



Influencing funders to shift power: Lessons from the Giving for Change initiative

A study of strategies, effects, and lessons from Giving for Change partners' efforts to influence funders

Giving for Change Alliance, November 2025

Front matter

Authorship and contributions

This report was written by Sadaf Shallwani and commissioned by the Giving for Change initiative. Research support was provided by Ronald Kimambo. The research was conducted in close collaboration with Giving for Change Alliance partners, donors, and sector practitioners.

About Giving for Change

The Giving for Change initiative (2020-2025) has aimed to strengthen community philanthropy and shift power in the international development and philanthropy sectors. With partners across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe, GfC has worked to support community-led development, influence donor practices, and amplify Global South leadership within global systems of aid and philanthropy.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Giving for Change or its partners.

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Executive summary

Background

Efforts to “shift power” in philanthropy and development have gained momentum in recent years, but real change in donor practice has been slow and inconsistent. *It is thus critical for the sector to understand how donors are influenced to shift their mindsets, systems, and practices.*

This report contributes to that discussion by examining the recent work of the Giving for Change (GfC) initiative, particularly under Domain 3, which aimed to influence international donors (private foundations, bilaterals, and INGOs) to support community philanthropy and move power closer to the ground. The key research questions explored in this study are: *What strategies did GfC partners use to influence donors? and What achievements, challenges, and impacts have resulted?* The analysis draws on GfC partners’ perspectives, as well as reflections from donors and others in the sector.

Findings

GfC partners used a range of individual and collective strategies to influence donors, grounded in the relational nature of systems change and mindset change work -

- Accompaniment through relationships and thought partnerships
- Facilitating and supporting opportunities for shared learning and practice
- Resources and advocacy
- Amplifying community voices and Global South voices
- Mobilizing stronger local power - leading to shifts in power dynamics

Reported effects on donor organizations included -

- Being supported to think differently and try new things
- Learning in community - from and with others, and experiencing spaces where power is shared and local civil society actors can set the agenda
- Experimenting with power-shifting approaches in grantmaking
- Having resources and tools to support organizational change
- Deeper understanding when they hear directly from Global South leaders and communities

Despite its limited timeframe and structure, GfC also contributed to shifts in the sector by -

- Fostering real conversations around shifting power and community philanthropy
- Catalyzing shifts in the understanding and approach of philanthropy as a sector
- Building power at the ‘base’, which helped to shift power dynamics
- Serving as a microsystem of more equitable relationships

GfC added value by serving as connective tissue between individual partners, amplifying the work of partners, and linking their collective efforts to the broader movement for systemic change.

Insights and approaches that enable shifts in donor practice

From the study's findings, we are able to draw out key insights and approaches that are particularly influential in shifting donor behaviour and advancing community-led change:

1. Meaningful influence happens within relationships grounded in trust, safety, and reciprocity.
2. Listening directly to local voices has a profound effect on funders' understandings and mindsets.
3. Experiential and collective learning allows donors to personally and directly experience equitable power relations, and learn in community.
4. Real change requires working with the whole donor organization - not just program staff but also board, leadership, and finance and compliance staff.
5. 'Bottom-up' demand creates pressure and incentive for funders to adapt their systems and practices.
6. Normative pressures can be leveraged to foster sector-wide change and collective accountability.
7. Donors' desires for evidence and tools can be used strategically to steer them towards better practice.
8. Systemic change requires more strategy, more organizing, and a generational perspective - beyond donor funding cycles and frameworks.

The GfC initiative demonstrated that shifting donor mindsets, systems, and practices requires sustained effort at multiple levels. Funders and INGOs, civil society actors, and ecosystem catalysts each have distinct and interconnected roles to play.

Concluding note

GfC demonstrated the potential and challenges of shifting power in philanthropy. It showed that real change can emerge from patient, relational, and strategic work.

Systems change work requires trusted relationships, direct connections and shared learning across sectors and levels, working with the whole donor organization, and continued organizing with a long-term view. Together, these efforts can shift individual donor practices as well as the broader culture of philanthropy and development toward more equitable, accountable, and community-led approaches.

1. Introduction and background

Efforts to “shift power” in philanthropy and development have gained momentum in recent years, challenging systems long dominated by Global North institutions and agendas. While many funders now use the language of shifting power and locally led development, real change in donor practice has been slow and inconsistent. *It is thus critical for the sector to understand how donors are influenced to shift their mindsets, systems, and practices.*

This report contributes to that discussion by examining the recent work of the [Giving for Change \(GfC\) initiative](#), particularly under Domain 3, which aimed to influence international donors, (private foundations, bilaterals, and INGOs) to support community philanthropy and move power closer to the ground. The analysis draws on GfC partners’ strategies and experiences, as well as donors’ and sector practitioners’ reflections, to highlight what worked, what was challenging, and what this means for the wider movement to shift power.

1.1 Shifting power and community philanthropy

Philanthropy and aid systems have historically been driven by external agendas, leaving local actors with limited influence over “development” decisions that directly affect their communities. This has reinforced dependency and weakened local agency, knowledge systems, and solidarity practices. The movement to “shift power” seeks to position local leaders and communities as decision-makers and agents of their own change.

Community philanthropy advances this by mobilizing local resources, strengthening community leadership, and fostering accountability between citizens and institutions. It positions communities as funders and co-investors rather than passive recipients.

GfC’s goal was to advance community philanthropy at local levels, while also working to shift global narratives and donor practices. The initiative linked local realities and expertise with global dialogues, showing how community-led approaches can strengthen inclusion, effectiveness, and impact.

1.2 Research objectives

The present research study was commissioned by GfC to examine what it takes to shift donor mindsets, systems, and practices. From the larger inquiry, this report focuses on the core questions:

*What strategies did GfC partners use to influence donors?
What achievements, challenges, and impacts have resulted?*

Specifically, the report explores:

- Strategies used by GfC partners to influence international donors
- Reported effects of these strategies on donor attitudes, systems, and practices, as well as on power dynamics between donors and Southern civil society actors.
- The value of GfC as a collective contributor and connector within the wider movement to shift power.

1.3 Methodology

The research was grounded primarily in consultations and interviews. Seven of the nine GfC partners participated in one or more conversations to share their strategies and reflections. They also provided reports and tools for review. They further recommended funders and sector practitioners who would be able to provide key insights on the research questions. In the end, 31 contributors - representing funders, Global South civil society organizations, and sector practitioners - participated in interviews and shared insights that led to the findings in this study. The findings in this report focus on reflections shared relating to the GfC initiative or partners in particular.

These primary insights were supplemented by a review of key internal GfC documents (such as the proposal, theory of change, progress reports, and donor-facing outputs) as well as external publications on shifting power, community philanthropy, and donor practices. This helped situate the findings in the broader sectoral discourse and connect them with existing knowledge. Further detail on the methodology is provided in Annexes 1 and 2.

Limitations

This study offers important insights; however, some limitations must be acknowledged: Findings were based on a small number of interviews with donors already inclined toward shifting power, meaning that traditional funders' perspectives were not represented. Grantees of the donor organizations were not separately included (unless they also happened to be a GfC partner), so it was not possible to fully assess how reported shifts were experienced by those receiving funds. Finally, many donors interviewed did not express explicit awareness of GfC as an initiative, tending instead to speak about individual relationships and sector-wide changes.

Despite these limitations, the study still allows us to identify emerging patterns in how donors conceptualize and practice power-shifting, and what kinds of strategies and approaches seem to be effective in supporting their journeys to shift power. It would be valuable for future research to include donors with a wider range of attitudes towards shifting power, as well as a wider range of civil society organizations, including those receiving grants from donors, to better understand the range of experience on the receiving end of philanthropy.

1.4 Report structure

The remainder of the report is organized as follows -

- Findings: An overview of GfC partners' strategies to influence donors, reported outcomes and impacts, contributions to the wider philanthropic sector, and reflections on systems change and the role of ecosystem catalysts like GfC.
- Discussion: A synthesis of key achievements and challenges, an exploration of the value-add of GfC as a collective, insights and promising approaches for influencing donor practice, and recommendations for funders, civil society, and ecosystem connectors.

2. Findings: Giving for Change partners' strategies and effects on donors

This section reviews Giving for Change (GfC) partners' work under Domain 3. It begins with an overview of the Theory of Change and partners' positioning, and then examines the strategies used to influence donors and their reported effects. It also considers GfC's contributions to broader sectoral shifts, and reflects on the initiative's role as an ecosystem catalyst.

2.1 Framing Giving for Change partners' work under Domain Three

The Theory of Change for Domain 3 of GfC anticipated that activities such as disseminating knowledge, organizing lectures and workshops, holding direct meetings, and engaging in international forums would increase awareness and provide tools and models to international funders. This, in turn, was expected to encourage international donors to support community philanthropy and recognize the political role of civil society organizations and activists. The long-term impact envisioned was greater voice and agency for communities and local organizations, and stronger accountability and collaboration among governments and other power-holders. See Figure 1 for the Theory of Change.

Under this approach, GfC partners pursued a dual focus:

- With donors already engaged in power-shifting debates, they encouraged deeper reforms, urging funders to use influence and platforms to advance more equitable systems.
- With those less familiar, they sought to spark interest and open pathways toward community-led approaches.

