

**RESTLESS
DEVELOPMENT**

Community Philanthropy

Authored by Maria Malomalo & Designed by Abigail Amon

“Alternative funding models, including community philanthropy, allow young people to pivot quickly, redirect efforts, and respond directly to their communities.”



Introduction *

Making the Case for Alternative Youth Funding Models

The global funding landscape, as we know it, has undergone drastic changes. Traditional donor models, which institutions from the Minority World have long dominated, are becoming increasingly unpredictable, restrictive, and disconnected from the realities on the ground. Youth-led organisations, particularly in the Majority World, are facing shrinking civic space, reduced aid budgets, and bureaucratic funding processes that often exclude or delay urgent action.

Drastic changes within the development sector are not new. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the socio-economic and political progression of communities globally. The pandemic profoundly disrupted the development and sustainability of movements and organisations, particularly youth-led ones, which tend to be more vulnerable to shocks due to limited resources and structural fragility. Beyond exposing these vulnerabilities, it also highlighted the critical importance of adaptability and resilience, as long-term capacities essential for sustaining activism, safeguarding organisational continuity, and ensuring that hard-won gains in rights and justice are not easily reversed.

"One of the things COVID did was make us realise that nothing is set in stone. Anything can change at any point."

Community Leader, Nigeria

Against this backdrop, young people must reimagine sustainability as building community-rooted, flexible, and self-determined systems that can survive disruption, resist co-option, and remain accountable to the people they serve. Alternative funding models, including community philanthropy, allow young people to pivot quickly, redirect efforts, and respond directly to their communities.

Reflecting on their experience with community philanthropy, a changemaker from Nigeria highlighted,

"Even if you win a USD 1 million grant, it won't carry the organisation forever. What we needed were deeper resources beyond just cash. The main resource was community ownership."

Changemaker, Nigeria

This paper explores community philanthropy through the lens of young changemakers who have leveraged the model to mobilise resources and finance projects. Their experiences provide critical insights into how locally rooted giving can challenge traditional aid hierarchies, redistribute power, and foster sustainable, community-driven solutions.



What Community Philanthropy Is *

Community philanthropy refers to the collective mobilisation of resources, extending beyond finances to include skills, knowledge, and social capital, towards initiatives that directly improve community wellbeing.

These initiatives range from tangible projects such as building schools and health centres to strategic actions like policy advocacy and rights-based campaigning, all rooted in local ownership and collective responsibility. As shared in this report through lived experiences, young people and communities are mobilising their resources, leading emergency responses, and rebuilding infrastructure like schools with minimal institutional support. This has been achieved through crowdfunding for crises such as Cyclone Idai, which ravaged Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic, or raising funds through diaspora networks, radio, and community newsletters. Through community philanthropy, young changemakers are demonstrating the power of collective action.

This model of resource mobilisation is rooted in relationships and community trust rather than external validation or technical credentials. Beyond raising resources for local action, community philanthropy transforms people, particularly local leaders, volunteers, and everyday citizens, into essential resources for addressing the most pressing challenges.

The foundation of the model is **trust**. Based on conversations with the changemakers, communities are more responsive when they trust the changemaker, the movement, or the organisation. Trust is cultivated through open communication. In areas with limited internet access, community radio can be a vital tool for engagement. One change maker highlighted that they partnered with the local radio station to enable them to share the progress of the project.

In addition to open communication, partnerships with trusted community leaders, including chiefs, councillors, and elders, further accelerate mobilisation and create trust with the communities. In addition, young

changemakers embedded in the community build trust through cultural understanding and presence.

“I grew up in the community... understanding the culture, dressing like them, staying there helped when talking about the idea.”

Changemaker, Nigeria

In this model, communities are active co-investors rather than passive beneficiaries. The communities provide different resources, including money, skills and expertise. The advantage of working with communities as co-investors is that they feel seen and trusted, stepping into leadership roles. This model flips the script on traditional aid. Communities identify problems, mobilise support, and lead implementation. Explaining the power of communities in philanthropy, one changemaker shared:

“Every single drop in a bucket might not look like anything. But if a million people put drops, we get a bucket of water.”

Changemaker, Nigeria

Analysis of the projects carried out by the changemakers reveals that community ownership transforms sustainability. When communities are involved in projects, they protect and expand them.

“When the community builds it, they protect it. They become the implementers. That’s the future.”

Changemaker, Zimbabwe

“We built two classroom blocks—one through GoFundMe, and then we got additional funding. In 2023, the pass rate for the school went from 0% to 13%, and in 2024 it went above 40%.”

