and overcoming times of bad luck.
- Invest in long-term diversification strategies as this helps communities become self-sufficient.
- Give full cost recovery to grantees.
- Recognise that it takes a long time to bring around change so they should invest long-term in partnerships and communities.
- Avoid imposing strict timelines: funders and INGOs should allow time for some efforts to not work, for learnings, changes to plans, and for life to happen.





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