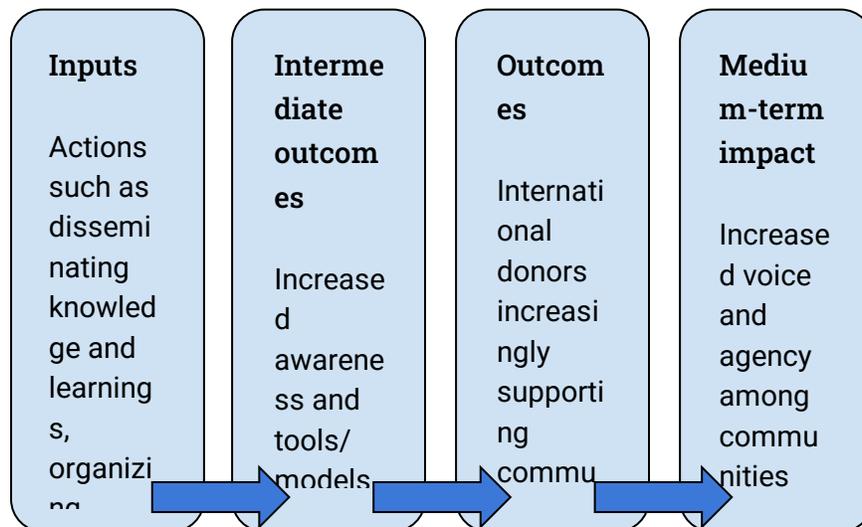


Figure 1. Giving for Change - Domain 3: Theory of Change.

Community philanthropy in Domain 3

Although community philanthropy was central to the GfC initiative, it featured less prominently in the Domain 3 influencing work. GfC partners and donors tended to focus more on flexible funding, longer-term support, and shared decision-making than on community philanthropy itself. This suggests that while community philanthropy remained a key pillar of GfC, further framing and advocacy may have been needed for it to gain stronger traction with international actors.

Donors' awareness of and involvement with GfC

Most of the foundations and sector practitioners who were interviewed were aware of the GfC initiative but had limited understanding of its specific objectives, structure, and activities. However, all of them mentioned significant interactions, relationships, and partnerships that they hold with different GfC partners, and they all spoke about being aware of, and influenced by, different conversations, themes, ideas, and learnings emerging from the broader movement to shift power and support community-led change. This is consistent with how GfC was designed - building on partners' existing relationships and networks, and serving as a contributor and catalyst within a broader movement, not as a branded program seeking name recognition.

2.2 Giving for Change partners' strategies and their effects on international donors

GfC partners primarily used five key strategies to influence international donors to shift power and support community philanthropy:

1. Accompaniment through relationships and thought partnerships
2. Facilitating and supporting shared learning and practice
3. Developing resources and and engaging in advocacy
4. Amplifying community voices and Global South voices
5. Mobilizing stronger local power - leading to shifts in power dynamics

In the following sections, we share more about these strategies used by GfC partners to influence international donors, as well as effects seen in some donors and in the sector more broadly.

(A) Accompaniment through relationships and thought partnerships

GfC partners established and nurtured long-term, trust-based relationships with funders, offering thought partnership to help them reconcile values with practice. This work was described as “walking with” donors, rather than pushing them from the outside. These partnerships and change efforts were more effective when they built on the underlying good intentions of funder organizations and the people working within them, and when they were longer-term and trust-based.

It is not the typical, very structured way of influencing. (...) We have conversations - even closed doors conversations. (...) Those conversations can then lead to more concrete collaboration. (...) How it affects practice is a long-term goal.

- Policy and program lead at global GfC partner

All these (donor) organizations have got beautiful souls - good, beautiful visions and missions. But the challenge is the body - your organizational infrastructure, your management infrastructure, your board. You find that there is always a mismatch. (...) The hand-holding (that we engage in) is about trying to align the two things. You're aligning the soul and the body.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

Reported effects on donor organizations

GfC partners and donors alike described these direct relationships and thought partnerships as being key places of influence and learning for the donor. GfC partners observed funders learn and change over time within partnerships - demonstrating the importance of consistency and patience. Donors also confirmed how these longer-term relationships and thought partnerships influence their learning. For example, a global foundation noted how their partnership with

UNNGOF helped them to think differently about narrative and language. This validates and underscores the importance of GfC partners' investment of time and energy into relationship-building and one-on-one influencing.

We have people in [Bilateral Donor] who have been 'working the account' from within. (...) We were never looking for funding from [Bilateral]. We were focused on influencing [Bilateral] itself, and actually made quite a lot of progress. For example, [one department within Bilateral] established a distinct focus on local resource mobilization and community philanthropy.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

(B) Facilitating and supporting shared learning and practice

GfC partners strategically created and facilitated opportunities for learning/unlearning, collaboration, and co-creation among and with funders and INGOs. These ranged from local trainings to global working groups, and from virtual webinars to national symposiums and international summits.

The Ghana Philanthropy Forum is a critical milestone that has come out of this process [GfC]. (...) We had conversations about what philanthropy looks like from an indigenous point of view, how philanthropy has evolved in Ghana, how it is manifesting in communities, and how philanthropy can support more social justice work. (...) This has been one major outcome of the GfC program.

- GfC: [Insights from WASCI](#) on Community Philanthropy and Civic Space in Ghana (2025)

Opportunities for donors' shared learning and practice facilitated by Giving for Change partners

- National philanthropy symposiums, led by anchor institutions, to bring together diverse stakeholders, raise awareness about community philanthropy, and strengthen will and political commitment for local philanthropic ecosystems (e.g., the Ghana Philanthropy Forum)
- Virtual webinars (e.g., webinars hosted with Alliance Magazine in 2024 and 2025 on the power of community philanthropy)
- Local and global workshops (e.g., capacity strengthening workshop for Private Development Initiatives in the Netherlands)
- Regional or global working groups or communities of practice (e.g., "Measuring What Matters" working group)

Reported effects on donor organizations

Donors shared that, inspired by the different learning opportunities they have engaged in, they have been trying out new grantmaking practices such as flexible grants, reducing grant reporting requirements, funding advocacy and convening efforts, and piloting participatory grantmaking.

Two types of facilitated learning processes were highlighted as particularly strategic and impactful by both GfC partners as well as donor respondents in this study: the #ShiftThePower summit in Bogotá, and Wilde Ganzen's long-term work with Private Development Initiatives in the Netherlands.

#ShiftThePower summits

The #ShiftThePower summits were highlighted as key milestone events in donors' learning and change processes. These summits, hosted and facilitated by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF), held space for conversations and interactions around how power imbalances shape the sector, why and how communities should lead their own change processes, and how donors need to operate differently to enable that. The summit in Bogotá (December 2023) in particular aimed to help civil society actors and donors experience what it means to share power and be part of an emergent, co-created process. Donors' reflections validated the organizers' intentions in terms of what they experienced and learned at the summit.

Bogotá was simply one of the greatest learning experiences of my professional life. To be in that space, to be outnumbered, to be challenged, was really good and humbling as well. People were free to be blunt and speak their minds. It was very liberating to have conversations free of the baggage that normally goes with a potential funding relationship.
- Patrick Steiner-Hirth at Robert Bosch Stiftung ([Reflections from the #ShiftThePower Global Summit: What can funders do differently?, Jan 25, 2024](#))

Wilde Ganzen's work with Private Development Initiatives (PDIs)

Wilde Ganzen, a global GfC partner, works with hundreds of Dutch Private Development Initiatives (PDIs) that support community-based organizations in the Global South. Wilde Ganzen's model combines funding, one-on-one advisory support, peer learning, and workshops on issues such as governance, community participation, and decolonizing aid. This has encouraged PDIs to transition from directive roles to facilitative ones, and in some cases to restructure leadership, appoint Southern directors, and reduce Dutch boards' operational roles.

PDIs shared that through their partnership and learning with Wilde Ganzen, they have increased their awareness of the importance of local leadership, shifted towards Global South-led and community-led practices, and implemented structural changes for locally-led governance and decision-making. Wilde Ganzen's approach and a case study of a PDI are provided in Annex 4.

(C) Developing resources and engaging in advocacy

GfC partners developed knowledge resources and tools, and carried out strategic campaigns to influence broader change in the philanthropic and INGO sectors. These activities were generally around themes of shifting power and supporting local agency and community philanthropy, but also emerged in response to priorities in the current context.

Moreover, GfC partners used their learnings around local agency and community philanthropy to guide their advocacy with donors. For example, the Global Fund for Community Foundations described grants they made to community foundations and other local organizations that helped them to better understand local philanthropy works - and they then synthesized and documented learnings for use by funders and other international actors.

Reported effects on donor organizations

Donors confirmed that the research and tools developed by GfC and others in the sector have been important catalysts and resources in their own organizational thinking and change processes. For example, small donor organizations in the Netherlands reported using the Power Awareness Tool developed by Partos with support from Wilde Ganzen. Global funders described learning from UNNGOF’s resource on decolonizing language. And a number of donors reported benefiting from research and write-ups from the Global Fund for Community Foundations.

The Global Fund for Community Foundations produced a lot of research. That has been really helpful when we are defending why we want to have a locally-led development policy or strategy.

- Program lead at bilateral donor

A word of caution from Giving for Change partners around templates and toolkits

GfC partners cautioned that the desire of donors to package shifting-power concepts into templates or toolkits risks ‘projectizing’ the ideas and movement, and co-opting them into donor-controlled narratives and methods, when what is actually needed first is a fundamental mindset shift.

In some conversations, there's been this immediate request for things like, “If I do these 10 things, then I have shifted power”, and wanting to projectize Shift the Power, and the principles and values behind it. This isn't something that you can projectize. We can't give you a silver bullet, that these five things or seven things are going to automatically make the difference within your organization. It really begins with a mindset shift, and a willingness to really be open to that process and not be in control of that process.