Changemaker, Zimbabwe

What Young People Need to Know...

Involvement from the Beginning

If we bring in a wide range of people, including the community, at the start of any project, we're more likely to come up with powerful and relevant ideas. Diversity isn't just a nice-to-have; it's the foundation of strong, inclusive work.

Document Every Moment

We often miss valuable insights because we don't take time to write them down or reflect on them. Those small, informal conversations? They're full of answers. Taking notes is not just for meetings; it helps us see patterns, learn faster, and do better.

Think Beyond Your Village or Community

Our communities are part of bigger systems. What works in one place can be shared and adapted elsewhere. We should always think about how success can ripple outwards. Don't get stuck in one place, scale up, share, and grow the impact.

We Can Fund Ourselves If We're Organised

We have the power to support our solutions. It's not about waiting for outside donors. It's about building trust, structure, and leadership. Even \$1 a month from people in the diaspora can make a massive difference.

Scaling Up Needs Real Planning

Raising money and doing the work are not easy. Passion alone isn't enough; proper structures and budgets must support it. We must rethink the allocation of resources between administration and project costs. A 30/70 split might be more realistic.

"If one of them can spare a dollar a month, then we will have \$12 million. Then they can build a hospital and schools."

Changemaker, Zimbabwe

Community Philanthropy Does Not Replace Government Responsibility

Community philanthropy is not a substitute for government responsibility but a vital complement to it. Governments have a duty to ensure sustainable, core, and long-term funding for community initiatives. Rather than viewing community philanthropists as competitors, governments should recognise them as allies, creating enabling policies that protect, strengthen, and scale local giving, instead of restricting it.

Projects Must Leave a Legacy

Everything we do should build a better future, especially for young people. We've already seen the change when communities are empowered. Real impact means people come back to uplift their communities.

Donors Can Be Local

Foreign funders have a role to play in community development. However, we should not rely on them completely. Let's shift the mindset. Your community can be your strongest partner.

Doing the Work Comes With Pressure

Even when you're doing good, people may not understand the sacrifices. The emotional toll is real, especially when you're misunderstood or judged. Let's normalise care and compassion for those doing the work.

You Have the Blueprint - Use it

You don't have to start from scratch. The knowledge, models, and pathways already exist. What's needed is for more young people to take up the baton.

This shift from dependency to agency is foundational for long-term impact. Community philanthropy challenges the idea that big grants alone drive change.

Accountability and transparency are cornerstones of the community philanthropy model. Visibility of results encourages further community investment. Reflecting on their experience, one young changemaker highlighted that in community philanthropy, transparency becomes a political act. Communication is also a panacea for transparency and mobilisation. Reflections from the changemakers highlighted that social media platforms helped provide real-time updates and feedback loops, creating transparency and maintaining momentum.

“The people who gave us money needed accountability and feedback. At every stage, we gave updates to make the process seamless and transparent.”

Changemaker, Zimbabwe

This deep connection enables smoother communication, greater ownership, and continuity. In one case, a trained local team continued construction on a third school block without outside intervention. The changemaker highlighted that when communities are involved as co-investors, they are more likely to ensure the project's sustainability.

The model is not without challenges. Discussions with the changemakers revealed that many community-led initiatives begin organically, without grand plans or formal designs. The projects often emerge from necessity, care, and an urge to respond. The ‘structureless’ nature of the initiatives affects growth and continuity. In addition, with visibility often comes scrutiny. One changemaker described how community support prompted the need to formalise their approach:

“With time, we started trying to build a more structured framework of how to fundraise from the communities.”

Changemaker, South Africa

The scrutiny also prompted the young changemakers to develop monitoring frameworks. Much of the Monitoring and Evaluation was conducted using storytelling, which was crucial for reporting, learning, reflection, and adaptation.

“We did what we called the story after the stories, focusing on their lives. We wanted things to flow naturally. We created story structures and mapped them out.”

Changemaker, Nigeria

This approach allowed young changemakers to track progress more meaningfully over time.

“When you think long-term, you can measure progress from a learning perspective. It looked a lot like we failed initially, but with time, it was apparent that we had made a lot of progress.”

Changemaker, Nigeria

Ultimately, community philanthropy is about belief. It's about shifting power, recognising dignity, and building something real together with the communities. This model offers an alternative vision for development, one that grows from within, rooted in people, trust, and shared leadership.

Young people are already proving what's possible. The next step is to expand and adapt these models across communities and movements. A new funding future is emerging, where resources are localised, power is shared, and resilience is built from the ground up.