- Program lead at global GfC partner

Examples of resources and tools developed by or with Giving for Change partners	Examples of advocacy campaigns led or supported by Giving for Change partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wilde Ganzen (WG) worked with Partos and others on improving and digitizing the Power Awareness Tool that helps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “Too Southern to be Funded” campaign to challenge funding biases (GfC, 2024).

<p>fundings foster equitable partnerships (GfC, 2024).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Fund for Community Foundations developed a wide range of writings and resources around how funders can support community philanthropy. • UNNGOF developed an interactive tool that helps development practitioners analyze their writing for neocolonial and saviourist language, and improve it to be more appropriate and dignifying. UNNGOF's participation during the 2023 OECD Civil Society Days highlighted the importance of language and the right lexicon for inclusive communication in humanitarianism and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with Vice Versa Magazine in the Netherlands and the Vice Versa Global platform - which resulted in a number of live and online dialogues and debates, as well as a magazine issue focused on community giving and how it can transform philanthropy. • Coordination of an annual Transforming Philanthropy month. • Contributing to civil society working group discussions and recommendations for global policy conversations - for example, in 2023, partners in Brazil worked on connecting hyper-local perspectives to global policy conversations as part of G20 engagement and climate financing work (GfC 2023 Annual Report). • Strategic online meetings hosted by GFCF that led to a campaign against restrictions on Global South civil society by Global North governments (GfC 2023 Annual Report).
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(D) Amplifying community voices and Global South voices

GfC partners strategically created space for and amplified voices from the Global South, especially from communities and local organizations, in opportunities they organized and participated in.

They described their role as linking the local to the global - ensuring that local voices are heard and are part of the dialogue at all levels, and influence decision-making over time. Including and amplifying local voices from the Global South in key global conversations also had the added effect of demonstrating local capacity and agency to global actors.

We felt that it's of strategic importance to engage in these spaces, whether it is with OECD in Paris or the high level political forum in New York, because the decisions that finally come down - these decisions are birthed in the northern capitals. (...) When you're in those spaces, you are carrying the voice from the South. It doesn't guarantee that whatever you say will be accepted, but you are in that space where the decisions are being taken. (...) Policy and institutional framework development is not a single event. These are processes, and they take time. (...) You want to make sure that there is a voice of civil society consistently on the table.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

We are being deliberate to make sure that local voices are heard, and also, whatever we're discussing at the local level needs to interface at the international level. (...) Sometimes there are insinuations that there's no local capacity to be able to undertake certain interventions. Ensuring that the partners we work with locally are able to be appreciated in

international platforms is important - to show that this whole misconception of what capacity is needs to be challenged.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

A couple of GfC partners described how they established fellowships to identify and create space for emerging leaders from the Global South to develop their thought leadership and engage in systems change or systems building work. Global Fund for Community Foundation's *ShiftThePower Fellowship* and Comuá Network's *Saberes Fellowship* provided time, resourcing, and support for Global South leaders to engage in reflective practice, systems thinking, peer exchange, and the development of resources that centre community voices. Fellows were also often recognized and invited to different philanthropic conversations, further strengthening representation of marginalized voices in these spaces.

Reported effects on donor organizations

Donor organizations also reported that much of their most impactful learning emerged when they engaged directly with local civil society leaders and practitioners from the Global South, including but not limited to grantee-partners. Donor staff noted that their leadership and boards were also more strongly compelled by hearing stories and experiences directly from local actors.

Our institution has been influenced and continues to be influenced by voices from the Global Majority. We just co-hosted an event, and our leadership was able to attend that. They were able to absorb a lot of these messages from the Global Majority community about the fact that locally-led development isn't just about shifting funding flows, it's about shifting decision-making and investing in agency.

- Program lead at global foundation

(E) Mobilizing stronger local power - leading to shift in power dynamics

GfC partners strengthened the agency and confidence of local organizations, which increased their independence and capacity to negotiate and pushback in their relationships with funders. GfC partners emphasized that communities have local assets that they contribute towards change processes that they care about. Drawing attention to these assets demonstrates to international donors that local communities have capacity and contributions - and, perhaps more importantly, it strengthens local organizations' and communities' own sense of agency. As organizations and communities recognize their own power and capacity, they are more able to negotiate - and even decline - grant agreements that come with misaligned restrictions.

We ensure that when partners are fundraising, there's more ability to negotiate - for more funding to go into strengthening the organization, and towards programmatic initiatives that are better aligned with community priorities. We strengthen capacity and share tactics

to mobilize support - whether it's from duty bearers or whether it is through local fundraising. That builds organizations' confidence and means that they are not negotiating from zero - they have social capital and locally raised funds. That reduces their level of vulnerability, and they are able to negotiate better agreements, they can layer grants with what they already have.

- Program lead at GfC partner

Of course, funding is important, but local agency, supporting local constituency, building power and agency - that is really at the heart of what we're doing. And we explain to funders that local assets are power, and frame the conversation around the role of local communities as co-investors. It seems new to donors to think about local assets and about the community co-investing - so they (communities) too have a stake in that local development process, and also have agency.

- Policy and program lead at global GfC partner

Reported effects on donor organizations

Donor organizations did not directly share examples of their organization changing practices or systems due to stronger local power fostered by GfC partners specifically. However, the strengthened power of local actors was recognized as critical to longer-term shifts.

Civil society itself needs to lean into its strengths, how it is thinking about its own locus of power and ability to shift power, rather than being beholden to Global North donors. Global Majority civil society, can play a significant role in reimagining a different system but this will entail finding and working with a different set of actors.

- Senior leader at global foundation

Summary: Key strategies used by Giving for Change partners to influence donors, and reported effects on donor organizations

Key strategies used by Giving for Change partners	Reported effects on donor organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accompaniment through relationships and thought partnerships ● Facilitating and supporting opportunities for shared learning and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being supported to think differently and try new things - within the context of a long-term partnership with a GfC partner or another Global South civil society organization ● Learning from and with others; experiencing spaces where power is shared and local civil society actors can set the agenda ● Experimenting with power-shifting approaches such as flexible grantmaking, funding networking and

Key strategies used by Giving for Change partners	Reported effects on donor organizations
<p>practice (e.g., ShiftThePower summit, workshops, working groups)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resources and advocacy (campaigns, research, resources, and tools) ● Amplifying community voices and Global South voices ● Mobilizing stronger local power - leading to shifts in power dynamics 	<p>convening, funding advocacy and systems change work, and participatory grantmaking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having resources to draw upon to justify the impetus to shift power or support locally-led development; having tools and guidelines to support organizational change ● Increased understanding among leadership and decision-makers when they hear directly from Global South civil society leaders and communities

2.3 Shifts in the sector that Giving for Change has contributed towards

Beyond impact on the individual attitudes and practices of specific funders, GfC as a collective contributed to significant shifts in the philanthropic and global development sectors more broadly. However, GfC partners noted that the five-year timeframe of GfC was insufficient to be able to see the breadth and depth of its impact. In this section, we review key reflections on GfC’s impact on the sector.

It is important to note that we cannot *attribute* sectoral changes solely to GfC, but we can appreciate how it *contributed*, alongside other catalyzing movements, to important shifts. GfC partners were organizations and activists who are engaged in many different efforts towards shifting power and strengthening local agency - before, beyond, and after GfC. Given the collective and interconnected nature of social systems change, partners did not typically separate what occurred under GfC from their broader strategies, nor was such a distinction necessarily useful. GfC’s role was to strengthen solidarity, collaboration, and connection across organizations; provide resources for impactful work at community, national, and global levels; and amplify the leadership and influence of actors seeking to transform the ecosystem.

With that said, what shifts in the philanthropic sector can we say GfC contributed to?

(A) Giving for Change created space, impetus, and capacity for real conversations around shifting power and community philanthropy.

GfC and other ecosystem catalysts have helped to demystify and normalize questions, conversations, and reflections around what it means to really shift power and support community philanthropy. GfC partners highlighted the importance of supporting these conversations over time as they enable learning, understanding, and - eventually - change in practice.

What has worked well (in GfC) is being able to push narratives, and challenge the thinking around what shifting power actually means, and getting people to start looking at, "What biases do we have?", "How do we reposition ourselves and the way that we work differently?", or "How can we work differently to ensure that we are shifting power?". The ability for people to even engage and have the conversation that's happening (...). It's taking root. It's no longer this foreign concept that people can't put their hands on or they can't be able to understand or break down.

- Executive director at GfC partner

We're starting to see a few [philanthropic] actors opening up and wanting to learn more and be curious about community philanthropy. It's very gradual. (...) They're still learning what community philanthropy is, how it works. They're opening up to it, and some of them have a genuine interest in having practices that truly shift power to communities.

- Program lead at GfC partner

However, a few GfC partners cautioned that sometimes shifting power language is co-opted or used without alignment on meaning. Most relevant to this study were instances of donors or INGOs co-opting concepts like community philanthropy or community foundations.

Community philanthropy can be easily instrumentalized. You see pushback in the INGO space, which says, "Community philanthropy, we're already doing it, it's called matching funding." And just the difference between gaming behaviours in order to unlock the resources; versus centering community voices, power, and resources as a way to build from the bottom up, to help people to realize the thing they can be - these are fundamentally different.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

(B) Giving for Change catalyzed shifts in the understanding and approach of philanthropy as a sector.

GfC and other ecosystem catalysts have helped funders internalize shifts to better support the power and agency of local communities. Donors also shared that they have been trying out new grantmaking practices such as flexible grants, reducing grant reporting requirements, funding advocacy and convening efforts, and piloting participatory grantmaking.

Our whole perspective was shaped by folks like the Global Fund for Community Foundations. They have hugely shaped how we think about locally led development, and the approach that we took. (...) We tried to identify four or five major networks in this space and then fund them to do the work.

- Program lead at global foundation

For many donors, however, these shifts in practices stayed at the margins and weren't yet mainstreamed into their organization-wide practice. Changes in organizational systems and practices often take longer than shifts in attitudes and beliefs. However, GfC partners noted that the changes were nonetheless significant, especially when you look at where the sector was just a couple of decades ago.

If you read all the bilateral donors' strategy papers, you see the language that permeates throughout is around locally-led development, localization, shifting the power (...). Those are major gains. INGOs have all had these country offices, like colonial outposts reporting to the northern capitals - and we're seeing these INGOs changing their country office model. We're seeing organizations changing their policies, changing the configuration of their boards. (...) Previously, donors always transferred all the risk to us in the South, but now, we are talking about risk sharing rather than risk transfer. (...) We need to celebrate. These are major gains.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

(C) Giving for Change built power at the 'base', which helped shift power dynamics between local organizations and international donors.

In addition to donors being more willing to listen and share power, *local organizations are increasingly using their agency and voice, and organizing themselves to collectively demand better practice in the sector.*

As described earlier, a number of GfC partners focused on building power and agency at the 'base' - i.e., among local civil society organizations and movements. The aim was to reduce their reliance on Global North philanthropy, and strengthen their power to negotiate, demand, and decline within any partnerships they chose to consider.

For some GfC partners, this strategic focus area reflected broader questions around whether meaningful changes in power dynamics are even possible in a system of philanthropy that is inherently built on imbalances of wealth and power. They considered that perhaps energy is better invested in supporting civil society in the Global South to take power.

We've come to understand that you can only go so far with funders because they still retreat to their governance, their systems, their structures, their bureaucracy, their accountability. (...) We still have to be there (with funders) every step of the way - if you're invited, make use of every opportunity. But that (supply side) actually isn't going to be what drives change. (...) There isn't the political momentum or will to really transform. It is only a reform. So in the context of the (Giving for Change) program, we saw the opportunity to invest much more in the demand side.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

As a result of GfC and other ecosystem catalysts' intentional efforts to build power, agency, and voice among Global South leaders and organizations, meaningful shifts in power dynamics are being observed.

The change is that now in the South, you have got more strong, firm, bold voices that are asking for change, and they are asking for change in the aid industrial complex.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

We're seeing major shifts. (...) Donors are willing to be challenged. Gone are the days when donors presided over, on some throne, and sent down orders. Now donors are listening. And the few that do not listen, we're compelling them to listen. (...) We are not getting into those spaces as novices. We are getting in those spaces as people who have some expertise and competencies, because of the work that we do. So when we speak, they listen.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

(D) Giving for Change was a microsystem of what relationships between local and global organizations could look like.

The GfC alliance itself enabled GfC partners who work locally in the Global South to have direct connections and relationships with others in the Global South, as well as with international actors in the Global North. This contributed to their power and agency as Global South actors and helped to shift power dynamics with funders and others in the Global North.

One of the most challenging things, as a local organization, is engaging in international advocacy. It means that you need this network of intermediaries, and you need time and effort to think about how to connect with international organizations. (...) And that's very hard for a local organization to work on alone. That was one of the powerful things of Giving for Change, because it's a consortium - it opened doors, it opened connections.

- Executive leader at GfC partner

The great advantage of Giving for Change, as opposed to the other parts of the system, is that it has been relatively organized. (In the alliance) there are a group of people - who would not normally talk to each other - who have been regularly coming together to share experiences across different situations. (...) It's created a network between people in countries - largely south-to-south, to create a force.

- Sector practitioner and consultant

In a sense, what Giving for Change has done - it's not just about reforming the existing system, it really has been about trying to build the confidence of people to realize that they

are the makers of the new system, and actually that the work that they've done, the choices they've made in their day-to-day work on the ground, are essentially political.

(...) This isn't just (about) doing projects well, this is actually (about) building a good world, and so, liberating from some of those structures.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

(E) Giving for Change's timeframe and structure limited its ability to demonstrate systemic shifts.

As will be further elaborated below, systems change is complex and takes time, particularly with an entrenched system like philanthropy and aid. In that context, GfC partners noted that the GfC initiative was limited in what it could do within its five-year timeframe. Moreover, because GfC was ultimately a donor-funded program with expected deliverables and deadlines, its inherent structure may also have limited the transformative change it could catalyze.

Changing behaviours and mindset shifts is slow building work. It's not work that, unfortunately, can fit within an 18 month program or even a five year program, like the Giving for Change initiative.

- Program lead at global GfC partner

Building a collective voice takes time, it takes relationships and building trust. Five years is very little for us to be able to accomplish that in a solid way. (...) I don't think we were able, in the time that we had, to have a solid collective voice and message that we could share with the field. I think we were getting there. But with the program ending and everyone having to rethink their funding sources and all of that, it takes a lot of energy. So I don't think that we achieved the potential we could have. (...) It's the limitations of time and resources.

- Program lead at GfC partner

Despite the flexible nature of the Giving for Change program, once you introduce certain frameworks, reporting deadlines, and deliverables, it automatically becomes a project because there's a certain level of accountability that comes with it. That's just the reality of things.

- Giving for Change: [Insights from WASC](#) on Community Philanthropy and Civic Space in Ghana (2025)

Despite these limitations, as described in earlier parts of this report, there were clear ways in which GfC and its members effected change in funders' attitudes and practices, and contributed to the infrastructure and processes necessary for longer-term change. Some interviewees further explained that aside from what GfC achieved directly, it contributed to a growing and impactful movement and those effects will become clearer over time.

I think that you can only see the impact of these things from a long distance. (...) This program will have a kind of longer term effect, but it would be hard to figure that out right now. In five years time, that would be a more interesting report.

- Sector practitioner and consultant

Shifts in the sector that Giving for Change and other ecosystem catalysts have contributed towards

1. Space, impetus, and capacity for real conversations around shifting power and local agency.
2. Shifts in the understanding and approach of philanthropy as a sector.
3. Stronger power at the 'base', which shifts power dynamics between local organizations and international donors.
4. Serving as a microsystem of what equitable relationships between local and global organizations can look like.

2.4 Reflections on Giving for Change as a systems change effort

Relating to the last point, GfC partners and sector practitioners also shared reflections on *how systems change happens and the role of ecosystem catalysts like GfC*. They highlighted that -

1. Systems change is inherently complex and takes time.
2. Systems change is relational, and requires strategy and infrastructure.
3. Ecosystem catalysts and networks like GfC are essential in advancing systems change.

1. Systems change is inherently complex and takes time.

Systems change involves multiple interconnected factors at different levels and happens over decades and even generations. GfC partners pointed out that entrenched systems like philanthropy have developed over more than a century and cannot be quickly transformed. As noted above, meaningfully shifting the sector requires long-term commitment, trust-building, and space for mindset and behavioural shifts - none of which fit neatly into conventional aid processes with short-term deliverables and measurable outputs.

This is a sector, a system that is 100 plus years old, and was really designed never to empower in the first place. (...) It's going to take some time to turn that ship around to something that is better.

- Program lead at global GfC partner

This is a long-term agenda. You make different decisions today if you intend to be around in 10-20 years time. (...) If you just need to get to the finishing line, which is at the end of the three-year project - then who cares what happens after that? That you planted the wrong trees will only become evident in 15 years time. Here, philosophically, we are building to last. So, that has been central to how we have grown the work.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

2. Systems change is relational, and requires strategy and infrastructure.

Social systems operate through people and in the relationships between them, and systems change requires collaboration, strategy, and infrastructure. It requires us to bring people together and bring people along. It requires strategic thinking and coordinated action. And it requires infrastructure that enables relationality and provides both stability and flexibility.

To achieve this systems change that we're all seeking, it requires everybody within the ecosystem, not just individual champions. That's the greatest lesson I've learned from this process. No single organization can shift the system alone. So we need to collaborate, we need peer support, we need ecosystem thinking. (...) One of the failures was that we were not able to pull in non-traditional actors, like the private sector, or government.... People from a different sector see things totally differently, but are very crucial and important for us to achieve what we want to achieve.

- Program lead at GfC partner

There are lots of alternatives happening all around the world. (...) But they're not in a system that enables them to thrive, they're not connected, so they become highly vulnerable. So there's an opportunity to connect and weave these things together in an alternative ecosystem.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

We must organise to build the system we want. A central pillar of the #ShiftThePower movement is on community philanthropy and its insistence on the recognition, harnessing and pooling of assets that exist within communities. This is a form of what Dan Firth calls 'relational organising', through which people can build their own institutions, rather than fitting in with an international development system that doesn't work.

- Organising in dark times ([Hodgson & Knight, 2025](#))

3. Ecosystem catalysts and connectors like Giving for Change are essential in advancing systems change.

Because of the complex and relational nature of systems change work, ecosystem catalysts and connectors play a critical role in bringing together local and global actors to dialogue, learn, collaborate, build knowledge and evidence, and organize themselves in more strategic ways.

Several respondents noted, however, that *the organizing role of ecosystem catalysts and connectors needs strengthening.*

There are a lot of people in this space. We need to collaborate a lot more, but time and resources for this are both in short supply. (...) I think RINGO plays that role, I think Giving for Change plays that role.

- Sector practitioner and consultant

The right, and philanthropy of the right, has organized extremely successfully over long terms, with long term core grants to people who have a minimum sufficient agreement. And progressive funders have not. (...) Often, the unit of analysis being an individual foundation or an individual funder is not enough.

- Executive leader at global GfC partner

In a series of [interviews](#) with philanthropic leaders conducted by Alliance Magazine and the H&S Davidson Trust (2025), disorganization was named as one of the key reasons philanthropy is not effective. [Nina Luo](#) (2025) has further argued that philanthropic systems and practices generally demonstrate a lack of understanding of how to be strategic and actually advance systemic change - for example: shifting funder priorities; silos and duplication; aversion to risk and failure; over-reliance on metrics, short-term results, and 'best practices'; and a fundamental disconnect from large-scale grassroots mobilizing.

Ecosystem catalysts and connectors - such as GfC, #ShiftThePower, RINGO - create linkages, spaces, and opportunities for people to:	Examples shared by GfC partners, donors, and sector practitioners in this study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn from each other within relationships ● Listen to and learn directly from local leaders and communities in the Global South ● Learn/unlearn, be challenged, and try out new practices within a community of learning ● Directly experience what a different system might look like in terms of power-shifting or power-sharing, productive discomfort and learning, and collaboration and co-creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funders being influenced through their learning within thought partnerships with civil society organizations in the Global South ● Funder boards and leadership being influenced through hearing directly from local leaders and local organizations ● Measuring What Matters working group hosted by the Global Fund for Community Foundations ● GfC partners' experiences within the GfC Alliance microsystem ● Donors' experiences at the ShiftThePower summit where the agenda and approach was set by local civil society organizations, and donors had no influence in shaping the event ● Local organizations' and INGOs' experiences in the Reverse Call for Proposals approach by RINGO, where INGOs have to apply to work with local organizations

3. Discussion and recommendations

This section begins with a summary of key achievements and challenges, explicitly answering the key research question. We follow that with an exploration of the value-add of Giving for Change (GfC) as a collective. We then draw out promising approaches for influencing donors that are emerging from study's findings, and provide recommendations for funders, civil society, and ecosystem connectors.

3.1 Key achievements and challenges

GfC enabled a diverse and expert group of organizations around the world to come together, organize, and take action to help local and global development sectors shift power and support community philanthropy. As part of its goal to influence international donors, GfC partners individually and collectively engaged in different strategies to help donors learn, shift their mindsets, and operationalize changes in their systems and practices.

Key research question: What were the key achievements, challenges, and impacts of Domain 3 in influencing international donors, INGOs, and foundations to support community philanthropy and shift power closer to the ground?

Achievements and impacts

GfC partners played a significant role in shaping donor understanding and practices by building long-term, trust-based relationships and serving as thought partners. Through shared learning opportunities at various scales, donors were able to engage in collaboration, co-creation, and power-sharing. Knowledge products such as toolkits and resources produced by GfC partners further enabled donors to begin operationalizing their commitments to shifting power and supporting community-led approaches.

At the same time, GfC partners focused on strengthening local agency and power by supporting civil society organizations to mobilize their own resources through traditions of community philanthropy. This approach fostered greater local ownership, reduced dependency on external aid, and gave organizations stronger negotiating positions with funders. By amplifying the voices of community and Global South leaders, GfC partners also helped donors, including their leadership, hear directly from those most affected, which proved particularly influential.

Beyond donor and community-level change, GfC partners individually and collectively contributed to broader sectoral shifts. Partners created space and momentum for real conversations about power and local agency, while the initiative as a whole advanced new thinking in philanthropy, especially around community philanthropy and local giving. Many international donors have become more open to examining what it means to shift power and

support community philanthropy. Some have even experimented with new approaches. Importantly, GfC partners contributed to shifts in language, and in reframing narratives around local capacity, risk, and legitimacy. In addition, by strengthening power at the grassroots, GfC contributed to shifts in power dynamics between local organizations and international donors.

Challenges and learning opportunities

While GfC helped shift mindsets and discourse, donors’ operational systems themselves remained largely unchanged. Risk frameworks, compliance requirements, and - fundamentally - governance and decision-making structures, continue to perpetuate donor-driven frameworks and methods. This reflects a broader and core challenge in the sector - where the increasing rhetoric around shifting power and locally-led development has not been accompanied with actual structural change in how the sector operates.

There was also sometimes misalignment between what donors said they needed, and what is actually necessary for genuine paradigm change. For example, donors wanted ready-made frameworks and toolkits that they could apply to their work, without or before having truly grappled with the fundamental worldviews, assumptions, and biases that underlie their current systems and practices. In these situations, change is superficial, and risks co-opting the language of shifting power without genuinely engaging with the concepts.

Similarly, some donors reported wanting research and evidence that local organizations have capacity and that locally-led approaches are effective. However, social change is inherently complex, and oftentimes donors’ preferred short-term and simplistic metrics are not helpful indicators of actual long-term and complex social change processes. In addition, measuring and attributing change to an isolated contribution is inherently difficult, as progress emerges from a wider ecosystem of agents and efforts.

Along the same lines, in light of the longer-term and complex work involved in systems change, GfC was limited by its five-year timeframe as well as some of the other structural aspects of how it was set up. Nonetheless, GfC partners and the donors they worked with identified both important achievements of the initiative during this timeframe, as well as seeds of sectoral change that have been planted - whose fruits will become apparent in the years to come.

High-level overview of GfC’s <i>contributory</i> influence on international donors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attitudes: Clear evidence of change. Donors increasingly recognize the importance of equity, local agency, and flexible funding. ● Systems: Limited reform. Compliance, risk management, and governance structures still uphold inequities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practices: Some experimentation occurred, but these remained at the margins rather than mainstreamed. ● Power dynamics: Some space was created for communities and Global South actors to

negotiate with donors on more equal terms, but power imbalances largely persist.

Did Giving for Change, as a collective, add value above and beyond its individual partners?

Much of the most effective influencing under Domain 3 happened through long-term, trust-based relationships held by individual GfC partners. These partners brought established credibility, networks, and the ability to accompany and coach donors over time. Many were already engaged in efforts such as #ShiftThePower and RINGO, before and beyond GfC. Donors interviewed often had limited knowledge of GfC as a program, but consistently described meaningful engagement with specific partners and the influence of these interactions, which they connected to the wider movement for community-led change rather than to GfC as a discrete initiative.

As a collective, GfC added value primarily through its connective function. Systems change is inherently relational, and GfC linked local and global actors, fostered solidarity, enabled collaborative action across regions, and co-created spaces where more equitable relationships could emerge. These relational spaces supported shifts at both organizational and sectoral levels. While GfC partners did begin to shape a more coordinated advocacy strategy, progress was slow-building and constrained by competing priorities, system complexity, and limited time. Even so, partners' reflections indicated that the initiative's collective real value lay in its role as a supportive connector.

GfC added value above and beyond its individual partners by serving as connective tissue between partners, amplifying the work of partners, and linking their collective efforts to a broader movement for systemic change.

3.2 Insights and approaches that enable shifts in donor practice

From the study's findings, we are able to draw out key insights and approaches that are particularly influential in shifting donor behaviour and advancing community-led change:

1. Meaningful influence happens within relationships grounded in trust, safety, and reciprocity. Donors often shift when they engage in genuine learning and reflection with trusted partners. Through accompaniment and ongoing dialogue, donors are able to understand different perspectives, explore new ideas, reflect on contradictions, and incrementally adapt their systems and practices.

2. *Listening directly to local voices has a profound effect on funders' understandings and mindsets.* First-hand perspectives carry legitimacy and nuance that external actors cannot replicate, often catalyzing deeper reflection and change. Hearing directly from community leaders and local organizations helps donor staff, especially leadership and Boards, grasp and internalize critical aspects of shifting power such as locally-led decision-making, long-term and flexible grants, and risk sharing.

3. *Experiential and collective learning allows donors to personally and directly experience equitable power relations.* This helps them appreciate that other systems and ways of working are actually possible and can be quite transformative. It helps them move from theory to practice. Learning in community further amplifies this effect, as donors and local actors learn together, challenge assumptions, and co-create new ideas and practices.

4. *Real change requires working with the whole organization.* Mindset shifts among program staff are not enough. It is important to foster mindset and attitude shifts in boards and senior leadership. Equally important is engaging the compliance, finance, risk, and legal staff who often determine what is possible. When these teams begin to see capacity, risk, and due diligence differently, they can adapt or reconsider processes for more flexible and enabling funding.

5. *'Bottom-up' demand creates pressure and incentive for funders to adapt their systems and practices.* As communities and local civil society organizations strengthen their agency and voice, own their own power and engage as equals with funders, and organize around demands and accountability mechanisms, funders are pressured to improve their approaches.

6. *Donor behaviour is also influenced by normative pressures.* Donors often take cues from each other - 'getting on the bandwagon' so to speak. This dynamic can be leveraged to foster sector-wide change and collective accountability. As more funders adopt longer-term commitments, flexible grants, and community-led decision-making, these approaches become sector expectations rather than exceptions.

7. *Donors' desires can be used strategically to steer them towards better practice.* Donors' desire for data and evidence can be harnessed to build the case for community-led approaches by demonstrating how they are impactful, effective, and sustainable. Similarly, their appetite for frameworks and toolkits can be used to disseminate approaches that emphasize inclusive governance and decision-making, equity, power-sharing, and community leadership. By strategically shaping these products, we can both respond to donor needs and steer them toward better practice.

8. *Systemic change requires more strategy, more organizing, and a generational perspective.* Systems change is generational, but donor programs remain tied to short cycles and rigid

frameworks. To embed lasting shifts, civil society organizations and ecosystem connectors need to plan and organize beyond donor timelines - building movements and collaborations that sustain pressure and innovation over decades. Keeping a long-term horizon helps ensure that shifts in donor practice are not isolated or reversible but embedded in enduring structures and cultures.

Relationships, learning, and collective spaces can spark change, but deeper transformation requires whole-of-organization engagement, bottom-up demand, and long-term strategies that reach beyond donor cycles. The following section offers tailored recommendations for funders, civil society actors, and ecosystem connectors to help embed and sustain these shifts.

3.3 Recommendations

The GfC initiative demonstrated that shifting donor mindsets, systems, and practices requires sustained effort at multiple levels. Funders and INGOs, civil society actors, and ecosystem catalysts each have distinct and interconnected roles to play. The recommendations below highlight where each group can focus to reinforce systemic change.

(A) Recommendations for funders and INGOs

Invest in relationships and centre local voices

1. *Invest in relationships, not just transactions and deliverables.* Systems change is relational. Long-term accompaniment, trust, and dialogue with civil society are effective spaces for learning and growth - as well as for impact. Where possible, invest in multi-year, flexible partnerships, with opportunities for funders and partners to learn together, share risks, and co-create solutions.
2. *Center Global South voices and lived experience.* Direct encounters with community leaders and grassroots organizations are transformative. Funders should systematically create opportunities for boards, leadership, and staff to learn from and engage with Global South actors, recognizing these encounters as catalysts for mindset and practice change.
3. *Resource experiential and collective learning.* Support convenings, summits, and co-created learning forums where donors and civil society actors from different parts of the world can learn in community, experience equitable power relations, and try out alternate systems of collaboration.

Reform organizational culture and systems

4. *Grow your organization's appetite for experimentation.* Develop an organizational culture around experimentation and trying out new approaches. These become important

spaces for learning and understanding, shifting internal framings, and transforming organizational systems and practices.

5. *Bring along your leaders and Board.* Boards and senior leaders need to engage with these issues directly so that power-shifting commitments are embedded in the organizational ethos and structure, not just rhetoric.
6. *Reform internal systems.* Influence is limited if funders' risk frameworks and compliance systems remain unchanged. Funders should revisit due diligence, reporting, and legal requirements so that they enable rather than constrain. This includes engaging compliance and risk staff in rethinking what "capacity" and "risk" mean.
7. *Resist the urge to "projectize" power-shifting into templates or toolkits.* Genuine change doesn't come from simply using the right tool or checking off the right boxes. It requires deep and deliberate internal, relational, and structural work.
8. *Acknowledge and share power.* Shifting power is not just about funding flows but also about who has agency and power to determine organizational strategy, govern, and make decisions. Create mechanisms for the meaningful participation of Global South actors - particularly those from the communities you seek to serve - in your own organizational governance, leadership, and decision-making.

Normalize equitable practices and accountability

9. *Normalize practices that promote equity and create space for agency.* Flexible funding, longer timeframes, and core support should become the norm rather than the exception. These practices both strengthen organizations and signal a cultural shift in how funders value partnership and agency.
10. *Leverage accountability and peer pressure.* Donors often do not want to be "left behind" when peers adopt progressive practices. Funders can harness this dynamic by making collective commitments visible and encouraging mutual accountability through associations, platforms, and networks (e.g., WINGS, Philea). Existing peer learning groups among foundation CEOs can also be strengthened to move towards more transformative leadership practice.

Strengthen the ecosystem

11. *Support the gathering of real evidence* around the effectiveness of community- and civil society led approaches for longer-term systemic change. Provide resources, time, and support for civil society organizations to co-create learning frameworks with their communities, identify meaningful and relevant indicators and methods to track progress, and gather learnings and data over a longer period of time.
12. *Support long-term organizing.* Recognize that systemic change is generational. Provide multi-year resourcing for networks and movements, rather than trying to force transformational ambitions into short project cycles. In addition, promote more sustainable financing models that build local assets and strengthen local resourcing ecosystems, to ensure long-term resilience for civil society and movements.

(B) Recommendations for civil society actors

Build local voice and power

1. *Build and sustain power at the base.* Continue to strengthen community resource mobilization, leadership, and negotiation skills so that local actors engage with donors as co-investors rather than passive recipients. This bottom-up demand creates pressure for funders to shift and ensures change is sustainable.
2. *Connect with others to amplify your collective voice.* Organize across movements, nationally and globally, to demand equitable systems, challenge restrictive practices, and demonstrate alternatives. Alliances enable civil society actors to amplify demands for equity and resist co-optation. Collective voice also creates counter-narratives to dominant donor framings.

Engage strategically with funders

3. *Foster and leverage long-term relationships.* Trust-based relationships with donors remain a powerful entry point for influence. Partners should continue to nurture these connections, offering accompaniment, sharing experiences and perspectives, and engaging in shared dialogue and reflection around how power shapes systems and practices - and thus realities. It is also strategic to engage directly where possible with funder Boards and leadership, as that direct engagement can lead to transformative understanding and support.
4. *Amplify local voices.* Facilitate direct engagement between communities and donors, allowing donors to hear directly about lived realities as well as how donor systems and practices affect communities. Ensure these interactions are mutually respectful and beneficial, not transactional and extractive.
5. *Document and share practices and evidence.* Stories and grounded evidence of community philanthropy and community-led change are vital to building legitimacy and influencing funder mindsets.
6. *Guard against co-optation.* As “shifting power” gains traction, civil society can ensure definitions and concepts remain rooted in community and Global South perspectives, preventing donors from diluting or instrumentalizing the agenda.

Keep a long-view on systems change

7. *Maintain a long-horizon perspective.* Systems change is long-term work. Stay strategic and organized even when short-term wins are limited, maintaining a multi-generational perspective on change. Plan beyond donor cycles. Develop strategies, narratives, and alliances that outlast external funding, ensuring that influence and agency are not dependent on donor programs.

(C) Recommendations for ecosystem catalysts and connectors

Invest in the relational core of systems change

1. *Hold relational and co-created spaces.* Continue convening safe, co-owned spaces where movement leaders, local practitioners, communities, civil society, and donors can experience what equitable power relations can look like in practice, learn in community, and co-create new approaches, systems, and collaborations.
2. *Act as connectors and amplifiers.* Ecosystem actors play a critical role in bridging local and global levels, ensuring community realities influence donor conversations, and amplifying Global South thought leadership across the sector. They also strengthen solidarity across movements, regions, and sectors, fostering mutual learning and collaborative advocacy and systems change.
3. *Model alternative ways of working.* Alliances like GfC can demonstrate South-South solidarity, co-leadership, co-resourcing, and mutual accountability, showing what equitable systems look like in practice.

Strategically support donors

4. *Support normative change and collective accountability.* Use strategic narratives and collective platforms to shape and normalize good practice across the sector, leveraging peer pressure to drive wider change. Platforms and networks can highlight donor commitments, track progress, and foster accountability, making shifts more visible and harder to reverse.
5. *Strategically package evidence and learnings.* Respond to donor demand for data, frameworks, and tools by shaping products that centre equity, community leadership, and shared decision-making - without reducing them to checklists. It can also be powerful to demonstrate how funders have made transformative shifts in their systems and practices, resulting in long-term impact at local levels.

Keep a long-horizon view on systems change

6. *Adopt a long-term perspective and sustain momentum across project cycles.* Donor-funded program cycles often undermine the complexity and long-term nature of systems change work. Ecosystem actors need to strategically mobilize and use flexible resources from diverse sources to sustain long-term organizing and momentum.
7. *Promote collaboration and solidarity across sectors, movements, and geographies.* Silos, projectization, and competitiveness have resulted in disorganized, uncoordinated, and often unstrategic approaches to systemic change. Collaboration and solidarity helps the movement be more effective and sustainable.
8. *Balance coordination with flexibility.* Strategy and coherence matter, but so does adaptability. Recognize that connectors emerge and fade depending on resources and context, and that this fluidity can be a strength.

3.4 Concluding note

The GfC initiative demonstrated the potential and challenges of shifting power in philanthropy. It showed that real change can emerge from patient, relational, and strategic work.

Much of the initiative's influence on philanthropy emerged from individual GfC partners' long-standing relationships with donors, which created safe spaces for learning, reflection, and incremental change. Additionally, as a collective, GfC added connective tissue between its partners, amplifying Global South voices, and embedding this work within a wider ecosystem of movements for change. At the same time, communities themselves mobilized resources, built leadership, and asserted their agency in defining development and philanthropy on their own terms.

Nonetheless, donor systems and governance structures are slow to change, even when we start to see meaningful mindset or cultural shifts. This work requires many different actors and levers of change, continued organizing over the long-term, and adaptability to changing contexts and energies. GfC was never meant to be a single flagship program claiming attribution. Its strength lay in contribution and amplification - adding connective tissue, capacity, and energy to a diverse and layered ecosystem.

Systems change work requires trusted relationships, direct connections and shared learning across sectors and levels, working with the whole donor organization, and continued organizing with a long-term view. Together, these efforts can shift individual donor practices as well as the broader culture of philanthropy and development toward more equitable, accountable, and community-led approaches.

Annexes

[Annex 1 - Methodology](#)

[Annex 2 - Data gathering guides](#)

[Annex 3 - Respondents who shared insights and information in the study](#)

[Annex 4 - Shifting power from private development initiatives in the Netherlands to community organizations in the Global South](#)

Annex 1 - Methodology

The research process included the following key components:

Consultations and interviews

Seven of the nine Giving for Change (GfC) partners participated in 1-2 consultations or interviews to share the different strategies they have used to influence change in international donors. They also shared their reflections on changes they have seen in individual donors and in the sector more broadly. The activities and experiences they described were further explained by reports, tools, and documents that they shared for review. (See [Annex 2 - Data gathering guides](#), and [Annex 3 - Contributors who shared insights and information in the study](#).)

GfC partners were also asked to recommend international donors and sector practitioners for stakeholder interviews. They were asked to recommend organizations and people who could speak to different aspects of philanthropy's engagement with ideas of shifting power, including the journeys of specific donor organizations.

From these recommendations, a list of 30+ names was generated for stakeholder interviews. This list was refined in collaboration with Wilde Ganzen to ensure representation from different parts of the sector, and inclusion of funders at different stages in their journey to shift power. Final inclusion also depended on the availability of the respondent to participate in the interview.

In the end, 31 contributors participated in interviews and shared insights that led to the findings in this study. Contributors to the research study included -

- 17 respondents from 10 funder organizations (including 1 GfC partner)
- 10 respondents from 7 Global South civil society organizations (mostly GfC partners)
- 4 sector practitioners (consultants and sector support organizations)

(See [Annex 3 - Contributors who shared insights and information in the study](#).)

Document review

Internal and external documents were reviewed to ensure this study was contextualized in both GfC's history as well as broader sector discourse.

- Key internal documents around the GfC initiative were reviewed to ensure a full understanding of the objectives and activities undertaken. Documents reviewed included the initial proposal/concept, theory of change, select progress reports, key reports on donor-focused conversations, and key external facing outputs from the initiative.

- A sample of external documents (including those published by or around the GfC initiative) on shifting power, community philanthropy, and donor practices was also reviewed to ensure the findings are contextualized in the current discourse, build on existing knowledge, and contribute to further learning in the sector.

Case studies

Based on the learnings from the interviews, and in consultation with the GfC team, a handful of donors were identified and invited to be profiled as case studies on how international funders can overcome challenges and successfully shift their practices to support local agency and/or community philanthropy.

Information for case studies was drawn out from initial interviews, and supplemented with additional interviews if needed, based on a case study framework outlining the organization's motivations, approach, implementation, challenges and achievements, and lessons learned. (See Annex 2 - Data gathering guides.)

Analysis and validation

A data analysis framework, based on the research objectives, was used to analyze the themes that emerged from the interviews, while also paying attention to other unexpected themes that emerged outside of the framework.

For those organizations who agreed to serve as case studies, their data were synthesized to focus on their organizational background, rationale/motivation or perceived incentives for supporting community philanthropy/ local agency, their approach or model, their impact and outcomes, their challenges and lessons learned, and recommendations for others.

Findings were validated in different ways at different stages - including

- Immediate/ongoing checking for accuracy and understanding with interview participants during and after their interviews,
- Referring to other sources such as reports and interviews with others to triangulate findings where possible,
- Sharing draft case studies with the organizations being profiled for their review and validation, and
- Review and validation of the overall research findings by respondents as the draft report was written and revised.

Annex 2 - Data gathering guides

The following tools were used to guide data gathering:

Interview guidelines

The following served as a guide for the interviews, but the researcher used her discretion in determining which questions to pursue and how. For example, depending on time, all questions may not have been covered. As well, if an important insight emerged in a particular interview, more time may have been spent exploring that theme, at the cost of other areas.

Research questions	Guided interview questions for international donors (foundations, bilaterals/ multilaterals, and INGOs)	Guided interview questions for other stakeholders
	<i>Introduction & consent process.</i>	
<p>(A) Current practices of international donors</p> <p>To what extent has the program influenced existing donor attitudes, systems, and practices, and power dynamics between donors and southern civil society actors?</p>	<p>Q1. To start, can you tell me a bit about your or your organization’s awareness of or involvement with the Giving for Change initiative and their efforts to influence funders towards shifting power and supporting community-led philanthropy?</p>	<p>Q1. To start, can you tell me a bit about your or your organization’s awareness of or involvement with the Giving for Change initiative and their efforts to influence funders towards shifting power and supporting community-led philanthropy?</p>
	<p>Q2. Could you tell me about your own organization’s stance on shifting power and community-led philanthropy? Is it something your organization feels strongly in support of?</p>	<p>Q2. Could you tell me about your own organization’s stance on shifting power and community-led philanthropy? Is it something your organization feels strongly in support of?</p>
	<p>Q3. How about for you individually? This is a safe space - you can share how you feel candidly and without judgement. How do you personally feel about the movement to shift power and support community-led philanthropy? What inspires you? What worries you?</p>	<p>Q3. How about for you individually? This is a safe space - you can share how you feel candidly and without judgement. How do you personally feel about the movement to shift power and support community-led philanthropy? What inspires you? What worries you?</p>
	<p>Q4. How about others in the sector? Do you feel generally that there is support for or resistance around shifting power to communities among other foundations and international organizations?</p>	<p>Q4. How about others in the sector? Do you feel generally that there is support for or resistance around shifting power to communities among other foundations and international organizations?</p>

Research questions	Guided interview questions for international donors (foundations, bilaterals/ multilaterals, and INGOs)	Guided interview questions for other stakeholders
	<p>Q5a. What are some areas of progress that your organization has made in recent years towards shifting power and supporting community philanthropy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - Attitudes/ beliefs - Systems/ structures/ policies - Practices - Relationships/ interactions/ dynamics <p>Q5b. Where do you think change is still needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - Attitudes/ beliefs - Systems/ structures/ policies - Practices - Relationships/ interactions/ dynamics 	<p>Q5. Where have you seen progress in the sector? Where is change still needed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge - Attitudes/ beliefs - Systems/ structures/ policies - Practices
	<p>Q6. When you think about your and your organization’s interactions with Giving for Change partners and programs, do you think these interactions and programs have influenced your organization in any way on this journey to shift power? In what ways?</p> <p>Q6b. When you think about the Giving for Change partners’ programs and interactions with the sector, do you think these interactions and programs have influenced the sector? In what ways?</p>	<p>Q6a. When you think about the Giving for Change partners’ programs and interactions with the sector, do you think these interactions and programs have influenced the sector? In what ways?</p> <p>Q6b. Do you think Giving for Change interactions and programs have been successful in influencing funders to shift their attitudes, systems, and practices? In what ways?</p>
<p>(B) Challenges in shifting donor practices</p> <p>What are the barriers and areas of resistance to adopting community</p>	<p>Q7a. What have been some of the key barriers and resistance for your organization when it comes to shifting power and/or adopting community philanthropy?</p> <p>Q7b. Do you think these are similar or different to the barriers faced by</p>	<p>Q7. What do you think are some of the key barriers and areas of resistance for funders and other international organizations when it comes to shifting power and/or supporting community philanthropy?</p>

Research questions	Guided interview questions for international donors (foundations, bilaterals/ multilaterals, and INGOs)	Guided interview questions for other stakeholders
<p>philanthropy and shifting power dynamics?</p> <p>What are some of the institutional, cultural, and structural reasons that donors may be reluctant to change their practices?</p>	<p>other foundations? What might be different for others?</p> <p>Q8. Let's unpack some of these barriers and areas of resistance further. What do you think are some of the reasons behind these?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual thinking/ mindset - Organizational culture/ mindset - Broader culture/ mindset - Organizational systems / institutional reasons - Structural reasons (how the sector is set up, how society works) 	<p>Q8. Let's unpack some of these barriers and areas of resistance further. What do you think are some of the reasons behind these?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual thinking/ mindset - Organizational culture/ mindset - Broader culture/ mindset - Organizational systems / institutional reasons - Structural reasons (how the sector is set up, how society works)
<p>(C) Results and impact of shifting practices</p> <p>What efforts or initiatives have been successful in influencing or supporting donors to shift power and support community philanthropy?</p> <p>What has been the impact of these changes on relationships and power dynamics with local communities and civil society actors?</p> <p>To what extent are these changes expected to be sustained and what will influence their sustainability?</p>	<p>Q9a. If your organization has been successful in adopting community philanthropy and/or shifting power in other ways, what do you think have been some important -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Levers, entry points, - Internal influences, - External influences, and - Internal or external interventions/ actions <p>that have contributed to that success?</p> <p>Q9b. What do you think has been the impact of these changes on relationships and power dynamics with local communities and civil society actors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in local communities and organizations' knowledge, attitudes, systems, and practices? - Changes in the power dynamics of the relationship between the international donor and the local organization and community? - Other changes? 	<p>Q9. Have you seen funders and other international organizations who have been successful in shifting power and perhaps adopting community philanthropy? For those who have made good progress, what do you think have been some of the important -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Levers, entry points, - Internal influences, - External influences, and - Internal or external interventions/ actions <p>that have contributed to that success?</p> <p>Q9b. What do you think has been the impact of these changes on relationships and power dynamics with local communities and civil society actors?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes in local communities and organizations' knowledge, attitudes, systems, and practices? - Changes in the power dynamics of the relationship between the international donor and the local organization and community? - Other changes?

Research questions	Guided interview questions for international donors (foundations, bilaterals/ multilaterals, and INGOs)	Guided interview questions for other stakeholders
	<p>Q9c. To what extent do you think these changes in attitudes, systems, and practices will be sustained in the long term? What conditions might support or hinder the sustainability of these changes?</p> <p>Q9d. What additional investment or work might be needed to continue and build further progress towards shared power and local agency?</p>	<p>Q9c. To what extent do you think these changes in attitudes, systems, and practices will be sustained in the long term? What conditions might support or hinder the sustainability of these changes?</p> <p>Q9d. What additional investment or work might be needed to continue and build further progress towards shared power and local agency?</p>
<p>(D) Future actions to achieve results</p> <p>What are some actionable recommendations for how international donors can be encouraged to adopt community philanthropy and support local agency?</p>	<p>Q10. What are some takeaways, lessons learned, best practices, or recommendations that you would offer for other funders who are seeking to shift power, support local agency, and support community philanthropy?</p> <p>Q11. Outside of individual funders, what do you think needs to be done at an ecosystem or sectoral level, to support funders to shift power, support local agency, and support community philanthropy?</p>	<p>Q10. What are some takeaways, lessons learned, best practices, or recommendations that you would offer for funders who are seeking to shift power, support local agency, and support community philanthropy?</p> <p>Q11. Outside of individual funders, what do you think needs to be done at an ecosystem or sectoral level, to support funders to shift power, support local agency, and support community philanthropy?</p>
	<p>Q12. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think would be important to share around the topic of shifting power and community philanthropy, especially in terms of the role of international donors and NGOs?</p>	<p>Q12. Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think would be important to share around the topic of shifting power and community philanthropy, especially in terms of the role of donors and NGOs?</p>
	<p><i>Thanks, wrap-up, and agree on next steps (including interviewee review of interview transcript and key takeaways if possible)</i></p>	

Case study framework

The following framework was used to guide the collection and analysis of organizational information for case studies.

Organization name	Organization's name
Organization description	Mission Geographic location and scope Size of organization Summary of key activities
Rationale	The organization's motivation for shifting power, supporting local voice and agency, and/or adopting community philanthropy
Approach/ model	Their approach or model, the reasons behind their ways of working, and how these are implemented
Achievements / successes	Areas where they have made good progress (what makes them proud and why?) - and what contributed to that progress (including impact on power dynamics internally as well as between donor and local organizations)
Challenges	Challenges and barriers they faced or are facing - and if/how they are responding to these challenges (including challenges in shifting or disrupting power dynamics)
Key learnings / takeaways	Lessons learned and best practices; takeaways/ recommendations for others

Annex 3 - Contributors who shared insights and information in the study

We would like to acknowledge and deeply appreciate the following people who generously shared their time, insights, and additional information to bring richness and depth to the findings of this study.

Giving for Change Alliance Partners

#	GfC Partner Organization	Contributor Name(s)
1	<i>Comuá Network</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morais, Yasmin
2	<i>Dalia Association</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nusseibeh, Nour
3	<i>Global Fund for Community Foundations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hodgson, Jenny • Emerhi, Ese
4	<i>Kenya Community Development Foundation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maingi, Grace • Ngule, Caesar • Kuria, Hellen
5	<i>Uganda National NGO Forum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isooba, Moses
6	<i>West Africa Civil Society Institute</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vandyck, Charles Kojo
7	<i>Wilde Ganzen</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cajegas, Lori • van de Grift, Josje • Stroes, ErnstJan • Basheer, Reham

Donors, Sector Organizations, and Sector Practitioners / Thought Leaders

#	Contributor Name	Organization
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2	Cheung, Tania	<i>Comic Relief</i>
3	Deurloo, Peter	<i>Stichting Amaidhi-Hulp aan India</i>

Donors, Sector Organizations, and Sector Practitioners / Thought Leaders

#	Contributor Name	Organization
4	Deurloo-Hunsche, Dilia	<i>Stichting Amaidhi-Hulp aan India</i>
5	Doane, Deborah	<i>Reimagining INGO movement</i>
6	Giethoorn-Kas, Kirsten	<i>Friendship Foundation</i>
7	Horstmeier, Mirjam	<i>Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>
8	Huguet, Rachel	<i>Hilton Foundation</i>
9	Kassim-Lakha, Shaheen	<i>Hilton Foundation</i>
10	Knight, Barry	<i>Advisor to the Global Fund for Community Foundation</i>
11	Lawrence, Leon S.	<i>Dutch Lanka Friendship Foundation</i>
12	Mapstone, Michael	<i>Anglo American Foundation</i>
13	Matarazzo, Carola	<i>Movimento Bem Maior</i>
14	Moloantoa, Nancy	<i>Porticus Foundation</i>
15	Ong-Alok, Gigi	<i>Partos</i>
16	Anonymous contributor	<i>Bilateral Donor</i>
17	Anonymous contributor	<i>Global Private Foundation</i>
18	Anonymous contributor	<i>Global Private Foundation</i>

Annex 4 - Shifting power from Dutch Private Development Initiatives to Global South community organizations

This annex provides an overview of Wilde Ganzen's approach to partnering with Private Development Initiatives (PDIs) in the Netherlands, with a focus on how they support organizations to shift power. This overview is followed by a detailed case study of one of the PDIs with whom they've been working.

Wilde Ganzen's approach to partnering with PDIs in the Netherlands

[Wilde Ganzen](#) (WG), a Giving for Change Alliance partner, strategically influences hundreds of Dutch [Private Development Initiatives](#) (PDIs) - small philanthropic groups that support community-based organizations in the Global South. WG promotes partnerships grounded in mutuality, complementarity, and trust, where local organizations take full ownership of projects and Dutch partners raise funds.

Support provided by Wilde Ganzen to PDIs

WG provides co-financing, advisory support, and capacity strengthening. For approved projects, WG matches 50% of the Dutch partner's fundraising and offers technical guidance to ensure effective and sustainable implementation. WG builds relationships and capacity among the PDIs through regular workshops, trainings, and its annual Wilde Ganzen Day.

WG employs an integrated strategy to influence PDIs to shift power - combining funding incentives, coaching, and learning:

- Funding model: Project applications must be submitted by the Global South partner, WG's co-financing reinforces the PDI's role in resource mobilization rather than project management.
- Advisory support: WG advisors assess governance, community participation, and sustainability, ensuring projects are locally led and contextually relevant.
- Workshops and peer learning: Multi-year programs on participation, governance, and shifting power help PDIs reconsider their roles.
- Reframing roles: PDIs are encouraged to focus on solidarity, fundraising, and awareness-raising in the Netherlands rather than operational control in the Global South.

Outcomes seen in PDIs

PDIs increasingly recognize that locally led projects are more effective and sustainable. WG's capacity-building initiatives have prompted reflection and restructuring, with several PDIs creating local management teams or appointing Southern directors. Regular peer exchanges have fostered more equitable relationships and community-driven practices. PDIs particularly value WG's co-financing model and long-term advisory support for enabling stability and strategic growth.

However, cultural hierarchies, leadership dependency, and uneven local capacities continue to constrain power shifts. WG notes that equitable partnerships emerge more readily where local organizations have strong governance, independence, and diversified funding.

The Friendship Foundation case study below describes the PDI's motivation, experience, outcomes, and learnings in shifting power to their community-based partner in Sri Lanka.

Systems-level influence

WG's model has influenced other funders: The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a five-year fund to strengthen PDI capacities - with WG co-designing it and simplifying reporting requirements. WG also contributes to [Philea](#)'s efforts to promote civic space and locally led development.

Case study: Friendship Foundation's experience shifting leadership and decision-making to Sri Lanka

The Friendship Foundation was founded in the Netherlands in 2005 as a private development initiative (PDI) and registered locally in Sri Lanka in 2007 as the Dutch-Lanka Friendship Foundation (DLFF). Its mission is to support families with disabled members in Ampara District, Eastern Province, through education, care, income generation, and social inclusion. The Netherlands arm is volunteer-led, while DLFF Sri Lanka employs 16 staff members. Guided by a vision of equality and inclusion, the organization's work is rooted in founder Kirsten Giethoorn's Montessori background, which emphasizes self-directed learning and the belief that people should shape their own futures.

Over time, DLFF recognized that projects designed in the Netherlands were limited in effectiveness because they did not adequately reflect Sri Lanka's cultural, social, and political realities. This realization was reinforced in 2020 when Sri Lankan practitioner Leon Lawrence joined as Inclusion Consultant. Leon's experience in the INGO sector and his insights into the biases of Global North actors strengthened DLFF's commitment to shifting decision-making to local leadership. Together, Kirsten and Leon began restructuring DLFF, creating advisory and management systems in Sri Lanka, and moving toward a shared leadership model that now includes joint directorship between the Netherlands and Sri Lanka.

DLFF's achievements include establishing Sri Lankan-led decision-making, increasing community participation (such as co-designing vocational programs), building local legitimacy with government recognition, and improving cultural dynamics within Sri Lanka and between Dutch and Sri Lankan teams. The Netherlands-based PDI now focuses primarily on fundraising, while the Sri Lankan team leads program design, operations, and community engagement. Flexible funding, peer learning (e.g., from Karuna Foundation in Nepal), and constructive conflict between leaders have been important enablers. The journey has also revealed challenges,

including resistance from board members worried about losing control, community misunderstandings, funding dependence on Dutch donors, and communication barriers.

Key learnings include the importance of trust, humility, and shared values; deliberate investment of time and resources in organizational change; the role of strong interpersonal relationships in co-leadership; the need to adapt external models to local contexts; and the necessity of challenging hierarchical mindsets in both North and South. DLFF's experience shows that shifting power is not just about structures but about ownership: when local leaders define problems and solutions, change is more sustainable and impactful.

See the detailed case study here: [Friendship Foundation - Case Study](#).